Briefs

Specialty Crops

Larger Citrus Crop Expected In 1999/2000

The 1999/2000 citrus crop, buoyed by improved weather conditions so far in both California and Florida, is expected to be 20 percent larger than last year. Orange and lemon crops are each expected to be up 24 percent, while tangerine production is forecast to increase 27 percent. Despite the large gains expected this year for most U.S. citrus crops, orange production will remain below the 1997/98 record, and the tangerine crop alone is forecast to reach a record level.

Freezing temperatures hit California's San Joaquin Valley late last December, reducing the state's 1998/99 navel crop to less than half the size of the previous year and cutting the Valencia crop by over a third. The state's lemon and grapefruit crops, generally grown farther south, were largely unaffected by the freeze by the freeze.

Although the period still lies ahead when freezing temperatures are likely to affect production, the 1999/2000 California orange crop is expected to be 76 percent above last year. This would still be smaller than the 1997/98 crop, as navel orange production has not fully recovered. If the forecast is realized, the supply of oranges should be ample for fresh use this winter and through mid-2000. Grower prices will likely drop somewhat from last year but still exceed 1997/98. Consumers should also see lower retail prices than last year, especially with fresh California oranges in plentiful supply through next summer.

California's *Citrus Acreage* report for 1998—the state's first since 1992—shows acreage increasing for most major citrus crops. Total navel orange acreage rose 13 percent since 1992, and Valencia orange acreage increased 5 percent. Navels and Valencias are grown mostly in the San Joaquin Valley. Lemon acreage—mostly in Ventura County—increased 12 percent in 1992-98. Nonbearing acreage of both navel and Valencia oranges accounted for about 6 percent of total 1998 acreage planted. About 12 percent of the state's lemon acreage is not yet bearing fruit.

Florida's orange crop, which is expected to account for 75 percent of U.S. orange production in 1999/2000, is forecast 14 percent larger than last year, when the crop was small in both number and size of fruit because of poor weather conditions during the bloom and growing seasons. Better growing conditions have improved the outlook for this year's crop. However, a relatively warm, dry winter and spring in 1999, with only sporadic rain, led to a longer bloom period from January through May in some parts of Florida. With an extended bloom period and labor availability already a problem, growers may have difficulty finding pickers for the late-blooming fruit. Low quantities of fruit ready for harvest at a given time, and wide dispersion within a grove, may make it unattractive for pickers to remain, especially if the delayed harvest overlaps with peak-season harvest of other fruit or vegetables in the area.

Most of Florida's orange crop is used to make juice. However, a growing proportion of the crop is going into making the increasingly popular chilled, not-from-concentrate (NFC) orange juice, and less into frozen concentrate. Juice production in 1999/2000 should continue to follow this trend. Juice production is expected to increase about 12 percent over last year, but total supply could be about 2 percent below last year, with beginning stocks at a 5-year low coming into this year's juice production season. Juice processors try to maintain a certain quantity of juice in stock (reserves for some number of days, based on market movement), so the amount of juice available for consumption could be even lower, putting upward pressure on retail prices. Prices may also move higher as processors offer fewer price-lowering marketing promotions to consumers in an effort to keep a steady supply of NFC orange juice available throughout the year. However, promotions could appear even with a relatively short supply, as competition continues between NFC and frozen concentrate, as well as among the three major brands.

Florida's grapefruit crop is projected to reach 2.5 million short tons, down 2 percent from last year. Colored seedless grapefruit should comprise about 47 percent of the state's grapefruit, with white seedless comprising much of the remainder and seeded grapefruit grown to a much lesser extent. Hurricane Irene, which hit Florida's east coast in October, increased droppage and reduced the overall size of this year's grapefruit crop. Florida growers have removed acreage from grapefruit production over the past few years—a response to low prices for both fresh and processing uses. Grapefruit groves had a larger proportion of late-blooming trees this year than is the norm, which will necessitate an extended harvest period in the spring.

Florida's grapefruit production is expected to be 100-percent utilized for juice or fresh fruit this year, as it was last year but unlike the previous 2 years. Low juice inventories at the beginning of this season (December 1999) and increased demand for not-from-concentrate grapefruit juice should drive demand to use all the grapefruit produced in the state this year and increase grower prices.

A special 1999 Florida grapefruit and tree survey—usually scheduled for every second year—was conducted by the Florida Agricultural Statistics Service earlier this year and showed that grapefruit acreage had declined 11,559 acres (9 percent) since the 1998 survey (*AO* November 1998). White seedless grapefruit acreage declined the most. Losses were due to several factors, including grove abandonment for economic reasons, unhealthy groves being pushed (cleared) and replanted, or sick trees being removed from healthy groves and not replanted. Acreage loss was greatest in the three largest grapefruit-producing counties in Florida, which reduced their acreage by 8 percent, accounting for 62 percent of total grapefruit acreage loss in the state. No Florida county reported an increase in number of acres or trees. AO

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