

Central Valley Business Times

California's Valencia orange harvest expected to be down

SACRAMENTO

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- 20 Million cartons are predicted
- Drought impacting yield



California growers are expected to pack about 20 million cartons of Valencia oranges from the current crop, according to a new report from the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The forecast is based on results of a survey conducted from Jan. 16-Feb. 14. Estimated fruit set per tree, fruit diameter, trees per acre, bearing acreage, and oranges per carton were used in the statistical models estimating production.

The season has been dry in many areas and measurements are indicating an average fruit size, but the fruit set has been negatively impacted, NASS says.

Survey data indicate an average fruit set per tree of 545, well below the five-year average of 639 and the lowest set since the 2008-09 season. The average March 1 diameter was 2.571 inches, slightly above the five-year average of 2.562.

Sixty years ago, when Valencia growing was at its peak in California, growers had trees on about 123,000 acres. Since then, the navel orange has become the dominant citrus grown in the state.

For this year's sample, 577 Valencia orange groves was randomly selected proportional to acreage, county, and variety representation for the state, with 539 of these groves being utilized in this survey. Once a grove was randomly chosen and grower permission was granted, two trees were randomly selected for each grove. For each randomly selected tree, its trunk was measured along with all connected branches. A random number table was then used to select a branch, and then all connected branches from the randomly-selected branch were measured.

This process was repeated until a branch was reached with no significant limbs beyond it. This randomly-selected branch, called the terminal branch, was then closely inspected to count all fruit connected to it, as well as all of the fruit along the path from the trunk to the terminal branch. Since each selected path has a probability of selection associated with it, a probability-based method was then applied to estimate a fruit count for the entire tree.

In the last week of the survey period, fruit diameter measurements were made on the right quadrant of four trees surrounding the two trees of every third sampled grove. These measurements were used to estimate an average fruit diameter per tree. The sampled groves were primarily in the top Valencia orange producing counties of Tulare, Kern, Fresno, Ventura and San Diego.