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Chile mulls impact of drought

Fruit exports projected to remain broadly flat this year as water shortage bites



Chile is on course to export around 2.7m tonnes of fresh fruit in 2019/20, around the same volume as in the previous season according to the latest forecasts from Asoex.

Speaking at a logistics forum at the port of Valparaíso, Asoex said the final volume would depend on the impact of the drought, especially in the regions of Valparaíso, Metropolitana, O'Higgins and Maule.

"We expect this season to be quite similar to the previous one in terms of volume, with increases in some products such as cherry and blueberries," said Asoex's secretary general Sergio Maureira.

"A lot depends on what happens between January and April, because the drought could affect fruits like grapes, apples, pears and kiwifruit that are still in production."

Cherry exports stood at 192,710 tonnes in

the first week of 2020, an increase of 25 per cent on the previous season. Of this, 93.8 per cent was destined for Asia, with China absorbing 174,538 tonnes – an increase of 29.26 per cent on last year.

Blueberry exports meanwhile, are estimated to reach 115,000 tonnes this season, of which organic berries will account for 11 per cent, a rise of 45 per cent on 2018/19.

Shipments of table grapes are set to total 596,000 tonnes, of which 20 per cent will be made up of new varieties.

Cherries overtook table grapes to become Chile's export leader in the fresh fruit category in 2019, with shipments totalling US\$1.562bn, up 44.7 per cent on the previous year. Grape exports reached US\$1.194bn, a fall of 2.8 per cent on 2018.

The number of hectares planted with table grapes has contracted significantly from a peak of 60,000ha to around 47,000ha. Cherry plantings, meanwhile,

continue to surge, currently standing at around 50,000ha.

The government has warned that the acute water shortage could lead to the introduction of water rationing. Scientists believe that by 2040 Chile could be one of the 25 countries worldwide most affected by drought.

According to the 2030 Water Scenario study, forest plantations are the biggest consumers of water in Chile (57 per cent), followed by the agricultural sector with 37 per cent. Drinking water accounts for 2 per cent of the total.