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Mango shipments expect to rebound from slow September

By TIM LINDEN

Mango importers have experienced a very strong season this year as Mexico shipped about 10 percent more volume than last year with very good market pricing. As production moves into the fall and winter months, supplies are also expected to be greater than last year, although September saw light supplies resulting in a hot market.

By early September, about 43 million cartons had been exported to the United States from Mexico, compared to about 39 million a year ago. "Volume increased this year and so did returns to the growers," said Jesus (Chuy) Loza, managing member at Freska Produce International LLC in Oxnard, CA. "Mangos are definitely a growth item."

Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Corp. of Los Angeles, said that Mexico had a good deal throughout the spring and summer but that most of the increase was at the early end of the deal. After the first six weeks of the season, Mexican shipments were up significantly as the early volume was heavy and maintained fairly good prices.

However, by September Mexico's shipments had slowed to a trickle and Brazil was slow in getting started. Rain in Brazil while the mangos were in the flowering stage delayed the crop, and some later rain hurt the early fruit. Many different importers said that the early quality problems resulted in reduced supplies. In fact, during the week of Sept. 14, only 39 containers of

mangos were unloaded in U.S. ports. This represented about 225,000 cartons of fruit, which everyone admitted was the lowest weekly volume in years.

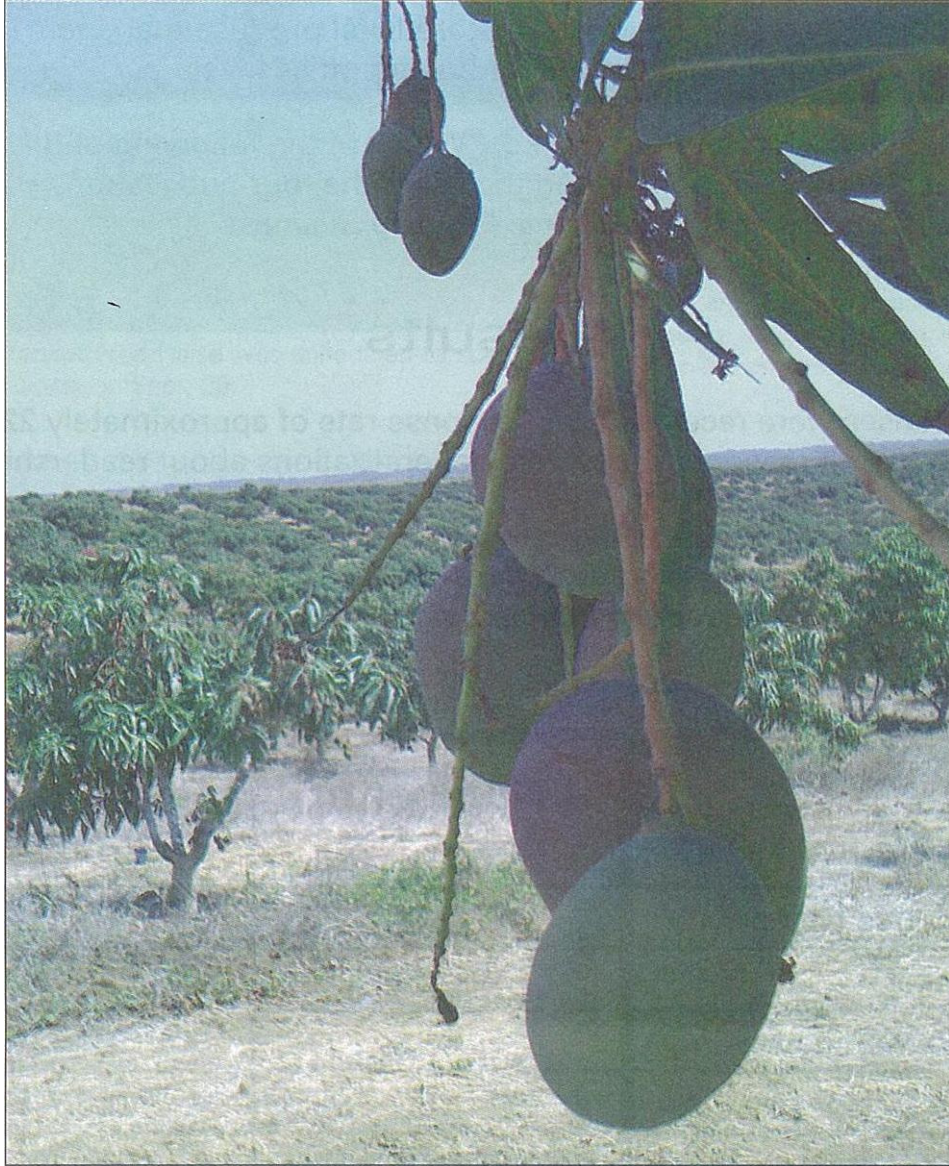
Of course, the decreased volume did result in good prices. Speaking about the early deal, Albert Perez, managing member of Continental Fresh LLC in Coconut Grove, FL, said, "Quality has had its challenges during the early part of the season."

However, he added that the "rain fruit" was working its way through the system and that by October there should be only top-quality fruit on the market. The result of a dip in supplies was high prices; Mr. Perez said they climbed as high as \$8.50 per carton during the middle of September.

The National Mango Board wrote on the crop forecasting page of its web site that Brazil was projected to end the season at about the same level as previous seasons. "They started a bit early this year because Mexico ended early, creating a good opportunity for South America to begin shipping," said Wendy McManus, the board's director of marketing. "We're projecting 6.5 million boxes from Brazil, with peak shipping weeks of mid-September to mid-October. This is fairly close to previous years."

Because the fruit takes two to three weeks to get into the U.S. pipeline, the board said that this amount of time should be added to any projections when trying to figure out when volume will arrive in the United States. So in

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Ecuador is one of the top sources for mangos marketed in the United States during the fall and winter months. The first shipments from Ecuador have been sent, but the volume won't peak until mid-November.

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this example, if the peak shipping period is mid-September to early October, then the peak volume period for the fruit to arrive in the United States is early October to the end of the month.

Close on the heels of Brazil will be shipments from Ecuador. Isabel Freeland, chief financial officer and vice president at Coast Tropical, was in Ecuador Sept. 15 when she told *The Produce News* that Coast would begin its harvest in about two weeks. She said the fruit was sizing well but it would do it good to remain on the trees for a couple of more weeks.

Last year, Ecuador had weather issues which greatly reduced its volume. This year's volume is supposed to be closer to normal. The National

Mango Board has projected that Ecuador will ship 7 million boxes starting in early October, with peak shipping weeks from late October to early December.

Mr. Loza of Freska said that shipments from Ecuador should be up about 30 percent this year, with significant volume of the yellow-skinned Ataulfos for the first time.

Speaking about Peru, Ms. McManus said that volume should also be up substantially over last year. "Peru's projection will continue to take shape as we get closer to their harvest, but at this time, we are projecting that they will ship 9.5 million boxes starting in late November, with peak shipping weeks from mid-December to mid-February," she said.

For importers, retailers, wholesalers or others interest-

ed in updated information, the National Mango Board invites participation on its web site. The crop forecast is updated about once a week. That document can be found on www.mango.org under the Retailers tab — crop history and forecast. "Please encourage your readers to check that page for updated information," said Ms. McManus. "We offer a crop forecast alert e-mail, which is just a short e-mail that goes out to subscribers each time the mango crop forecast is updated. Visitors to our site can sign up to receive those e-mail alerts on the same crop history and forecast page."

As October approaches, the industry is poised for a total 2009 mango crop that most likely will be the largest amount ever imported by the United States.