



By Maura Maxwell

Friday 18th September 2020, 10:31 GMT

Crunch time for Spanish citrus



Despite last season's success, long-term profitability will not return to the sector unless it tackles deep-rooted problems

The 2019/20 season was one of the most successful in recent history for Spain's citrus industry, with prices significantly higher than the five-year average due to strong demand and the shorter crop.

The results were revealed at a meeting held by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA) on Thursday to announce the forecasts for 2020/21.

The new season crop is expected to weigh in at 6.93m tonnes, 12 per cent above last year's total and 5 per cent higher than the five-year average.

Soft citrus production is expected to rise by 12 per cent, while lemons are forecast to rise by 8 per cent. Orange and grapefruit volumes are set to fall by 1 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.

MAPA said that production for 2019/20 had totalled 6.2m tonnes, 18 per cent below the record 2018/19 crop and 9 per cent below the five-year average.

The ministry noted that demand had remained high throughout the pandemic thanks to the durability and extended shelf-life of citrus, as well as its nutritional benefits.

Domestic consumption up to May rose by 5.1 per cent in volume and 17 per cent in value. Lemons saw a significant increase, with consumption up 11.2 per cent on the accumulated annual level.

While there was a slight dip (-3.4 per cent) in the volume exported during the first half of the campaign, from September to March, the value of shipments increased by 19 per cent.

Exports also held up well during the pandemic, with Spain managing to supply significant quantities of citrus to the EU in spite of the smaller crop, the notable increase in domestic consumption and the logistical challenges caused by the crisis.

Shipments in March alone reached almost 500,000 tonnes, a new record for that month.

However, strong European and domestic demand resulted in a sharp fall in exports to non-EU countries.

Overall, prices were significantly higher than those seen in previous seasons, especially during the first weeks of the pandemic MAPA noted.

Orange prices, for example, were more than double last year's average and 40 per cent above the five-year average. During the month of May, prices were three times higher than in previous years.

"If we take into account that the normal percentage of losses is always between 3 and 4 per cent, we can see that this year will go down in history as one in which we have made the most of the harvest," said consultant Paco Borrás.

Speaking to Valencia Fruits, Borrás noted that "the percentage of the crop that went for export was the highest in recent years (60.29 per cent) and therefore, the percentage of fruit going for processing was one of the lowest (14.83 per cent)".

However, Borrás warned that deep-rooted

organised nature of Spain's production

mandarins and oranges were the major

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

structural problems within mandarin and orange production persist and a failure to address these issues would hold back the development of the industry.

The fragmented and poorly

base, structural deficiencies in the supply chain, draconian export protocols hindering access to new markets, a lack of promotional activities for mandarins and oranges and the absence of a functioning interprofessional for

issues that needed to be addressed, Borrás noted.