

The USDA projects that apple exports will be “far below levels previously expected”, despite forecasting a rise in apple exports in the 2021/22 marketing year, compared to the previous year.

The apple export estimate for this calendar year is 375,000 metric tons. Although up 5 percent on last year, it is still 7 percent down on the record 2019/20 marketing year.

In parallel, apple production for the 2022 season is anticipated to stand at 553,000 metric tons. This is 6 percent lower than 2019/20 and only 3 percent higher than the 2020/21 estimate.

Similarly to 2021, this year’s production and export volumes are likely to be considerably lower than before the pandemic started. Exports had been rising for three consecutive years until 2021, when the lowest export volume since 2016/2017 was recorded.

Going into 2022, both labor shortages and unprecedented weather conditions continue to lead to smaller yields.

New Zealand's COVID-19 restrictions introduced international border closures which have restricted the entry of Registered Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) workers and backpackers needed for fruit picking. In addition, there have been Omicron outbreaks amongst staff, resulting in home isolation.

Moreover, Hawke’s Bay, the major production area for apples exported in New Zealand, saw apple picking start two weeks late this year, as a result of heavy rainfall. The aforementioned lack of workers makes increased picking, which would usually solve the problem of a harvest delay, unlikely. As was witnessed in 2021, a significant amount of fruit will probably not be harvested.

The USDA also reported that “shipments last year followed the long term pattern of declining New Zealand exports to Europe and the United Kingdom and a shift towards Asian markets.”

Lower-value orchard blocks are not being harvested, to prioritize export-quality crops over crops used for processing. Therefore, a higher percentage of fruit picked is expected to be exported this year.

Estimates for New Zealand’s pear production are at 11,500 MT in MY 2021/22, down from the previous estimate but still a year-on-year increase from MY 2020/21.

Similar to the situation with apples, the combination of reduced harvest labor and a delayed onset of harvest has caused the downward revision in production. However, a recovery in production in the Nelson region (which experienced hail damage last year) is expected to result in the production rise from MY 2020/21.

[Click here](#) to read the full report.