


The U.S. blueberry deal may be 'very short' this year, but the head of the Argentine blueberry industry believes it would be 'premature' to say if greater volumes will be sent to the North American market. 

Oregon-based Fall Creek Farm & Nursery international business development manager Cort Brazelton told *www.freshfruitportal.com* some farms on the West Coast had started harvests up to four weeks earlier than normal.

"In Oregon we are picking late varieties now, and what we are picking today we would usually pick sometime between the very end of August and the beginning of September," he said.

"British Columbia came on at the same time as Oregon and Washington and so it was actually a pretty tough fresh market because there was a lot of fruit to get through, but now it's going to be a very very short market because all the late varieties are very very early.

"There won't be a lot of late fruit from Oregon, Washington and British Columbia come September and October."

He added that the good quality of fruit this year meant consumption had been high, and so Southern Hemisphere countries that could supply good quality fruit during the fall window in the U.S. and Canada would have great opportunities.

"Looking from the perspective of Argentina, Peru, Mexico, or even northern Chile - anyone who can ship fruit here into the U.S. and Canada during late August, September, October - there's good news for them," Brazelton said

"The only place that will have any commercial volume in the U.S and Canada in that period will be Michigan, and it won't be huge.

"If quality is good and supply is reasonable, I think we will see a very boisterous market all the way into December when the Chilean boats start to arrive."

Another factor he mentioned was that the European highbush blueberry deal was running more or less on time - in some cases even a bit later than normal - and so the big supply gap would be in the U.S. and Canada this year.

'Assumptions cannot be made'

While there may be significant opportunities in the U.S. and Canadian markets this fall, a

representative of the Argentine blueberry industry said assumptions could not be made as to where individual exporters might ship their fruit.

Argentinian Blueberry Committee (ABC) manager Ines Pelaez said the crop was looking good and production could increase slightly from last year, but only time would tell where the fruit would end up.

"This situation is good for us because if domestic fruit in the U.S. ends early there should be higher prices, and exporters might ship a higher proportion of blueberries there, but we cannot assume that," she said.

"It would be premature to say, as we don't know what the prices of the markets will be like."

Pelaez said some volumes may start to be shipped from the country around week 35, but they would not be significant quantities at that time.

"We are expecting around a 5% increase in production this season, and I think we're going to have a good year," she said, adding final production estimates were due for around week 37.

"In general everything is looking good with very good quality fruit and good sizes. Everything is developing really well."

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