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THE SUNFRESH SERIES

Tomato market settles in as supplies start to increase

Article courtesy of *Produce News*

With the California mature green deal not expected to start until the week of June 19 and rain continuing to pepper the Southeast, in early June the tomato market was fairly strong and it is expected to last at least throughout the month.

“We have a very good market right now for everyone involved,” said Joe Bernardi on June 6. “At the current market, the growers can make some money and there’s room for the retailers to promote.” Tomatoes growing in a shadehouse. The start of the California/Baja deal should affect supplies positively.

The longtime tomato veteran, who is president of Bernardi & Associates, said a very solid market should greet the start of the California deal. He noted that tomato prices in early May were very strong, but once the f.o.b. price hit about \$20 the demand backed off a bit. In fact, in late May Bernardi told *The Produce News*, “As supplies dwindle, the price goes up and that tends to lessen demand just as it is supposed to. I expect it to continue to come down a bit in June but supplies are still going to be tight until after the Fourth of July.”

Ten days later, he said that prediction is proving to be true. At this time of year tomato supplies are coming from Baja California, central Mexico through south Texas, north Florida, South Carolina and Arkansas. “None of those deals are big but together they are giving us pretty good supplies,” he said.

The start of the California deal should affect the supply side of the equation on the positive side, but more rain in the Southeast might be a counter-balance on the negative side of the supply ledger. Time will tell, but in any event Bernardi expects the market to hold solid until at least California moves into a heavy volume period in early July. On June 6, he said the market ranged from about \$11 to \$15 depending upon type of tomato, size and point of origin.

Speaking from Turlock in California’s San Joaquin Valley, where Bernardi has an office, he said the weather has been perfect for the last month, producing a very good, high-quality crop. “We had an abundance of rain in the winter and spring and lots of snow in the mountains. This means the plants are going to get a lot of fresh water.

THIS WEEK'S SPECIALS:

\$15.75 50 lb. New Cabbage



\$23.75 18 lb. Red Seedless Grapes



\$16.75 50 lb. Spanish Onions



\$13.75 6 ct. Pineapples



Tomato market settles in as supplies start to increase (continued...)

They appreciate that. Over the last couple of years, they've had to use a lot of well water, which just isn't as good."

As the summer progresses, Bernardi said the big unknown is just how much fruit will be produced by the homegrown and regional deals around the country. While those local deals affect many of the vegetable crops, the commercial tomato market probably feels the affect more than any other commodity. Almost any regional vegetable deal across the country has a tomato component.

In addition, every home gardener tends to have at least a plant or two or three or four. In July and August, those plants are typically loaded with fruit and collectively they decrease demand for tomatoes from commercial shippers. But weather is often a limiting factor. That has definitely been the case this year for the early commercial deals in the Southeast. "We'll have to wait and see what kind of weather we have in July. August is typically the biggest month for those home-grown deals," Bernardi said.

Speaking of his own firm, he said there is nothing new or earth-shattering to report though this is "moving month" for a handful of his firm's employees. "We have already opened the San Diego office [to handle the Baja California deal] and a couple of guys from Nogales and another from Florida are getting ready to come to Northern California to help with this deal."

By having boots on the ground, and ears and eyes focused in many different districts, Bernardi & Associates, which is a brokerage operation, does its best for its customers and the growers. "Our goal as always is to continue to add value for both the customers and the shippers," said the company's top executive. "We are also trying to match up the customers with the tomatoes that are right for them."

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