

A combination of an early finish to Chile's season and supply issues in Peru has led to a strong European market for South African avocados in the opening stages of the campaign, according to an exporter.



Severe flooding and mudslides in Peru have affected a range of fruit crops in the Andean country, including citrus, table grapes, pomegranates and bananas.

In a statement sent to *Fresh Fruit Portal*, a representative of South African company Corefruit said the situation had resulted in higher prices for Hass avocados than normal in the EU during this time of the year.

"Traditionally the early market for South Africa is relatively strong, but this year with Chile ending earlier and Peru not able to ship big volumes the last three to four weeks due to weather conditions, the market is even stronger," Rouxan Jansen van Rensburg said.

Van Rensburg said while opening prices in a normal season for a 4-kilogram carton of Hass would typically be between €12-€14, depending on size, some people had now been fetching €17 per carton.

"From a production point of view we also been happy with quality and volumes been packed so far," the representative added.

Rains boost fruit sizing

Acting technical manager for industry body Subtrop, Elsje Joubert, said the South African avocado crop was "shaping up really well" despite the drought-related issues.

"This year's estimated export cartons stands at a conservative 12.5 million export cartons (4

kilograms equivalents)," she said.

"The production total was estimated at an achievable 117,000 (metric) tons for this season, which is very similar to the 2015 season and 5% less than the 2016 crop.

"The drought indirectly affected the avocado yield this season and that is why the volumes are lower than usual this year."

South Africa's total production stood at around 134,000 metric tons (MT) in 2014, 103,000MT in 2013 and 117,000MT in 2012.

Joubert added the industry was currently farming avocados on just over 17,500 hectares and there were around 1,000 new hectares annually.

She said lower ground water levels had added to the underlying stress of avocado trees.

In addition, higher ambient temperatures and lower relative humidity caused some negative effects on pollination and fertilization of the flowers, resulting in a reduced fruit set in some production areas.

"Nevertheless, the fruit is proving to be generally of high standard and pack-out percentages (fruit sizes) should be better than the past season," she said.

"Losses due to hail, sunburn and wind damage are also significantly lower in comparison to the past season. We were fortunate to have good growing conditions other than the drought in general."

Fruit sizing in general was also larger than last year due to "some humbling rains received during fruit expansion and maturation stages in most of the production regions."

The country's key export markets are the Netherlands, the U.K., France, Germany and Spain.

The local market has also been "very lucrative" so far this season and is "expanding fast", she added.

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