



Promoting sustainable agriculture
since 1974

PRODUCE NOTES

March 24, 2003

AUTUMN HARVEST FROM SOUTH AMERICA

Just when we need a little produce excitement, fresh berries, stone fruit, apples and pears are arriving from South America. As always, we get questions asking how the fruit is grown and certified. Another concern is whether it's sustainable to bring in fruit from so far away even if it is organic. Yet, many shoppers want something different this time of year and will buy conventional imported fruit to satisfy their craving. Why not offer them something organic instead, especially if it's from a family farm in rural Argentina or Chile?

One of Veritable's buyers, Caitlyn Blackford, visited these countries several years ago and toured a number of orchards and packing facilities. Her photos of the trip depict orchards with lush cover crops, pristine waterways, and clean packing facilities. Next time you are at VV, ask to see these photos of farms in a distant land. She was impressed: "I was really taken with the scale of operation for most growers. Whether an independent grower, or a grower cooperative, there were lots of family operations. In the case of the cooperatives, they seemed to really be part of the center of the community. We met lots of very friendly, very sincere people."

Probably the biggest importer of South American fruit is CFFresh. Based in Sedro-Wooley, Washington, CFFresh owns the Viva Tierra and Nature

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SOUTH AMERICAN FRUIT AVAILABILITY

APPLES: Galas have started although our apple buyer is sticking to the Washington supply because the quality and prices are good. We'll be offering the new crop within a few weeks. **Fujis** and **Granny Smiths** are expected mid-to-late April, followed by **Golden Delicious, Jonagolds** and **Braeburns**.

PEACHES & PLUMS: The **Linda Rosa** and **Larry Annes** are done for the season. **September Sun peaches** are still available.

PEARS: **Abate Fetel, Red Bartletts, Packhams** and **Bartlett** have started and they are beautiful. (Those heavy boxes they come in are made from poplar trees grown on the farm.) **D'anjous** have also started but, like the galas, we're selling Washington supply before moving into these. **Bosc** and limited supplies of **Alexander Lucas** are expected mid-to-late April.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE MARKET

There are definitely signs of spring in the produce world. **Local Asparagus** is in plentiful supply from the Capay Valley and the Sacramento Delta. We also have steady offerings of **Spring Onions** and **Green Garlic**. **Fava Beans** from the Santa Barbara area have also made an appearance. **Strawberries** are plentiful and the price is down.

In the world of **Citrus**, many items are winding down: **Navel Oranges, Honey Tangerines, Royal Mandarins,** and **limes**. **Grapefruit** is steady and supplies of **Valencia Oranges** are increasing. **Lemons** are also steady.

Hass Avocados have been hard to find lately, but supplies should increase as Santa Barbara area growers begin to harvest.

Please consider trying the new **Dried Fruit** products we will begin to offer, **Bear Bites**, a line of organic *dried apples* and *cherries*, as well as **Hazel Nuts**. These items are packaged in cello bags with colorful labels.

We are also now offering **Organic Flowers**. If you are interested in flowers for your produce department, please ask for details from your sales person.

Pineapple from Maui are due to reappear next week.

I spoke to the folks at *Del Cabo* who offered the following explanation for the shortage we are experiencing with their **tomatoes** this year. "A combination of disease pressure on the plantings, aggravated by some rains that came at exactly the wrong time, has caused our volume from our main growing region to be half of what it was last year."

New Crop Russets? Unfortunately, not until June.

1100 Cesar Chavez Street
San Francisco, California 94124
voice: 415 641.3500
fax: 415 641.3505

Conserve labels, and also sells under a number of individual labels. Their strength comes from the success of the growers working together with their field reps on a variety of levels—growing, post harvest, certification, and marketing. For South America they have a Chilean native, Luis Acuña, who has been with them for years, and Bill Denevan, an organic apple grower in Santa Cruz, California.

Addie Pobst also works with Luis, I asked her if apple growers in Chile and Argentina face conditions similar to those here. She said: “The regions where our growers’ apple orchards are located have climatic conditions very similar to Washington State - apple trees know what they like - so the growers’ methods and techniques are also very similar.” She says the same could also be said of the other fruit crops they grow as well as the garlic.

Several of the farms, PAI and Greenwich, are collectives. PAI’s 200 growers farm 8,000 acres in the Rio Negro and Rio Neuquen valleys at the foot of the Andes Mountains. They transitioned to organic in the early 1990’s. So did the growers at Agro Roca who transitioned with the help of a foundation, FAEA (Argentine Ecological Foods Foundation), the first accredited certifier in Argentina. Both Agro Roca and Greenwich pack under the Viva Tierra label.

Santo Caprioli, founder of Olive Grove and the Organica label, has always been organic. In 1949 he arrived in Argentina from Italy, and worked hard to establish his dream of an Italian farm lifestyle like his ancestors had lived for many generations. His plums and pears have been great so far, and we look forward to more.

The fruit is shipped via boat to Philadelphia where it is inspected by the USDA then shipped to various destinations throughout the U.S. If there are any problems with the shipment the fruit is held until cleared. In the case that a quarantined pest is found and fumigation is required, the company receiving the product will decide whether to re-label the product and sell it as conventional or destroy it.

Certification in both these countries is equivalent with US and international standards. Both have national standards, Argentina since 1995 and Chile since 1999, with power of enforcement backed by government agencies. PROA is the main certifier in Chile, and Argencert and OIA are the main certifiers in Argentina, although Oregon based TILTH, Swiss based IMO, and German based BCS certify there as well. The certification process is as rigorous as it is here and includes inspection of growing, harvest, packing, storage, and transportation practices.





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ORGANIC STANDARDS ARE AT RISK!!!!

ACTION ALERT

KEEP ORGANIC ORGANIC!

TAKE ACTION TODAY!

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

It only takes one minute!

Go to www.ota.com, look for Take Action near top of page. Click on Contact Your Representative/Senator and follow prompts to automatically send a fax.

Go to www.capwiz.com/ota, click on Contact Your Representative/Senator, or Enter Your Zip Code, and follow prompts to automatically send a fax.

YOU can also FAX a letter directly using the letter below. Just write in your Representative's or Senator's name at the top and be sure to include your address with your name when you sign at the bottom.

If your representative is listed below, call or fax him **immediately**. These guys have the ability to swing this in our favor:

Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-50) (ph) 202-225-5452, (fax) 760-737-8438

Richard Pombo (R-11) (ph) 202-225-1947, (fax) 202-226-0861

Doug Ose (R-3) (ph) 202-225-5716, (fax) 202-226-1298

Ken Calvert (R-44) (ph) 202-225-1986, (fax) 909-784-5255

David Dreier (R-26) (ph) 202-225-2305, (fax) 866-373-6321

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Dear

I am concerned about maintaining stringent standards for organic agricultural production.

By co-sponsoring the Farr-Kind bill to repeal section 771(HR. 995), you support what's best for shoppers, businesses, and the environment. HR. 995 will repeal a loophole in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill. The loophole, Section 771 of the spending bill, would enable livestock producers to disregard organic feed requirements for organic livestock. This loophole is unacceptable.

Sales of organic products in the US have increased at least 20% each year for a decade, making organic agriculture one of the bright spots for US agriculture. This growth is driven in part by the demand for organic feed and other organic materials and ingredients, which in turn, gives our farmers additional opportunities to earn a living on their farms. US national organic standards, implemented in Oct. 2002, require that organic farmers follow strict production standards in order to sell their products as organic. For livestock, those standards include using only organic feed.

Allow the USDA to enforce stringent US organic standards by co-sponsoring the HR 995 to repeal section 771. This loophole is a mistake that can be easily corrected with your support. For an update on co-sponsorship of HR 995, contact Senator Farr's office, Troy Phillips, 202-225-2861 or troy.phillips@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your concern for voters like me, and for your concern in maintaining stringent organic standards.

Sincerely,