

Spain is expecting a swift end to its lemon season due to a sharp year-on-year volume drop in its late-season variety, but an industry representative says that overall it has been a strong season.



Interprofessional Lemon and Grapefruit Association (AILIMPO) general manager José Antonio García said the Verna lemon season, which began in the first week of May, would likely only last five or six weeks, whereas typically it would run through the summer months.

"We should finish between June 10-15," he told *Fresh Fruit Portal*.

"It's going to be a short campaign because the harvest volume is lower than last year - we are forecasting 106,000 metric tons (MT), which would be a 40% drop in comparison to last year."

The production decline is due to a poor flowering period in May last year.

However, García still has good expectations for the campaign.

"In the European market Spanish lemons are practically the only lemons available. Prices are currently higher than for Fino lemons, and for Verna lemons we have large sizes of fruit," he said.

The campaign of Fino lemons, which make up the majority of the Spanish industry's volumes, kicked off in September last year and wrapped up in late April. Production levels

fell by 5% to around 850,000MT.

Garcia said the season did not start off particularly well but improved in its latter stages.

"The beginning of the campaign was a bit challenging as we had water supply issues due to the very dry summer, and that meant that we had quite small fruit in general from September to December," he said.

But he said that rainfall at the start of this year helped improve fruit sizing and the season was much better from January onwards.

"In general exports have gone well in terms of volume, and it has been a profitable season for growers," he said.

"Consumption remains good in Europe, and Spain also had an advantage because the supply of Turkish lemons has been lower this year."

Garcia said the grapefruit sector - which is relatively small with an annual production of around 70,000MT - has enjoyed a good season in the European market.

He also noted that imports from the U.S. state of Florida have reduced significantly over recent years.

"That has left a gap in the market which Spanish and Israeli grapefruit are taking advantage of, and we are satisfied with how this campaign developed," he said.

"Now it has finished and we are waiting for the volumes to ramp up of South African grapefruit, which are slightly delayed."

Both the grapefruit and lemon sectors are expected to see volumes rise over the coming years as new orchards being planted, he said.

www.freshfruitportal.com