

There is a mixed picture in Chile in terms of production trends for key stone fruit commodities, with the fresh peach planted area falling rapidly as nectarines nudge up and cherries soar, according to a USDA GAIN report.

The fresh peach planted area is in a declining trend, totaling 1,902 hectares in 2020-21, which is down 10 percent year-on-year. The USDA attributed this to "difficulties in commercializing peaches".

"Chilean fresh peaches need to travel to distant markets, which have low margins and very high standards for quality and condition of the fruit, making it a very challenging business," the report said. "After long shipping times peaches often present quality or condition problems upon arriving to commercial markets."

Elsewhere in the stone fruit category, the nectarine planted area has grown by 2 percent to 5,433 hectares.

According to the USDA report: "Nectarines are an interesting alternative to diversify stone fruit production for producers that are seeking to reduce the risk of exporting to a single market."

"Nectarines are especially attractive in those areas in the central part of the country that have the required climatic and soil conditions for production. Nectarines are commercialized all over the world and new varieties are more resistant and can arrive to distant markets in good conditions."

The increasing trend in the nectarine planted area will offset the decrease in fresh peach planted area, according to the report, with the two combined expected to remain relatively steady and reach 7,350 hectares in MY2021/22.

Cherries, one of the stars of Chilean fruit exports over recent years, have seen production grow constantly, with record production surpassed volumes each year.

The cherry planted area is expected to grow by 12 percent in the 2021-22 season to 44,000 hectares.

However, despite the large increase, exports are only expected to grow by 3 percent to a record 364,000MT, as the increase in planted area is offset by lower productivity.

"Continued drought and the risk of frost damage have forced producers to adjust strategy to maintain fruit size and quality. Producers are now pruning trees more, as well as thinning

flowers and fruit to ensure that the size and quality of the fruit harvested remains consistent," the USDA said.

"The result is better size and quality fruit, in spite of the weather conditions, but reduced yields per hectare of planted area."

Chilean peach and nectarine exports are expected to see a slight drop during the 2021-22 season due to drought conditions in growing regions. Production of the two commodities would drop by 1 percent to 98,000MT. The expected drop follows on from last season's decline of three percent year-on-year.