

The U.S. grape season is now picking up after a slow campaign from Mexico and California's Coachella Valley, with the San Joaquin crop looking to be around a record level.



Jason Fuller, vice president of domestic sales at California-based grape and stonefruit breeder Sun World, said the company was poised to have its biggest harvest volume on record.

"For the overall grape industry in San Joaquin - although it is very early in the season - we do see at this point in time close-to-record or above-record type numbers hanging in the vineyard," he told Fresh Fruit Portal.

He said the volumes were leading to opportunities to be promotable with retailers, following what has been a sluggish few months.

USDA data shows that Coachella's volumes were 22% down year-on-year at around 3.8 million 18-pound boxes, while Mexican supplies as of the end of July were 24% down at 16.1 million boxes.

"I think that the business has been a little bit off track to start, coming out of the spring Mexico and Coachella season, just because of some of the disruptions that happened down there," he said.

"But things seem to be turning a corner, a lot of promotions are in place, and I think that you'll see that now through the end of December - barring Mother Nature or any type of weather event that could slow that down.

"I think the fruit quality is the best I've seen in recent memory on a lot of varieties, not just our own, but the industry. What that will provide us is the opportunity to get repeat sales at the retail level," he said.

He said numerous factors had contributed to the decline from Mexico and Coachella, but expected the crop to rebound next year.

"The momentum was lost coming out of the spring season and that's what's given us a little bit of a slow start, but I think that the retailers and the shippers are starting to feel the tide turn with the volume," he said, adding that early August was typically a slow time of the year for many fruit commodities.

"Now vacations are starting to end, and we anticipate that leading to some better movement across the country."

Sun World's largest-volume proprietary grapes are the mid-season Midnight Beauty - which is being harvested at the moment - and the late season Scarlotta Seedless, Autumn Crisp and Adora Seedless.

The company is developing ground for newer plantings and also seeing other vineyards started to reach their full potential this year.

On the export side, Fuller noted Autumn Crisp and Adora Seedless were newer to the export markets and are being very well received.

"Midnight Beauty and Scarlotta Seedless have been around for a few years and we have introduced Autumn Crisp and Adora Seedless into the export market and they are now very well sought after," he said.