

P.I. NEWS

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CALIFORNIA'S 2015 PISTACHIO CROP COULD BE DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY

Early indications suggest 2015 may yield a poor harvest for California pistachio growers. A shortage of chilling hours is largely to blame though the drought is not without complicity in the matter.

Growers cite a trifecta of chilling hours, water availability and water quality for what looks to be a poor crop, which could be down as much as 70 percent in California, according to estimates.

One bright spot seems to be Arizona as this year's crop could yield close to last year's, according to Jim Zion, managing partner with Meridian Growers in Fresno, Calif.

"We're seeing some orchards in California with up to 70 percent blanking," Zion says.

Nut size also appears small, Zion said. Other issues affecting the crop appear to be erratic maturity, which could extend the harvest and force growers to shake trees more than once. Such is not the case across the board as Zion said some California orchards "definitely look better than others."

Nuts with closed shells could also present a problem for marketers this season.

Zion cautions that crop size and other issues will be easier to judge once harvest is under way in September. Still, he predicts "a difficult year for marketing."

Pistachio grower and Pioneer Nursery co-owner Corky Anderson agrees that the crop "will be short this year."

Despite the woeful news within the pistachio industry this year, growers have generally enjoyed positive trends marketing the popular tree nut in the past several years. Since the formative days of the American Pistachio Growers organization, exports have risen by several hundred percent while domestic consumption is up 16 percent.

According to Judy Hirigoyen, vice president of global marketing for American Pistachio Growers, Asia, five countries in Europe and the United States remain the target markets for American pistachios. Total exports to APG target markets since 2003 are up over 700%.

In spite of what could be a bad year for pistachio growers, APG Executive Director Richard Matoian says returns to pistachio



Regardless of crop size, the American Pistachio Growers is pushing ahead with marketing partnerships to help promote domestic and international consumption of American pistachios. From left, *Biggest Loser* contestant Sonja Jones and the show's nutritionist, Cheryl Forberg; Miss California Bree Morse; APG Chairman Thom Dille; and APG Executive Director Richard Matoian.

growers remain among the highest of the big-three tree nuts - pistachios, almonds and walnuts - grown in California.

Success in the pistachio industry has also driven membership and an internal strategy shift with the organization's budget, according to Matoian. Currently about 80 percent of the organization's budget is spent marketing pistachios, up from 31 percent in 2008.

Membership is also up 79 percent from 2008 to over 600 individuals and organizations.

Part of that marketing is targeted at health professionals and social influencers to encourage consumption of pistachios. APG has partnered with several key professionals, including Miss California, Tour de France bicycle racer Mark Cavendish, Registered Dietician and nutritionist for the television show *Biggest Loser* Cheryl Forberg and others.

At the annual APG luncheon in Visalia, Calif., *Biggest Loser* runner up Sonya Jones spoke to growers about her time spent on the reality show, and how pistachios became a daily snack routine for her.

Jones says she still snacks on pistachios every day as part of her routine to maintain her weight loss. Jones lost 120 pounds over the four-month course of her time on the television show.

Source: Todd Fitchette

Pistachio Growers Association Inc.

27 Ludgate Hill Road
Aldgate SA 5154

T: 0417 809 172

pgai.com.au



Pistachio Growers' Association



IRAN DEAL THREATENS US GROWERS



Californian pistachio farmers, who have benefited from the sanctions against the world's biggest producer, prepare for the return of their top rival

US pistachio farmers have expressed concern that the nuclear deal with Iran, and the subsequent lifting of sanctions against the country, could boost competition on the pistachio market and curtail the US industry's continued success and expansion.

Iran stands as the largest producer of pistachios in the world, and Californian growers have benefited from the lack of Iranian nuts on the market. Pistachio farmers there have doubled their acreage over the past ten years, despite the drought conditions.

Reports have pointed out that the return of Iran could be good news for consumers, since pistachio prices have sky-rocketed in recent years, rising by 40 per cent in five years, according to Bloomberg.

However, Bloomberg also questioned the threat posed by a resurgent Iran. "Iran would struggle to sell into Europe and the US because of high levels of contamination from aflatoxin, a toxic chemical caused by fungus," it reported.

Earlier this year, the president of US-based Wonderful Pistachios, Stewart Resnick, pushed farmers to plant even more of the nuts, according to Western Farm Press, since net returns on the crop were more than double those for almonds and walnuts.

The US pistachio crop was worth around US\$1.3bn last year.

TURKEY: IMPORTANT WARNING CONCERNING PISTACHIO NUTS

Turkey's Chambers of Agriculture Union (TZOB) Chairman Semsî Bayraktar, announced that an increase is expected in the production of pistachios, and to prevent a drop in prices, exports need to be increased.

Bayraktar, in a written statement, stresses that in the years 2013 and 2014 the pistachio harvest experienced a decline, but this year 150,000-160,000 tons of production is expected.

Fluctuations in production lead to instability in price, states Bayraktar. "An increase in pistachio production is expected and to prevent prices from falling too much, export channels need to be enforced."

The three countries producing the most pistachios are Iran, the USA and Turkey; the three countries' production equates to almost 83.4% of total pistachio nut production.

Pistachios are grown in 41 of Turkey's provinces and a very large part of production comes from the southeast Anatolia region. Bayraktar describes the situation:

"According to the Turkish Statistical Institutes's data from 2014, Sanliurfa was first for production with 21,494 tons. First in number of trees is Gaziantep which produces 17,231 tons, followed by Siirt with 15,228 tons. Amongst the people there is a common misconception that inadequate irrigation systems led to a decline in pistachio production. Pistachio trees do not like a high level of ground watering. Pistachio production according to traditional methods should be left behind and irrigation to increase the quality and yield should be considered."

Bayraktar reports that illegally smuggled Iranian pistachios entering Turkey left farmers in a difficult situation, in this regard he wants appropriate measures to be taken.

Referring to the importance of providing support for established nut orchards, which are having to close Bayraktar concludes, "Pistachios can be stored for a long time and high quality products can be found on the market at any moment, in order to assure price stability and a sufficient income for our growers, it is necessary to establish licensed warehousing and product specialization exchanges."

Source: hurriyet.com.tr

DONKEY WITH FLASHLIGHT REPLACES NIGHT WATCH IN TURKEY

An elderly man in the southern city of Gaziantep came up with an ingenious solution to protect his pistachio orchard. Hamo Demir, 100, equipped his donkey with a flashlight wrapped around its neck and set it free in the orchard at night. The donkey, unaware of its new duty, is motivated to guard the orchard by grazing freely throughout the night.

Demir lives in Karkamış, a district of Gaziantep that is known throughout Turkey due to Syrian conflict that rages just a few meters away on the Syrian side of the border and for gunshots ringing on the Turkish side. However, the main concern for farmers in Gaziantep, renowned as Turkey's pistachio capital, is the theft of their produce.

Some hire guards while others protect their orchards on their own, patrolling the areas at night. Demir is a fragile old man who said he has difficulty walking. "My wife and I, we are the only two people keeping watch over 100 trees, and theft is common here," he said.

"Our pistachios were stolen once and my wife was angry. She told me how they could steal the pistachios and she was angry



Hamo Demir with his donkey (IHA photo)

that I failed to protect the orchard. So, I thought putting a flashlight on the donkey and setting it loose was a good idea. I can now sleep tight."

Source: Daily Sabah / Ihlas News Agency, Gaziantep, Turkey

AMERICAN PISTACHIO GROWERS ADDS CELEBRITY CHEF/NUTRITIONIST

American Pistachio Growers (APG) has added a new Brand Ambassador to their lineup of world-class athletes who now claim the nutritious nut as their "Official Snack."

Cheryl Forberg, RD, the chef/nutritionist for NBC's hit show *The Biggest Loser*, will contribute to the grower organization's outreach efforts, educating consumers worldwide about the nut that's gaining global attention as a snack that supports healthy weight goals.

"Mindful snacking is an important tool in weight loss and management," said Forberg. "With their lower fat content - most of which is the healthy fat our bodies need - plus fiber, protein and phytonutrients, pistachios help keep hunger at bay while adding positively to your nutritional intake. In my latest book you'll find I talk about anthocyanin, a naturally-occurring plant chemical in pistachios thought to boost the immune system. All things taken into consideration, they're an ideal snack for weight loss and maintaining a healthy weight."

Forberg was tapped for the television show (about to begin its 17th season) in the beginning and has worked with contestants to achieve their goals ever since. While the public often focuses on the grueling physical exercise contestants undergo on camera, nutrition education is cited by many as the game-changer for big weight loss.

"I was a mindless snacker and an over-eater. It wasn't uncommon for me to consume 5- or 6,000 calories per day," said Sonya Jones, a contestant on Season 16 of *The Biggest Loser*. "Cheryl helped me change my life, teaching me to eat well while eating right. Part of that has been to choose snacks that add happiness, but don't add weight when eaten mindfully. I like to snack on pistachios, and one serving is about 49 nuts, so I feel full longer." Jones did not win the season's contest, losing by less than one pound. "I don't mind that I didn't win. I won a happier, new life and probably a longer one, too" she said.

Overweight and obesity are thought to significantly raise the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers, and even death, according to Forberg. Moreover, people who are overweight or obese can suffer from depression, poor self-esteem and social stigmatization.

APG cites more than 27 studies published in scientific journals that demonstrate pistachios may be a useful tool in the battle against weight.

"As the scientific evidence was accumulating, we knew Cheryl was the perfect person to help us educate consumers on the benefits of pistachios as a part of an eating plan of high quality foods the whole family can enjoy- whether or not they need to lose weight," said Judy Hirigoyen, VP of Global Marketing for the grower-run trade association. "She's respected by consumers and health experts alike, and she believes in pistachios."

About Cheryl Forberg, RD

The *New York Times* best-selling author, James Beard Award-winning cookbook author and chef/nutritionist for the hit NBC show *The Biggest Loser*, Cheryl Forberg is a registered dietitian and professional chef, dedicated to combining the benefits of nutrition with the pleasures of delicious food. *The Biggest Loser Six Weeks to a Healthier You* book (Rodale), written by Forberg, gained notoriety in 2012 when *US News & World Report* first named it the Best Diet for Diabetics (#1) and Weight Loss (#2). In 2015, it is still ranked as their #1 diet for diabetes. Her new book, *A Small Guide to Losing Big* (Flavor First Publishing), was released this year and follows the same guidelines in a pocket-book format, including menus and recipes.

American Pistachio Growers

American Pistachio Growers (APG) is a non-profit trade association representing more than 625 grower members in California, Arizona and New Mexico. APG is governed by an 18-member board of directors who are growers and is funded entirely by growers and independent processors with the shared goal of increasing global awareness of nutritious, American-grown pistachios. The United States has been #1 in global pistachio production since 2008.

Source: *The Recorder*, recorder@portervillerecorder.com

SYRIAN PISTACHIO PRODUCTION DOWN 50 PERCENT: MINISTRY

Syria, once one of the world's top exporters of pistachios, said on Tuesday that production of the nuts has plunged 50 percent over the past year.

The agriculture ministry said the slump was both the result of the ongoing conflict and frosty conditions last winter.

"Pistachio production was only 35,000 tons in 2014, while before the crisis Syria produced between 65,000 and 75,000 tons a year," ministry official Hassan Ibrahim said.

He said running battles prevented access to some of the country's best pistachio-producing land, including in Aleppo, Idlib and Hama provinces where rebel and government forces are fighting each other.

The center of the country's pistachio production, Morek in central Hama province, has seen frequent clashes. Severe frosts also hit the crop, Ibrahim said.

The plummet in production has kept exports low, with Ibrahim saying that just 800 tons were exported in 2014-2015. By comparison, some 3,000 tons were exported in 2012, according to official Syrian media.

Ibrahim said production could yet pick up this year, however, because farmers in areas still under government control where pistachios were not grown before are starting to cultivate the crop.

In 2013, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Syria was the world's fourth largest pistachio producer after Iran, the United States and Turkey.

The nut is a widely used ingredient of sweets and desserts in the Middle East.



BEST PISTACHIO-GROWING SEASON IN YEARS' FOR ARIZONA GROWER



Jim Graham is a first generation pistachio grower who previously farmed in Iowa.

In late July, Arizona pistachio grower Jim Graham kept one eye peeled on his nut trees while the other busily scanned the horizon for dark clouds and a summer monsoonal rain.

Two inches of rain fell days earlier - the first rain in five months on Jim and Ruth Graham's Cochise Groves farm.

The 160-acre pistachio operation in Cochise (Cochise County) is nestled at the base of the Gunnison Hills and the Dragoon Mountains along the western edge of the Sulphur Springs Valley in southeastern-most Arizona.

"2015 has included the best growing conditions we've had in quite a few years," Graham said.

In the early 1980s, the Kerman-variety orchards were planted by Ruth's parents - Victor and Hazel Nilsen.

The farm sits on a 4,300-foot-elevation perch about 75 miles east of Tucson near Interstate 10 and about 60 miles from the Arizona-New Mexico state line.

"The pistachio nut quality looks terrific. It looks like a good crop," Graham said somewhat cautiously, aware that monsoonal storms are a concern until the "rainy season" ends, usually in mid-September.

"It's not over until it's over," he said.

The pistachio trees on the Graham operation are alternate bearing. 2015 is the higher yielding "on year." He says it's too early to guesstimate yield, but he plans to double shake the trees at harvest.

Graham is somewhat surprised by the good crop, following a winter with milder temperatures and fewer chilling hours.

"We had a frost scare in April, but thankfully no damage occurred," he said. "The trees pollinated well in the spring, and the crop has developed well this season."

The farm is irrigated with groundwater drawn from 500-foot-deep wells. Water is pulled from about 300-feet down.

Rains have been few and far between this year. A 2.5-inch, three-day "soaker" in February was followed by five months of sunny skies. Monsoon moisture is needed to recharge the groundwater basin.

Pest and disease issues are usually uncommon at this dry, high-desert location. The fungus *Septoria* leaf spot, indigenous to Arizona, sometimes occurs.

Source: Cary Blake