

Grape exports from the Mexican state of Sonora are expected to kick off around the typical period of late April or early May this year, according to Sonora Spring Grapes chief Juan Alberto Laborin.



Mexico's leading grape-growing region has received lower cold hour accumulation than normal over the winter months, but Laborin said expectations were for a positive campaign with high-quality fruit.

"The season looks good," he told *Fresh Fruit Portal*.

"It is still very early because the grapes are just finishing the flowering stage, but they are more in less in within the normal dates. It was also a year of few cold hours - we would have liked there to have been more as the grapes could have rested better."

He said the first half of March would see the first fruit set and therefore be crucial in establishing volume forecasts, along with the date the first box will be available in the market.

"What is clear is that independent of the cold hours or the effects of the temperatures, the quality of the fruit is always very good," he said.

While the start of the year saw heavy rains and unusually cold temperatures throughout much of central and eastern Mexico, the northwest has experienced the opposite.

"In the west we have had very little rain and higher temperatures than normal. I was just in California and it is a similar situation there," he said. adding that the last two weeks or so had been colder.

The low rainfall this season is not expected to be a problem for grape production in the

short-term, Laborin said, but over the longer-term it would have adverse effects for growers.

### **Reducing emphasis on the U.S. market**

Last season Sonora's grape exports rose by a quarter year-on-year to 21 million boxes - a record figure partly attributable to good weather conditions and new hectarage coming online.

Another achievement of the season was managing to reduce the proportion of exports sent to the U.S. to below 70% for the first time.

"Of our total, only 68% was sent to the U.S., whereas before it was around 90% of our exports," Laborin said.

"We are working hard to not saturate the U.S. market and are looking for other destinations. It is a natural market for us because it's close, but we're exploring other markets to grow more."

He noted the domestic market was "growing and very attractive," adding that the industry had good penetration in Canada, northern Europe and Asian markets like Indonesia, China and Japan.

There has also been a "good presence" in New Zealand over the last four years, he said, and last year the industry added Australia to its list of available markets.

The Arab Peninsular is another region seeing increased volumes of Sonora grapes, he said.

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