

Chile's earliest table grape-growing region has officially kicked off the 2018-19 season, with the first shipments to the U.S. expected to set sail next week.



The Association of Agricultural Producers and Exporters of the Copiapó Valley (APECO) held an inauguration ceremony on Nov. 27 to celebrate the first harvests of Chile's most exported fruit.

APECO president Lina Arrieta expressed optimism for the coming season and said that the industry was dedicated to providing export markets with the varieties they demand.

"The markets have spoken, and we have listened. Our important export markets, like North America, are not interested in older varieties like Flames and Red Globes," she said.

"Our growers are working hard to meet the needs of our export markets, so you'll see increasing volumes of new varieties."

Grape volume from the Copiapó region is projected to exceed 10 million boxes this season. Harvesting began on Nov. 20, with the first shipments expected to depart for the U.S. between Dec. 5 - 7.

The largest volumes from this region will be harvested from December through mid-January, with late varieties finishing by the first week in March.

North America continues to be Chile's largest market for grapes, receiving roughly 45% of Chilean grape volume (39 million boxes) during the 2017-18 season.

Karen Brux, managing director of the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association, said: "With two merchandisers in the U.S. and one in Canada, we are able to support the trade with the marketing they need to sell more Chilean fruit."

"One retailer might love digital coupons, while another prefers produce manager sales contests or social media contests for their customers. We develop the right mix to elevate Chilean fruit sales."