

Exporters of Argentine lemons have not been able to build upon their last season in the U.S. market this year, with unusually heavy rains in growing regions reducing the proportion of export-quality fruit.

That is according to Mayda Sotomayor, CEO of Florida-based importer Seald Sweet. But Sotomayor commented that the Argentine industry was still able to learn important lessons for future seasons.

Argentina is in its second export season to the U.S., after market access was recently restored following a 17-year hiatus.

But while the country enjoyed a strong return to the market last season, this year has been much more challenging.

"It has been a very tough season for them," Sotomayor told FreshFruitPortal.com. "They had a lot of rain in May and early June that would not stop. So they struggled at the front end of the season because they could not ship early enough."

She explained that lemons with rain are "never good - no matter where you are in the world".

"So they've had a lot less volume than they expected to have, and also we feel that the quality was compromised due to the rain," she said.

Sotomayor said Seald Sweet was working with its exporters to help them "tighten up" to ensure only the highest quality fruit is exported in the future.

Lemon exports "much lower than projected"

In the 2018 season Argentina shipped around 10,000 metric tons (MT) of lemons to the U.S. Exporters had hoped to build upon that figure this year, but that is now looking unlikely.

Sotomayor says the export total to the U.S. will be "much lower than projected".

"They really have to regroup come next year and probably come to some decision where they don't ship if it rains just before," she said. "But it's unfortunate that they had heavier rain than they've ever had in the last 25 years. That also has caused difficulties all over the world - not just here in the U.S., but also in other places."

Jose Carbonell of Argentine association Federcitrus [recently commented](#) on exports to the

U.S. as well. He said that currently, they are down year-on-year.

"There is still some of the season left, but it is foreseeable that we will get to that figure [10,000MT] again," he said. He added that exports to most markets including Europe are lower this year due to low prices.

Total Argentine lemon exports reached 280,000MT last year. As of late July they have reached 190,000MT and should continue through August.

Argentina lemon exporters build market knowledge

But Sotomayor said there were positives exporters could take from this export season to the U.S. It will still be another year of experience under their belt, she said.

"It isn't the best year ... but it's another learning year for them," she said. "It's another opportunity for them to better understand the U.S. market and the quality they need to pack."