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Drought takes toll on Australian navels



Production is expected to fall this season

Australian navel production is forecast to drop to 226,000 tonnes this season, down from 255,000 tonnes in 2007, as the prolonged drought takes its toll on key growing regions, according to the Australian Citrus Growers.

Growers in the New South Wales Riverina have a near full allocation of water and are set for a larger navel crop. But output from the drought-affected

Sunraysia and Riverland areas, where water allocations are low, is forecast to decline by 25 per cent.

Later varieties such as Late Lane, which coincide with Australia's peak export period, are worst-hit, with some suppliers predicting a 50 per cent shortfall in the Sunraysia.

Internal fruit quality is reported to be very good, but exporters to

Asia note that an extended US navel season could overlap with Southern Hemisphere supplies and delay the California valencia crop, causing a clash with Australian late navels. Stiff competition is also expected from South Africa's larger crop.