

Both fresh citrus and orange juice sales nationwide have soared in recent weeks as shoppers stock up on vitamin-C packed food and drink items.

Industry leaders indicate that the question of supply and demand for juice versus fresh Navel oranges and mandarins is complicated. As supplies of California fresh citrus are ready to meet consumer demand, the orange juice sector in Florida ramps up production to meet the spike in consumer interest.

CEO of California Citrus Mutual Casey Creamer gave FreshFruitPortal.com an update on current market conditions for fresh citrus in the U.S.

The industry has seen increased demand in the last few weeks. This is "due to consumers stocking up on fresh oranges and mandarins as the COVID-19 pandemic became more of an issue here in the U.S." detailed Creamer.

California citrus still has strong supplies of oranges and mandarins as demand increases, Creamer said.

"Demand has started to slow from its peak, but volumes are still up. We are seeing a drop off in the foodservice sector, with lemons currently the most affected," he said. "Overall, the demand for fresh citrus has improved as consumers are seeking nutritious products high in Vitamin C like citrus."

This uptick comes at a challenging time for the U.S. citrus industry as it faces struggles with citrus greening disease - which had a [negative impact on California and Florida crop in past seasons](#), though the industry saw a slight comeback this year.

Orange juice leaps in sales

Although markets are experiencing extreme downturns on average, the Dow Jones Industrial Average shows that frozen orange juice concentrates are performing better than ever before. Soaring 25% in the past month, the market for orange juice is up in a big way.

According to Nielsen data on retail sales of orange juice, provided by the Florida Department of Citrus, frozen orange juice sales have jumped 27%. Differently from fresh citrus produce, juice supply is being outdone by demand and producers are working to keep up.

In the four weeks ending on March 14, juice sales rose 10% year-on-year - a significant shift in sales as growth figures were in the negative this time last year.

Shannon Shepp, executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus, shared with us what that means for the citrus industry.

"The unforeseen and significant recent increase in demand for 100% orange juice comes at a time when many Americans are stocking their kitchens with foods and beverages that offer health and nutritional benefits," she said.

Health drinks containing vitamin-C have been increasingly demanded by consumers amid the Covid-19 pandemic - as shoppers may be looking to boost immunity during the health crisis.

While it isn't proven that vitamin-C has [any preventative or curative powers against Covid-19](#), consumer response to the pandemic seems to indicate that people are stocking up on products rich in the vitamin.

Sudden spikes in demand were unexpected by the industry and, as a result, suppliers anticipate that prices will go up to reflect the higher cost to supply.

While the citrus industry doesn't seek to profit or advertise off of such difficult circumstances, citrus suppliers are "humbled by the number of consumers turning to us during this time of great uncertainty," according to Shepp.

Industry projections suggest a considerable increase in demand in the short-run, said Florida's Citrus Department.

Speaking to the critical nature of sanitary measures during the outbreak, Shepp also detailed that the Florida Citrus industry is "taking the necessary precautions as it relates to the health and well-being" of employees and supply chain actors.

It is following both state and federal guidelines to ensure the supply of "great-tasting and nutritious" Florida orange juice in coming months.