PACIFIC COAST FARMERS' MARKET ASSOCIATION

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HARVEST UPDATE - CHERRIES

Cherries Due at Market in Early May

Growing cherries requires a lot of patience, constant vigilance, and hard work to bring in a successful and abundant crop to market. The work of pruning, watering, fertilizing, and pruning goes on through the entire year for a harvest that takes daily picking for only two or three short months. This year the trees received more than enough chill hours and lots of precipitation because of the rain and lower temperatures we had from December through March.

This year's cherry season seems to be off to a good start, according to many of the local farmers we spoke to. Even with the winter's wind and rain, crop totals look to be average or slightly above average, Last year's January and February left a lower-than-average harvest because of the drought. It also looks like the crop will be harvested a week or so later than last year.

Jilma Lujan, the owner of Lujan Farms from Hughson in the Central Valley, says their cherry yield will turn out to be "average, compared to other years. Our cherries should arrive around the first week in May." In fact, she says their peaches may arrive before the cherries!

Francisco Resendiz of Resendiz Farms, who farms in Hughson as well, says he's thinking May 10th. He explained, "Everything is a week to 10 days behind pretty much everywhere due to the weather this

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Farmer Mike Billigmeier, B&B Farm in Linden, is looking forward to stone fruit season, of which cherries are a part. Along with his peaches, apricots, and nectarines, he grows Coral, Brooks, and Bing cherries, and a new Royal Hazel variety. Mike says, "It looks like we're going to have a good year, though it's hard to judge what the harvest will be like compared to last year during the drought."

He says they should be harvesting the first week or so of May, which is about two to three weeks later than during the last few years of drought. Their orchards do not appear to have had much damage due to the wind and rain of this winter, but it's taking longer for the fruit to set and develop. The first cherry varieties to appear at your farmers' market will be the early Corals and Brooks, followed by other varieties. Other cherry farmers say much the same as Billigmeier. The cherries will arrive a couple of weeks later with an average yield.

Guy Allard, the owner of Allard Farms in Westley, says, "The cherries are setting up well and we think that there should be enough groundwater for summer irrigation." Among the varieties that he thinks will be ready by the first week in May are the Champagne, Coral, and Brooks.

Further south in Morgan Hill, Chris Borello of Borello Farms says the cold weather has been great for their trees and the rain provided enough water throughout the winter. "All but one of our orchards fared well with the rain since they have good drainage. But one of our orchards along the creek flooded out and caused significant damage to the irrigation system and likely a large percentage of the trees will die because they were underwater for an extended period of time." Borello says the crop looks very promising and they anticipate being at the markets with cherries in early May.

Harvesting healthy crops depends on many factors, from good soil and good care, to good rain and sunshine. It seems that our local cherry farmers are coming through another season, relatively unscathed. Stop by your farmers' market this May and June and enjoy some of California's best sweet cherries.

TAGS

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