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By Carl Collen

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Solid start to Florida citrus season

First USDA forecast of the campaign predicts larger volumes of oranges and grapefruit



The National Agriculture Statistics Service of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released the first forecast of the 2019/20 Florida citrus season, projecting year-on-year increases in both the orange and grapefruit crops.

The USDA predicted Florida orange production at 74m boxes, up 3 per cent on the previous campaign, and Florida grapefruit production at 4.6m boxes growth of 2 per cent.

In the orange category, Valencias are pegged at 42m boxes, with early/mid-season varieties coming in at 32m boxes.

Specialty citrus is estimated to come in at 1.05m boxes, the USDA noted.

"This reflects what we've been hearing from growers," said Shannon Shepp, executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus. "Florida Citrus is here to stay. We remain the state's signature crop, and our growers are committed to providing nutritious, great tasting Florida Citrus for years to come."

According to Ellis Hunt, chairman of the Florida Citrus Commission, Thursday's forecast is "a positive indicator that the Florida Citrus industry is coming back."

The USDA issues its initial estimate in October of each year, and then revises it monthly as the crop takes shape until the end of the season in July.

"This incremental increase

is good news for the industry as we continue to recover from Hurricane Irma and the devastating effects of citrus greening," said Michael Sparks, executive vice-president and CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual. "We believe that this number - if it holds throughout the year - will strike a nice balance of getting the processors the oranges they need while firming up prices to the Florida citrus grower.

"I am proud of the Florida citrus grower who continues to produce the best fruit in the world in a very challenging environment," he added. "We are not out of the woods but we are making gains."