PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION

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HARVEST HEADLINE - ASPARAGUS

California asparagus has become harder and harder to find. Thousands of acres of asparagus used to cover the Stockton-Brentwood area in soft green spears every spring, but urban sprawl, the cost of growing it, and the availability of imports have stealthily replaced the acreage.

Asparagus, the harbinger of spring, is one vegetable we look forward to each year. The season usually runs from the end of February to mid-June and, even with all the rain, wind, and snow we've recently had, it looks like it will be a year of plenty. Farmers say yields are about average compared to previous years but may get harvested a week or so later than normal.

One local asparagus grower, Dick Swank of Swank Farm out of Hollister, says that customers continue to ask for it and that is why he takes the time to grow it. "I don't make any extra money on it because it's expensive to grow. We grow only about 4 acres." His acreage endured flooding during the unprecedented recent storms, and he had to replant most of his asparagus. He says that the yield will compare well to last year's harvest but "the asparagus may be more expensive as a result of this year's flooding. The quality is still there and I know the customers will be as well." Even with inflation and weather complications, he says he will continue to grow it as long as he can. If you'd like to learn more about Swank Farm's asparagus and how it's grown click here.

Roscoe Zuckerman of Zuckerman Farms in Stockton, relies heavily on direct-to-consumer farmers' markets to sell his product. Local farmers' markets, CSAs, and restaurants make up over half of his business. He says, "It's the only way we have of breaking even. They give us the opportunity to communicate the freshness of a local-grown product that is harvested the day before market, compared to asparagus that has traveled thousands of miles and is a week old before it hits market shelves." He says his asparagus yield is good this year, with not much damage.

Penny of Rose Lane Farm in Knightsen says that her crop is doing fine. "Asparagus loves water, and they got plenty the last couple of months. I grow my asparagus in raised planter boxes, so they are not as prone to flooding – though I still have trouble with gophers!" She doesn't sell fresh asparagus in bunches as other farmers do. "I take my small crop and jar it up and then sell it." She says that the costs of canning jars, sugar, and commercial kitchen rental space have all eaten into her profits. But she said they'll continue to offer it at the farmers' market.

So even with a very wet winter, increasing costs, and cheaper imports, asparagus is coming to your farmers' market! It might be a week or so late, depending on continuing wet weather, but your local farmers are dedicated to growing it for you to enjoy. Hang in there - your favorite spring vegetable is on its way!

TAGS

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