

The first exports of Argentine lemons to the U.S. market following a long hiatus are expected to take place in the first few days of June, according to an industry representative.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced earlier this month that it would not extend the stay on imports from northwestern Argentina, giving growers in the world's top lemon producer access to the largest consuming market.

In December, the entity, under then-President Barack Obama, said it would lift a ban on imports, but two 60-day stays were issued on the decision following Donald Trump's inauguration in January.

The USDA recently said there would be no further delays, and that the final rule would come into effect when the stay expires on May 26.

Tucuman Citrus Association president Roberto Sánchez Loria last week told local media *La Prensa* the industry was gearing up for its re-entry into the market.

"Today is the day that was set for the elimination of the restrictions on lemon imports," he was quoted as saying.

He said exporters were planning to carry out "a small symbolic shipment to mark the first imports to the U.S." early next month.

"This way we will move from what is a question of bureaucracy to a pure and net action," he added.

The first shipment will be via airfreight and composed of five or six 70-carton pallets, according to Sánchez Loria.

Large volumes from the major Argentine lemon-growing region would be via sea and would

not kick off until April 2018, when the next season gets underway.

The representative said there was "no limit" to how many tons may be shipped to the new market, but commented that volumes would likely be small to begin with as business would need to be developed.

"We need to have receivers in the United States with whom to establish business relationships, and so we will go about it as we do with other countries, little by little and growing every year," he was quoted as saying.

The South American country has around 132,000 hectares of citrus production, of which 84% is based in Tucuman, according to the story.

In 2019 the region is expected to ship around 20,000MT to the U.S. market.

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