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## Today's News

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### U.S. allowing irradiated guava imports

By Tom Karst

(Oct. 15, 3:17 p.m.) Mexican fresh guava treated by an irradiation dose is cleared to enter the U.S.

One source in Mexico indicated some irradiated guavas could enter the U.S. within weeks, with larger volume anticipated by next spring.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture cleared the way for the imports on Oct. 14. In June, the department posted a notice in the *Federal Register* asking for comments on a pest risk assessment for fresh Mexican guavas.

In a 60-day comment period following that notice, the USDA received seven comments, most of them from Mexican guava producers and Mexico's agriculture department.

Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson was the lone dissenter, citing an "exceptionally high" pest risk.

Under the new policy, fresh guavas from Mexico must be irradiated with a minimum absorbed dose of 400 gray, and each consignment must be inspected by Mexico's national plant protection organization. The shipments also must carry a phytosanitary certificate verifying the fruit has been irradiated and is free of pests.

One irradiation plant that can treat fresh fruit is operating in Mexico City, said Arved Deeck, director of Jalisco-based Benebion. Benebion, an irradiation service for growers and connected with the firm Phytosan S.A. de C.V., plans to open its own cobalt-based irradiation facility in the Mexico's San Luis Potosi state next year, Deeck said. He said the Benebion facility may open in April of 2009. The facility is centrally located in Mexico, and is expected to handle shipments arriving through Laredo and McAllen, Texas.

Fresh guava prices in the U.S. recently have run in the range of \$2.80 per pound wholesale in Miami, and Deeck said irradiation would add perhaps 5 cents per pound to the cost of the fruit shipped from Mexico.

The Mexican guava season is year 'round, but most volumes are shipped from August to May, Deeck said.

He speculated that shipments of irradiated Mexican guavas could begin by late October.

Other uses of irradiation are expected to include phytosanitary treatment of mangoes and citrus fruits. He said methyl bromide treatment for citrus is being phased out for environmental reasons, leaving irradiation as an attractive option. Meanwhile, Deeck said mango growers believe they can achieve better shelf life with irradiation compared with the alternative hot water treatment.

Only about 5,000 metric tons of guava are produced in the in the U.S.; Deeck said that preliminary industry estimates show that 30,000 metric tons of Mexican guava in the U.S. could be supported fairly easily.

In total, Mexico produces about 300,000 metric tons of fresh guavas, with domestic consumption currently accounting for virtually all production now.

Dorian Gallegos, director of procurement for Frieda's Inc., Los Alamitos, Calif., said the U.S. fresh guava deal is lightly supplied now in relation to potential demand.



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"My general sense is that it is a light deal; you get only California product and Florida product," he said Oct. 14.

Gallegos said the Mexican strawberry variety of guava would be in demand, because there is minor acreage in California.

"I think it would be welcome; they may need to put a little marketing effort behind it, but there is demand to fulfilled there," he said.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for World Variety Produce Inc., Los Angeles, Calif., said the California guava season runs from late September to May. World Variety markets items under the Melissa's label.

"If and when any of our retailers specifically request the Mexican guava, as always we will respond," he said.

However, he said, World Variety will focus on the white-fleshed California guava.

Mexico is known for the pink fleshed and slightly smaller guava, he noted.

"After the (California) season, we will extend the guava season with Mexican fruit," he said.

[E-mail Tom Karst](#)

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