

MARKETING MANGOS IN HAWAII

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I manage a small produce wholesaling business in Honolulu that sells to retail markets in Honolulu, including some supermarket chains. Mangos are a small item for us. We bring some in by airfreight from Mexico through California. During the Hawaii mango season, we generally do not sell mangos. Late in the Hawaii season, we market some mangos provided to us by Mr. Warren Yee. We do not export mangos.

We recently began bringing in Mexican 'Haden' mangos. They are packed by count in boxes, ranging from 8-count to 20-count. The popular sizes in the retail markets here are the 10s and 12s. The boxes average 12-14 pounds, but we buy by the box, not by weight. Prices range from an early-season high of close to \$20.00 to as low as \$4.00 per box during peak season. Right now the Los Angeles price is around \$12.00 per 12-count box, and airfreight will add about \$3.00 per box to the cost of bringing it in. We bring in a few hundred pounds a week. They sell now at around \$3.00 per pound in the retail markets. As the season progresses, prices will drop to around \$7.00-8.00 per box, FOB Los Angeles.

Generally we bring in 'Haden', and later on, in April or so, we will start to get 'Tommy Atkins'. Demand drops as the California summer fruits like peaches and nectarines come into season and there is more competition for space on the retail market shelves.

We do not handle Hawaii mangos very much. We find that retail markets buy directly from backyarders who take fruits to the supermarket and sell them for whatever price they can get. There are also people whom I call "opportunistic harvesters," who go around the neighborhoods and offer so many dollars a tree, harvest everything on the tree from immature to ripe, and sell them for whatever they can get. They may come to wholesalers and offer a price, but usually we find it not a good proposition, because the quality includes discards and offshape and varies from immature to overripe. With most of the retailers getting their Hawaii mangos through their back door, we can't compete with back-

yarders on price; they are happy to receive whatever they can, and they don't have that much invested in terms of growing the mangos. Late in the season Mr. Warren Yee's mangos come in, and we do find an opportunity there to market these commercially grown mangos.

Q: What about the tourist market?

A: We sell to retail markets, not to hotels and restaurants. I know they buy, but I don't know to what extent. As Hawaii mangos become available, I know they start including it in their menus, but I have no idea how much they are importing.

Q: During the season, do you think there would be room in the retail channel for a graded product?

A: The potential for a bigger volume on the retail level is there. The retailers are looking for a more consistent supply. Consistent quality in terms of standardized packs with uniform sizes and good color would be of importance to retailers, because they like their shelves to look nice. I think retailers feel that there is good money in mangos, but the problem is supply. Also, when there is a bumper crop of mangos it means that less peaches, nectarines, and other fruits are going to be sold.

Q: When do the Mexican mangos start coming in?

A: We just started about two weeks ago. Demand will drop off as Hawaii's season progresses.

Q: Could you comment on the quality of the imported mangos? What do you look for?

A: We like to have mangos with good color, a lot of red. The firmness is important; we have some problems with arrivals that come in too soft. Appearance is important. Price is not a major factor.