

Size Picking Helps Season Get Off to Good Start

Some nice warm, humid days late last summer helped this year's crop achieve some heft, and in the early going the 2015 California avocado crop appears to have a much better size profile than the 2014 version.

Wayne Brydon, a California Avocado Commission handler member, who spends a lot of time in the field as a representative for Del Rey Avocados, Fallbrook, told *From the Grove* in late February that "the fruit is sizing much better than it has the last couple of years. Growers who are size picking are finding a good amount of fruit 8 ounces and better (48s) on the trees."

He added that there is even a fair amount of fruit making 40 size, which was commanding a nice premium in the marketplace in February. "Even though we didn't have much rain last year, we did have a humid summer, and avocados love that," he said.

Brydon said it is the younger groves that appear to be sizing the best but he is anticipating a season with a size bell curve skewing more toward the larger end of the spectrum. He echoed the estimate issued by the Commission of a 327 million pound crop, with about 315 million

pounds of that being the standard Hass variety.

"It looks like the southern growing district has a crop very similar to last year while Ventura could be up about 20 percent," he said. "Some of the groves up there had a very light crop last year and are doing much better this year."

The Del Rey representative said in April the pre-season estimate will be recalculated through a more detailed report, but he expects the early estimate to be very close to accurate when all is said and done. He said April should also bring with it some stripping of groves rather than size picking. By then the crop will have matured to the point that stripping makes good economic sense.

Brydon does expect more of a sense of urgency this year in picking and marketing the California crop. Peru's entry into the market last summer with a significant volume increase resulted in two-tier pricing and downward pressure on the price California growers received for their fruit. "The Commission has started its promotions earlier this year in recognition of the fact that we need to get an early jump on the season," he noted.

He said many growers want to

be out of the deal before Peru has a chance to negatively impact the market price.

Phil Henry of Henry Avocado Corp., Escondido, CA, had a very similar report as to the early activity this season. As of late February, his firm was size picking 8 ounce and larger fruit. He agreed the size profile is larger this year and said as a company "we have a little bit bigger crop than last year, which I think is the same as the entire industry."

He said the larger crop and a very good pricing situation led to the earlier start than last year. He expects Henry Avocado's California volume to continue to climb until it reaches peak shipping levels in June and July. If all goes as planned, California shipments will start to taper off in August.

Adding California's early volume to the steady and heavy supplies from Mexico, the longtime industry veteran was very happy with the price profile at the time of this discussion. He said the market was pushing \$40 for 48s with even small-sized fruit selling from the mid-\$20s to the mid-\$30s. He expressed optimism that the strong market would remain that way throughout the spring. 🥑