

Indian River

World's Finest Indian River Citrus!



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history

The Indian River Citrus District comprises a narrow strip of land on the eastern seaboard of the State of Florida, stretching 200 miles from the Daytona Beach area to West Palm Beach. In fact, it is so narrow that out of the six counties, which make up the district, St. Lucie County is the only one wholly within its boundaries. There are 21 packinghouses, numerous gift fruit shippers, a number of major citrus sales agencies, and several major citrus processing plants located in the district.

The colorful history of the Indian River Citrus District goes back to 1807, when Captain Douglas Dummitt, sailing south along the Florida East Coast smelled the fragrance of orange trees and was determined to find these trees and to secure some for his, not yet established, homestead. On the East Bank of the Indian River, north of Titusville, Captain Dummitt and his family settled on what is known today as the “north end” of Merritt Island, Florida. Immediately after the cabin was built, and his family safely secured, Captain Dummitt left to find the trees with the fragrance he enjoyed so much. The orange trees that he found and planted at his homestead were to be the first-known citrus grove in what is today the “Indian River Citrus District.” Even now some of these original trees may be found at the original site of the Dummitt house.

From that modest beginning, the Indian River Citrus District began to grow and by the turn of the century, many more groves had been established up and down the Indian River area. Citrus grown in this area was transported by boat to northeastern markets. During this time, it was the fastest and most efficient way to move citrus to those markets, which continue today to be one of the largest for “Indian River” fruit.

During the 1920's, the Indian River name had become so well known that growers of citrus in other areas of the State of Florida began describing their fruit as “Indian River.” Growers in the district became concerned over the misuse of the name and several influential growers, led by the late Will Fee of Fort Pierce, went up and down the area urging growers to join in a conservative action to stop this infringement. In 1930 the Federal Trade Commission issues a “cease and desist” order prohibiting the use of the term “Indian River” on citrus not grown in the Indian River Citrus District.

The Indian River Citrus League was organized in 1931. Originally, it was a rather loose organization sustained largely by the efforts of Will Fee and voluntary contributions collected by him. An official legal definition of the boundaries of the Indian River Citrus District was very difficult to establish. Soil and geological survey



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maps, county boundaries, traditional water sheds, politics, etc. all played a part. Initially, the boundaries were pretty generally accepted to be the true Indian River water shed with the St. Johns River Marsh acting as a buffer zone to the west. The north and south boundaries were as they presently are.

As the value of Indian River Citrus became ever more apparent so were the problems with definitive, legally enforceable boundaries exacerbated. Members of the Legislature could never agree on definitive legal boundaries. Finally, each county in dispute declared itself to be in the Indian River District by special act of the Legislature. These acts were all wiped out in later years and The River Industry was forced to rely on general acceptances, tradition and brand and labeling laws. Finally, by sheer perseverance and steadfastness the break came in the perceived necessity for separating the River from the Interior for USDA regulatory purposes and the economic general good of the entire industry. This did not require legislative action but merely the vote of the growers joined with the secretary of agriculture to make the definitive boundaries legally binding.

In 1948 the Indian River Citrus League reorganized and restructured with a meaning chapter and By-laws designated to accomplish the specific purpose of protecting Indian River Citrus. It currently has in excess of 1,000 grower members who grow commercial citrus on approximately 150,000 acres. Only growers can now be members of the League. Roughly one-third of that acreage is grapefruit with the remaining two-thirds being various varieties of oranges and specialty fruit.

The League is operated financially by a per carton contribution from grower members' fresh fruit shipments. The League's responsibilities have expanded from the original purpose of "protecting and enhancing the Indian River name" to include a responsibility of voicing members' opinions at all industry meetings; to all governmental agencies as well as the Florida Legislature and the Congress in Washington.

BUILT-IN FREEZE PROTECTION

Historically, consumers have found "Indian River" fruit in the market places of the world even though the majority of the State of Florida has suffered freezing temperatures. The reason the "River" has not suffered significant damage from any freeze is due to a number of factors. One of the most important is its proximity of the Gulf Stream. Most people don't realize how far east the heart of the Indian River Citrus District is in comparison with the rest of the eastern seaboard of Florida. For example, if you took the exact coordinates of Jacksonville to Vero Beach, you would find that Vero Beach is over 100 miles further east than the city of Jacksonville, placing it out into the warm confines of the ocean.

Secondly, a cold front has to travel a lot further to get to the Indian River Citrus District and as it moves south it's buffered by all of the rivers, swamps, and lakes in the central region of Florida.



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Third, the Indian River Citrus District is a very flat region, allowing the growers to flood their groves when a freeze is on the way. This process involves bringing water in and pumping it as high in their groves as they can, to the tree trunks if possible. This warm body of water, which is essentially a temporary lake in most groves, will radiate its heat during the course of the night and will raise the grove temperature two to four degrees, which insures another buffer to keep this District's fruit free of any severe damage.

All of these factors combined assist the grower in keeping his fruit in the market place throughout the majority of the year.

WHY IS "INDIAN RIVER" FRUIT THE CREAM OF THE CROP?

As mentioned in the historical article, the Indian River Citrus District was mapped and described because of the soil conditions that prevail on the eastern seaboard of Florida. It is precisely these reasons that make "Indian River" grapefruit the finest in the world today. The Indian River Citrus District is underlaid by the distinctive Anastasia formation, composed of coquina limestone, which the root system of the citrus trees tap for essential minerals and nutrients during their growing cycle.

The District, generally, is extremely flat. This flatness, in concert with a high water table, only two to three feet below the surface of the land, provides the trees with enough moisture to obtain the highest quality of texture, shape and flavor.

Indian River citrus trees, on an average, do not produce as much fruit as trees in other areas of Florida. That is in part due to the high water table and a lack of vertical room for the root system of the tree. Indian River soil is rich in calcium and other minerals that abet citrus groves. The nearness to the salt water of the Atlantic Ocean also has a major bearing on the really exceptional good taste of Indian River citrus, but, most importantly, citrus needs approximately one inch of water per week to bear good citrus. It just so happens that the average annual rainfall over the majority of the Indian River Citrus District is approximately 52 inches per year and this provides natural elements, which, when combined with excellent production skills and improved scientific research, produces very high quality citrus that is thin skinned, has a high sugar content, and a very fine quality that is recognized around the world.

INDIAN RIVER: HOME OF HIGH QUALITY ORANGES

Traditionally, the Indian River Citrus District has been known around the world for its grapefruit but one of the best-kept secrets is the high quality oranges that are grown all along the "River." The same soil and weather conditions that groom our grapefruit also exist for oranges.

"Indian River" oranges, because of their color and high solids, are blended with oranges from other locations around the world to make the premium Florida pack we

A background image showing a lush green citrus grove with trees bearing bright orange fruit. The scene is set against a light, hazy sky.

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see in the market place. Approximately 98% of all oranges in the Indian River District are utilized in processed orange juice. Like grapefruit, the orange trees do not produce as much as they do in other areas of the world but what they do produce is of extremely high quality, yielding a very sweet orange juice.

PRODUCTION AND MARKETS FOR INDIAN RIVER CITRUS

The Indian River Citrus District's premium crop has been, and will continue to be, grapefruit. Currently, the District raises 70% percent of the total grapefruit crop grown in the State of Florida. Three out of every four grapefruit that leave the State of Florida fresh come from this District. Exports continue to be of major importance to the seedless grapefruit picture. Approximately 14 million cartons of "Indian River" fruit were exported during the 2006-2007 season. Once market for the Indian River Citrus District is the traditional northeastern United States. Traditionally, 8 to 10 million cartons have been shipped there from the Indian River. The most important market, in terms of the number of cartons shipped, is the country of Japan. The Indian River Citrus District accounts for over 95 percent of all of the Florida fruit shipped there. Each year approximately 11 million cartons make the voyage across the vast Pacific to the quality-conscious Japanese buyers and consumers. Europe continues to rank third. Here a number of countries import a total of 5 million cartons of Florida grapefruit annually. Historically, 80 percent of this grapefruit comes from the Indian River Citrus District. Other markets such as Eastern Europe and China are known as potential expansion markets for the Indian River grower. Indian River citrus is now shipped to 23 countries making it a global delicacy.

