

# Citrus harvest on track to break records

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SOUTHERN Australia citrus growers are on track to produce another record-breaking harvest.

For the first time China looks set to become the top export destination for citrus this year, thanks to the free trade agreement between the two countries.

Citrus Australia chief executive Judith Damiani said next month was the start of the peak for harvest and exports.

“We’re expecting the main crop, navels, to be up 10 per cent in tonnages this year compared to last year.

“That’s mostly due to a recovery from last year’s lighter crop.”

Last year Australia produced 260,000 tonnes of citrus. Navels account for 80 per cent of citrus exports.

Ms Damiani said export demand for navels continued to outstrip supply.

“We’re experiencing phenomenal demand from China,” she said.

Last year China was the second biggest importer of Australian citrus, behind Japan, but Ms Damiani predicted China would be take top spot this year.

Last year 40,000 tonnes of Australia citrus was sold to China.

“Demand from Japan has grown slowly in the past eight years but since 2103 China has taken off,” she said.

Ms Damiani credited Australia’s reputation for producing safe, premium foods, and the China-Australia FTA of 2015, with its incremental tariff reductions, for the growing interest from China.

Other factors included the Australian crop being grown counter-seasonally to Asian grown fruit, and China’s increasing affluence.

Ms Damiani said the outlook for prices was “buoyant” with \$328 million of citrus sold last year.

Nutrano farming division executive manager Richard Byllaardt said the citrus growing and exporting company now had 650ha at Mildura, Queensland and in the Northern Territory.

The Mildura harvest was well under way, he said.

“The taste and flavour is as good as we’ve ever tasted, thanks to the cooler summer.”

Mr Byllaardt said Nutrano’s sales to China had doubled this year and the company would send more than 100 containers of citrus to the major cities.

He said prices were “in line” with last year.

Nutrano planned to extend citrus acreage by 25 per cent this year in response to the Chinese demand.