

East Coast citrus market survives on imports

An overall low supply of citrus fruit in the U.S. market, caused by difficulties in Florida and high carrier costs from the West Coast, has led East Coast buyers to rely on imports to maintain stock.



The U.S. imports citrus mainly from Mexico, as well as Chile, Peru, and South Africa. In 2023, Mexico exported 1.6 billion pounds of citrus to the United States.

David Espinoza, president of [International Fruit Company](#), told [FreshFruitPortal.com](#) that imports are still arriving from Morocco.

Espinoza is based in Delano, California, and imports a range of fruits to the United States. He is also the head of international sales for Hronis Inc.

He said the Moroccan citrus industry in the U.S. has grown a lot, driven mainly by its low prices.

This year, production of Nadorcott mandarins in Morocco has increased by 20% in volume.

“They arrive at the East Coast with very good prices. If you want to move fruit from the West to the East Coast, shipments can cost \$10,000. However, from the East to the West, they go down to \$6,000,” he said.

East Coast buyers are looking to Morocco, Egypt, or even South Africa because costs are much lower.

“The same thing happens with Argentine lemons. They come in through the East Coast at a competitive price, and it’s much cheaper to market there directly,” he added.

East Coast imports typically will reach as far west as Texas.

Espinoza says there’s a good supply of lemons in California at the moment, so exporters would rather send their fruit to the East Coast where prices are more competitive.

“In terms of total import volumes, the balance between what comes into the East Coast vs. the West is about 80/20,” Espinoza said.

Import volumes to the West increase only during the California off-season from around May and October, he added. During the season, local producers supply much of the market.

Logistics

The import season from Chile and Peru was threatened by a [historic drought in the Panama Canal](#) which lowered daily vessel transit. Espinoza says, luckily, they haven't had major issues with the situation.

“Chilean and Peruvian exporters have been really good at dealing with this situation. Throughout the season, they have planned ahead on adding a week to transit times, which sometimes has occurred and others not.”

He said arrivals have generally landed on time. Most issues this year have resulted from low supplies.

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