

Large Crop on Tap for 2025

The rains for the past two years resulted in healthy trees and a very good bloom this spring, which could result in California's largest crop in almost a decade.

"Our field team thinks that a 400-million-pound crop is definitely reachable," said Patrick Lucy, president of Del Rey Avocado Company, Fallbrook, CA.

In fact, Lucy said while a 500–600-million-pound crop doesn't yet appear to be in play, that reality might not be too far off. The optimistic outlook is based on new plantings with better trees and rootstock, as well as higher density configurations. He said the traditional way of refurbishing an older grove by grafting trees is no longer considered to be the optimum approach. Using new trees and salt-tolerant rootstock that are better suited to each geographical situation tends to produce greater yields.

In fact, the Del Rey executive said that same dynamic played a big role in the underestimating of the 2024 crop. "The field teams could see some groves were loaded with fruit but they previously would cap an estimate at about 20,000 pounds per acre," he said. "This summer we saw groves or parts of groves that were producing 30,000 to 35,000 pounds per acre."

He also reminded that predicting yield is not an exact science. What remains to be seen is what extent will these huge producing groves with their newer and improved rootstock experience the alternate bearing effect that has defined avocado production for

generations. The goal has always been to develop trees that do not follow that tendency. Lucy said 2025 will provide a great data point for estimators.

Assuming the predictions are accurate and the 400-million-pound crop does materialize, Lucy believes it will face good marketing conditions. He reasoned that in the April through July time frame, which is when the vast majority of that crop will be marketed, California growers produce an avocado that yields an eating experience far superior to the competition from any of the other production regions. "History shows that demand for domestically grown avocados is very good at that time of the year and growers can get the premium that they need and deserve," he said, relating that growing costs are higher domestically.

He also believes with such a large crop there will be more fruit marketed at the front end of the season and that shippers will use more California fruit than ever before for their export programs. "That great green color that the California fruit has travels well and is very appealing to importers in the South Pacific region."

Peter Shore, vice president of production management for Calavo Growers Inc., and a member of the California Avocado Commission board, talked to From the Grove immediately after attending the October board meeting. "It is still preliminary and we still have to get through the winter, but 400 million pounds seems very doable," he said.

He said there was a late summer

heat wave but it doesn't seem to have resulted in a major reduction in the crop estimate. "There was fruit drop and it's hard to tell at this point, but it doesn't appear to have changed the estimate."

Like Lucy, Shore believes annual crops in the 400-million-pound range will be commonplace from here on out, with a crop size below 300 million pounds being the outlier. This prediction, of course, is based on Mother Nature cooperating with good rainfall and no devastating natural disasters. He based his predictions on the increased acreage and tree counts in the northern districts of the California avocado growing map and the performance of those trees in 2024. He believes higher yields per acre is the new normal based on the factors articulated by Lucy.

He agrees that 2025 will offer great information about the alternate bearing performance of these newer groves.

Shore also expects the California fruit to come to market under good selling conditions. He said the avocado market has remained very strong for most of 2024 even with California's larger than anticipated crop and a solid crop from Mexico. Mexico is expecting to export about 2.5 million pounds to the U.S. market during its 2024/25 fiscal year, which is very similar to 2023/24. "We are expecting a more consistent fruit flow with a good market," he said of the next six months, leading into the marketing of California's crop. 🥑

(Editor's Note: This article was written prior to the Santa Ana winds event and Mountain Fire that occurred in early November of 2024.)