

Consumer demand increasing

South African citrus arrives in US

Clementines and Navel oranges from South Africa are arriving this week to the US. The first refrigerated vessel, Iberian Reefer, will bring 2,621 pallets of citrus: 1096 Clementines and 1525 Navel oranges. The fruit will be distributed to grocery and other retail stores across the U.S.



The ship's arrival marks the official beginning of the 13th season of shipments of South African Summer Citrus to the U.S. The program began in 1999 with 50 tons and last year, exports to the U.S. exceeded 41,000 tons. A vessel with citrus from South Africa arrives in the U.S. every 10-12 days to assure best quality fruit is fresh and available in the marketplace.

Consumer demand for South African Summer Citrus has been increasing as the citrus is recognized as a sweet, delicious and nutritious staple to the summer menus and meals. Growers expect consumers will be especially pleased with the taste, texture and overall eating quality of this season's crop. There is a very large quantity of citrus on the trees and weather and growing conditions have been ideal to increase the fruit's brix or sweetness levels. Cooler weather has turned the fruit a brilliant orange color that appeals to consumers.

"We expect to see continued growth in our exports to meet the increasing U.S. demand for our excellent quality of citrus products," said Suhanra Conradie, CEO of the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF). "Clementines comprise the larger percentage of early season shipments, followed by Navel Cara Cara, and Midnight oranges. A small quantity of Star Ruby grapefruit also will ship to the U.S." South African Citrus will continue through October with an expected +/- 46,000 tons expected this season. The WCCPF is a consortium of 350 growers approved to export their citrus to the U.S.



With a keen awareness of U.S. consumers' demand for safe, healthy food choices, the citrus is inspected multiple times. It is inspected at the pack houses in South Africa, inspected in Cape Town prior to loading onto the vessel, and again on arrival in the U.S. "Because our fruit is maintained at cold temperatures close to - 0.55° C or 33°F during shipment, it does not require chemical fumigation on arrival as does citrus from other Southern Hemisphere countries," said Ms. Conradie. "This cold shipment extends the shelf life of the fruit and further and more importantly, avoids the need to apply unnecessary chemicals to the fruit."

During May, a small number of pallets arrived on container vessels carrying mostly Clementines and a few pallets of Navel oranges. The container vessels are intended to meet the growing early season demand for South African citrus. "The fruit takes times to ripen and achieve the high level of sweetness U.S. consumers prefer. Only small amounts of fruit are available and are shipped early in the season on containers," said Ms. Conradie.

The marketing initiatives of the South African Summer Citrus have continued to increase. This season an increase of in-store promotions that include grower visits are planned, new recipes have been created and include both standard, vegetarian and vegan options. The WCCPF's relationship with Youth Soccer has expanded with participation at various regional and national tournaments across the U.S., and the creation of the first Summer Citrus Soccer Star Award is to be presented to Youth Soccer select players. (www.summercitrus.com/soccer-star/)

The South African citrus sold in the United States comes primarily from the region near Citrusdal about two hours northwest of Cape Town, the Northern Cape near Kimberly, and the northwest along the Orange River, near Upington.

Next to Spain, South Africa is the second largest exporter of citrus in the world, producing 60 percent of all citrus fruits grown in the Southern Hemisphere. Other than the United States, South Africa's primary export markets include the European Union, Far East, Middle East, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the rest of Africa.

The WCCPF facilitates logistical, marketing and sales support coordination of products for its members. Its mission is to maintain and expand its role as the preferred supplier in the U.S. and throughout the world, and continue to be a reliable supplier of safe summer citrus for the U.S. and all global markets.

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