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## **Hood River Cherry Co. describes ideal bloom conditions for new cherry crop**

May 20, 2020

Hood River Cherry Co. co-owner Brad Fowler, who with his wife Kathryn (Katy) Klein founded the company in the early 1990s, described this year's bloom conditions as ideal and said pre-season interest has been strong.

Acknowledging 2020's extraordinary events, Fowler said the company's top priority is providing a safe and healthy product. He added that Mother Nature has cooperated in the months leading up to HRCC's July start.

"Even though Hood River Cherry Co. is completely focused on how we can pack this crop of cherries safely for our customers and our employees, our same long-term customers seem to be looking forward to this crop more than ever," Fowler said. "Maybe we all need this crop and Mother Nature's assurance that our world will be all right."

Now in its 28th year, HRCC has adhered to those founding principles of quality, safety and stewardship since Fowler and Klein planted their first cherry tree in 1993, the day their youngest son was born. Fowler said in early May that indications are for this year's new crop to closely match 2019s.

"So far, bloom conditions have been ideal," he said. "The bees have had lots of cooler calm days to do their work." HRCC is a high-elevation producer, so its cherries ripen later. "We don't begin shipping until about July 15," Fowler said.

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While conditions had been excellent going into May, Fowler said there remain some unknowns ahead.

“Labor and maintaining a safe environment for that labor is the biggest issue this season,” Fowler said. “To be honest, we really don’t know how this harvest season will unfold. Conditions and regulations are changing daily. Costs will go up, and it will be unavoidable that cherries will be more expensive this year. There is simply no way that can be avoided.”

He noted that Rainiers are one of the first varieties picked, “followed by Bing and then the queen of high elevation cherries, the Lapin.” Next are Regina and then Skeena, with the last variety of the season, the Sweetheart, picked in late August.

Fowler said production “increases slightly every year as our younger blocks mature and produce more cherries.”

Although there is that slight increase as blocks mature, Fowler said, “Hood River Cherry Cos. market is premium cherries. That’s what we do, and that’s all we do. All farmers strive to produce the biggest crop they can, but for us it’s not the way. We work hard to limit our crop size to no more than five to six tons per acre because that is the crop load that allows the tree to grow those really big and sweet cherries. There simply is no other way.”

He added, “Even though Mother Nature makes the final call, for us, we hope this crop is identical to 2019.”

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