

# Importers Agree its An

# *Outstanding Quality*

# 2002 Chilean Fruit Season

Wilmington, Delaware is one of the nation's leading gateways for imports of Chilean fruit. Port Illustrated recently talked to some of Wilmington's Chilean fruit receivers about this year's quality of Chilean fruit shipments, the volumes anticipated, and their marketing efforts post September 11.

The consensus from importers is that this season's fruit quality is outstanding, surpassing even last year's excellent crop. Vice President Richard DiMartini, Deciduous Fruit for Dole Fresh Fruit Company, the world's largest fruit supplier, said that he is "very satisfied" with this year's crop. "We have a very solid group of growers that met their volume projections with high quality of fruit. Dole offers a full variety of all table grapes and perishable fruit, as well as apples and pears, which makes us a leader in the fruit market," he explained.

East Coast Marketing Manager for Giumarra Vineyards Greg Murray reported that this year's Chilean green grapes have very good quality and sizing, in fact better than last year's, especially the Thompsons and Sugerones. The Red Flames have good quality as well, although volumes have been reduced due to more trimming in the northern Chilean regions.

Murray noted that he expects even better quality and fruit volumes from the

central regions in the following months. "Overall, this year's Flames have been some of the best I have seen and are received with great popularity at the stores", he said.

Murray said that the Black Seedless and the Red Globe grapes are expected to be of very good quality as well and will be in the stores in February.

"Since the beginning of the season in December, the fruit has been moving very fast given that the fruit quality has been very good, fewer volumes of grapes have arrived, and the ships working schedules have been more towards the end of the week," Murray said. He explained that due to weather conditions this year, the fruit ripening cycle in Chile is late by about one week. This delay resulted in reduced volumes at this stage of the season and higher grape prices.

"The Thompson grapes continue to be the most popular variety, with the Crimson and Flame seedless varieties growing in popularity," Vice President of Marketing for Pandol Bros, Inc. Jim Pandol said. Pandol is very satisfied with this year's crop and he anticipates good quality fruits and good import

volumes. This season, Pandol will also handle imports of Royal grapes and a new variety of Black Crimson grapes. Director of QC and Operations for the David Oppenheimer Group Rob Johns reported that during this season, David Oppenheimer expects to receive more grapes from all of its Chilean producing areas. "We anticipate gradual har-





vesting in the different regions and are looking into bringing in new varieties of seedless grapes,” he noted.

In addition to varieties of table grapes, which are the main imports for Wilmington Chilean fruit receivers, the David Oppenheimer Group markets varieties of stone fruit, peaches, nec-

tarines, plums, apples, pears, kiwifruit and other produce.

Receivers at the Port are satisfied with this year’s stone fruit crop, despite the fact that some varieties of apricot, plum and stone fruit were hurt due to cool and untimely weather conditions. QC Manager Pablo Valdes, Chiquita Fresh North America, said that the cherries and the plums from Chile are very good this season in shape, quality and volumes.

“We found out that the Chilean growers started producing better and greater varieties of fruit with higher sugar content and nicer blush, that are much in demand in the nation’s markets,” added Rob Johns of David Oppenheimer.

Earlier this Fall, Wilmington’s fruit receivers were concerned that fruit consumption might drop after the September 11 attacks and in the face of an economic slow down. In reality, this season shipments are expected to grow by an average of 5% compared with last season.

Most of the fruit imported through the Port of Wilmington is destined for

supermarkets and households, which have increased their fruit and produce consumption. DiMartini reported that despite the economic slow down, people purchase a great deal of fruit, even the more pricey items, because they stay at home more and host visitors more than usual.

“Under the circumstances, some consumers might buy less expensive fruit, but will dine more at home, which means that overall fruit consumption continues to grow,” Pandol explained. In an effort to increase consumption of fruit and produce during the past decade, the Chilean growers, shippers and receivers have developed safety and security regulations to safeguard the distribution chain for the Chilean imports arriving in the United States. These regulations proved to be valuable after September 11 as the nation’s supermarkets and consumers prefer to purchase safety certified food. In fact, all fruit brought through Wilmington this season will be safety certified.

Since September 11, the DSPC has tightened its security at the Port of Wilmington’s main gate, warehouses and all of its facilities to ensure the safety and security of all cargo arriving at the Port, especially food products. Security measures include more intense ID inspections of all vehicles and visitors, tightened warehouse security, and vessel inspections. In addition, this season the location of all Chilean fruit cargoes arriving in Wilmington can be traced through a real time bar code inventory control system that the Port has developed. This system will also help to maintain a safe distribution chain.

Port Illustrated congratulates the Chilean growers, shippers and receivers for another excellent season, and wishes them future success.

