

The spring and summer months in the U.S. watermelon market were characterized by a slight increase in fruit movement and an even higher rise in revenues, according to data from the National Watermelon Promotion Board. 

Fruit movement from April 1 until Sept. 26 rose 6% year-on-year to 4.6 billion pounds, while revenues over the period jumped 10%, spurred on by an increase in average FOB prices.

Florida registered a 6% lift in production to 729 million pounds, after a strong and early start to the season, while volumes from neighboring Georgia rose 21% to 816 million pounds.

Revenues for the regions increased 15% and 18% respectively.

California's volumes over the five-month period were down 7% at 466 million pounds. However, revenues saw a huge boost to the tune of 59%.

Texas production and revenues remained stable year-on-year after a very strong start, with volumes registered at 483 million pounds.

Meanwhile, Mexico saw a significant drop of 15% to 731 million pounds over the period, bringing it on par with Florida.

"California was down 7% on the year, but if you look back previously they got off to a pretty bad start due to wet weather," National Watermelon Promotion Board industry affairs associate Jason Hanselman told *Fresh Fruit Portal*.

"It was interesting to see production pick up, and in the end it was more of a rightward shift.

"They did see fairly good pricing, so from a revenue perspective they're quite a bit ahead. I think the pricing is due to that early shortfall in production."

Hanselman attributed Mexico's volume decline to the same weather-related issues that California experienced, given that much of the country's production is based in a similar climate.

Market conditions were relatively strong during two important dates for the watermelon industry - Fourth of July and Labor Day (Sept. 4).

There had been somewhat of a supply gap prior to Labor Day which helped to raise average

FOB prices, while the typical lull in sales after Fourth of July was much shorter this year than in other seasons.

### **Fall crops**

A further 240 million pounds of Mexican watermelon imports are expected to come into the U.S. in the remaining three months of the year, along with 24 million pounds from Guatemala.

Those volumes would typically compete with a Florida fall crop, but production from the Sunshine State is expected to see a heavy reduction due to Hurricane Irma, which wreaked havoc on the state's agricultural industry.

"I wouldn't expect zero production, but it should be down fairly substantially. Fields were soaked, plastic was blown off and plants went with it, so it was a very unfortunate situation with the harvest," Hanselman said.

He also explained much of the fall crop production was based in southern Florida, which was the most severely impacted area.

The level of damage in Georgia and South Carolina remains unclear, but any fruit coming from those states may see increased pricing due to the Florida shortfall.

Hanselman also noted that while Hurricane Harvey had not had a major effect on Texas watermelon production, the widespread flooding in Houston likely led to an earlier finish for many growers.

"[Houston residents] were not thinking about purchasing any sort of produce at the market, and with the logistical nightmare there I think that really kind of sapped demand," he said.

"I think if anybody did have anything that would have hurt pricing. But the fall crop in Texas, from what I've heard, wasn't dramatically impacted."

Prospects in general for the rest of the year look strong in the U.S. market, with good volumes and fruit quality anticipated.

"Mexico's already shipping very strongly, we're seeing great volume out of there, despite the earthquake events they had," he said.

"It looks like great quality watermelon is pouring through and we just want to make sure



that consumers have plenty of options."

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