

Industry members and government officials in Chile's northern Atacama region have welcomed in the start of the 2014-15 table grape export season, hailing the significant progress being made in the local area. 

Regional government representatives together with the Copiapo Valley Agricultural Producers and Exporters Association (APECO) inaugurated the beginning of the campaign, in an event organized by Chile's Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG).

The first table grape shipments are expected to embark from the port of Las Losas for the U.S. later this week.

Regional Ministerial Secretary for the Economy Mario Silva highlighted the importance of agricultural activities on developing the local economy.

"We, the government, are very happy that not only will an excellent quality table grape crop be exported this season, but also that we are generating jobs that largely benefit our neighbors in the Atacama Region," he said.

The regional head for employment Dissa Castellani praised the agricultural sector's ability to generate jobs as well as its increasingly specialized workforce, which she said was leading to higher wages for many.

Favorable climatic conditions mean the Copiapo Valley is traditionally the first area in Chile to ship table grapes in the season. Around 70% of volume is sent to the U.S., with other destinations including Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

At the inauguration, authorities were given tours of various agricultural facilities and officially kicked off packing operations for the first table grape consignment to leave the market.

According to industry estimates, some 11.5 million boxes of the fruit are expected to be shipped from the region this campaign, making it the Atacama's most exported crop, followed by pomegranates.

APECO also estimates around 17,000 jobs will be created in the region's agricultural sector from Nov. 2014 to March 2015, with priority given to local labor.

### **Emphasis on food safety**

The main challenge for Atacama's agricultural industry is working out how best to combat

the drought through more efficient use of water resources, while also improving the sector's productivity, competitiveness and efficiency.

The Ministry of Agriculture intends to promote the development of an agrarian economy based on technology and innovation, and by enhancing certain attributes that make the region more competitive, such as quality and safety.

To do this, the Ministry is working to strengthen the public-private partnership in food safety so as to facilitate access to new markets in the future.

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