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Current status of loquat in Chile

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SUMMARY – The loquat is a minor fruit tree with very little development in Chile, with a planted area of not more than 145 hectares. The irregular export of this fruit mostly goes to the east coast of the USA, the local market being its main consumer. The early varieties can reach the best price in the local market, whereas the late ones get a very low price when they have to compete with other fruits appearing at the beginning of the season.

Key words: Loquat, *Eriobotrya japonica*, exportation, culture.

RESUME – "Situation actuelle du néflier au Chili". La culture du néflier du Japon, au Chili, est encore peu développée, avec une superficie qui ne dépasse pas 145 hectares. Quelques exportations se font aux Etats-Unis, fondamentalement à la côte est de ce pays, mais le gros de la production est vendue dans les marchés locaux. Les variétés qui mûrissent au début de la saison sont celles qui ont les meilleurs prix, au contraire, les variétés tardives ont un très mauvais prix.

Mots-clés : Néflier, *Eriobotrya japonica*, exportation, culture.

The loquat tree has been known for many years. It is grown in home orchards as isolated trees and is commonly found in the gardens of the houses. Most of these trees came and still come from plant seeds that produce much, sweet but small fruits and a high amount of seeds (Razeto, 1988).

In Chile this minor fruit tree is found in the central zone of the country between the III and IV regions, between parallels 30° and 36° south latitude, with a total of almost 145 hectares. In the last 15 years the area planted with this species has changed very little (Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of hectares of loquats in Chile in the last 15 years (Odepa, 2002)

Year	Hectares
1987	187.5
1992	198.5
1994	179.5
1996	162.5
1997	143.4
2001	144.2

It has been commercially planted in Chile for around 45 years, which coincide with the introduction of new varieties from California (USA), like Tanaka, Early Red and Golden Nugget, the last one being the most frequently found with almost 79% of the commercial area (Table 2).

Table 2. Total areas cultivated with different loquat cultivars in Chile (Odepa, 2002)

Cultivar	Total hectares	%
Golden Nugget	113.2	78.5
Tanaka	19.2	13.3
Early Red	11.8	8.2

Loquat production in Chile begins with small amounts in September and ends in December, with the highest production taking place in November (Table 3).

Table 3. Total volume of loquat sold at local markets in Santiago de Chile in 1992-2001, kg (Odepa, 2002)

Year	September	October	November	December	Total
1992		8,654	259,390	237,084	505,128
1993		17,292	140,148	39,696	197,136
1994	2,604	44,998	347,028	89,694	484,324
1995	2,700	61,386	170,196	86,652	320,934
1996		8,440	162,432	36,696	197,136
1997	10,830	59,270	120,614	45,972	236,686
1998	3,888	12,350	82,286	7,380	105,904
1999		3,885	78,038	50,276	132,199
2000		5,830	103,608	49,980	159,418
2001		7,150	103,562	47,238	157,950
Mean	5,006	22,926	156,730	69,067	249,682

Loquat has a great acceptance and high price in the local market when cropped in September and October because it is one of the first fruits of the season. Its price falls abruptly in the following two months (November and December) because it has to compete with other fruit that start to come out to the market (Table 4).

Table 4. Mean prices at local markets in Santiago de Chile (real value), 1992-2001, US\$ per kg

Year	September	October	November	December	Year mean
1992		0.90	0.52	0.30	0.57
1993		0.74	0.42	0.38	0.51
1994	0.91	0.66	0.41	0.27	0.56
1995	1.10	0.64	0.46	0.30	0.63
1996		1.04	0.42	0.31	0.59
1997	0.65	0.47	0.40	0.34	0.47
1998	0.69	0.74	0.45	0.39	0.57
1999		0.89	0.45	0.37	0.57
2000		0.65	0.37	0.26	0.43
2001		0.74	0.28	0.21	0.41
Mean	0.84	0.75	0.42	0.30	0.53

Loquat export is not very significant with close to 38,000 kilograms last season (2001), mainly shipped to the east coast of USA (Table 5). The bulk of this export corresponds to the Golden Nugget cv.

Table 5. Number of boxes of loquat exportation in last five years (3 kg box) (Asoexpo, 2002)

Year	USA		Canada	Europe	Total
	East Coast	West Coast			
1997	7,261	0	0	5,163	12,424
1998	6,229	0	0	1,497	7,726
1999	6,831	10	640	50	7,531
2000	12,085	0	2	230	12,317
2001	12,063	365	150	0	12,578

Usually in Chile, the loquat is scion or "T" grafted. For this, the most used rootstock is the loquat itself. However, the Quince A rootstock, which is less used, and gives smaller trees, allows a greater plantation density (5 x 3 m; 4 x 2 m) with yields approximately 18 t/ha by fifth years of plantation (Razeto, 1988). When the loquat is grafted into itself, plantation density is smaller (6 x 6; 7 x 7 m), with yields between 8 and 11 t/ha. Currently the scion is propagated in plastic bags of 6 to 8 l capacity and is planted in orchard in Spring (September or October).

As the loquat tree bears a great amount of fruit, generally the weak flowers and clusters are eliminated. In the rest the top of the penacle is eliminated and between 4 and 7 fruits are left per cluster, depending on the load of the tree. The fruits that set first are the biggest ones.

The crop must be grown very carefully, especially the Golden Nugget cv. is very susceptible to bumps that later may produce damage resulting in a lowered price. Packing is normally done in the same place as grading. The fruit is put in 3 kilograms boxes with one layer per box. In Chile the processing of this fruit is restricted mostly to the production of jellies and preserves.

In our country the loquat is characterized by its sanity from pest and diseases. However, pest that may affect its export is the mealybug [*Pseudococcus calceolariae* (Maskell) and *Pseudococcus longispinus* (Targioni and Tozzetti)]. These insects are found in the calcine part of the fruit which hinders its chemical control (González, 1988).

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