

The current Chilean cherry season in China has been developing well, thanks largely to better fruit quality and more extensive promotions than last year, according to an industry representative.

FreshFruitPortal.com spoke with Cristian Tagle, president of the Chilean Cherry Committee, who also explained that this season would likely see similar total export volumes to record the 2017-18 campaign. This would mean a much smaller year-on-year drop than 20%, as forecast by the industry at the beginning of the season.

Tagle said exports would likely end up around 7% or 8% lower than last year's 39 million boxes, but the final amount could vary in the final stages of the season. By contrast, by week 1 this year exports to all markets were up 13% year-on-year, and 17% to the Far East.

"The shipping season is practically over. There might be some left still from Chile Chico in the extreme southern regions, but the bulk of the volume has already left," he said.

This season an even higher percentage of fruit has been shipped to Chile's main market, China, and has generally been selling well.

"Demand has been pretty good, we think that that is because the quality has been better than by the same time last year ... The consumer buys the cherries once, they like them, and then they come back to buy again," he said.

He added the better quality has meant that stocks of fruit have not accumulated in the market, as they did last year.

On another note, Tagle said that the widespread hail and rain that hit Chile's central growing regions in mid-November had not had a significant impact on the cherries' condition - contrary to fears following the weather event.

"The hail fell in quite limited areas, where there were big losses, but in general the state of the fruit has been very good," he said.

Overall, he commented that the campaign has been characterized by two main aspects - better quality and better promotions.

"The latter, whether in traditional retail or e-commerce, has been an important factor that has allowed the pace of sales to be agile, guaranteeing product rotation," he said.