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The Perishable Specialist gearing up for Argentina blueberry movement

By CHRISTINA DIMARTINO

Farmers in Tucuman, Argentina, are busy setting up for the coming season. The Perishable Specialist Inc. President Frank A. Ramos told *The Produce News* on Sept. 8. Mr. Ramos and his partner-wife, Ana, are licensed customs brokers who work together at the Miami, business.

"They are cleaning their fields and making sure their bushes are in good shape," said Mr. Ramos. "We will see the first shipments of blueberries from that region by October 15. It's the first region in the country that cranks up. They've had good weather, and hopefully it will stay that way throughout the season. In the past few years, growers were hampered by hail, frost or other weather conditions. Everything is looking very good at this point."

Blueberries from Argentina typically run through the end of November. The Chilean blueberry program begins strong around December 1. Chilean blueberries run through about

the end of March.

"There is a little window for Uruguay blueberries that starts about 30 days behind Argentina's start," said Mr. Ramos. "This program runs alongside Argentina from that point, but it is a small program compared to Argentina."

The Perishables Specialist provides government clearances between shippers and importers. It handles all the customers' needs as related to customs clearance and Federal Department of Agriculture inspections. It also coordinates cold-storage protocols and fumigation procedures when necessary. Mr. Ramos said that it is imperative to stay abreast of requirements on products that are brought into the United States.

Most of the blackberries that the company handles come from Guatemala.

"Guatemala runs blackberries year round," said Mr. Ramos. "They compete with Mexico when that season kicks in, so they slow down a little during that period. The berries

from Guatemala are very high quality and the volumes are heavy. We're currently into the peak season from the country."

The Perishables Specialist also clears raspberries out of Chile in a mid-December through April season.

Mr. Ramos said that although the blueberry program from Argentina had not yet begun, he was hearing from customers that it should be even better than last year. He added that weather will determine when it starts and the heaviness of volumes.

"So far, they've had good growing conditions," he said. "We're all hoping for the best."



Frank A. Ramos, president of The Perishable Specialist Inc., admiring his company vehicle

tough economy, increasingly more are coming into the U.S. The health benefits being reported on media venues really helps to sell them.

"My family and I vacationed in Maine this summer," he continued. "I was amazed at the huge consumption of blueberries there. They are being used in every imaginable way on menus. I even enjoyed a blueberry soda."

Miami is still the major gateway into the United States from Argentina and Chile. Although he is not involved in getting the berries to their final destination, he knows that the majority of them end up in the Northeast, although some go out west.

The Perishable Specialist will be celebrating its 10th year in business on Jan. 15, 2012.

"This year, we ranked number 351 for Hispanic-owned companies in the U.S. by *Hispanic Business Magazine*," said Mr. Ramos. "We are very proud of this accomplishment."

In my experience, blueberries are the fastest growing of all berries. Demand and volumes increase every year. Even in this