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Good quality, ideal spread define Northwest cherry season

By

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Most people are looking for 2021 to be an improvement on 2020, and Northwest cherry growers are no different. “Last year’s high quality was savored by consumers, but demand massively exceeded supply for most of the summer,” said James Michael vice president of marketing, North America for Northwest Cherry Growers. “Fortunately, the first round of the Northwest crop estimates is complete, and it appears that there are a few more boxes on the trees.” With a round one crop estimate of 23,792,000 cartons, it won’t be an overly large crop, but the spread that most field staff are seeing in the growing districts and the great cell division indicated so far speak to a nice, long season of dark, sweet cherries.

“Several growers I spoke with were amazed at the large-sizing on the Chelan-variety cherries so far,” noted Michael. “That should help pull consumers into the Northwest as our bags start to appear on the shelves.” Retailers will see a transition over the first few weeks of June as California fades out and the Northwest begins. Some of the earliest districts in Washington state are expected to begin harvest in the final days of May, with most expecting to begin shipping between June 3-5.

July should have strong volume and August should have enough cherry volume to run ads this season. Supplies are projected to begin running low toward the end of August.

For the past few years, growers have had to address cold damage in the orchards but not many Spring frosts. However, the drops in daily temperatures that the state experienced in April were quick and severe enough to shave off portions of some orchards and totaled a few. “Fortunately, most of our buds were outside of the danger zone,” said Michael, “but perimeter trees and earlier orchards in colder spots lost some crop potential.”

The Northwest Cherry Commission has noted that while cherry volume during the first two weeks in June may grow more slowly due to weather-impacted orchards, by the end of June shipping volumes should exceed 2020. So far, total supplies in late June and for the Independence Day holiday appear promising.

“High winds during pollination also created challenges for a few growing areas,” said Michael, explaining that while the bees still found plenty of time to fly, the pollen appears to have been affected by the wind. Fruit sets following bee activity in some areas aren’t what growers had been expecting.

According to the NW Cherry Commission, digital promotions remain an important part of reaching the massive growth in online shopping. Data suggests that online shoppers were two times more likely to be weekly cherry buyers and four times more likely to purchase multiple bags of cherries. Regardless of whether consumers are shopping in stores or online, the focus seems to be on

healthier eating. In fact, the commission' discovered that the health benefits of cherries influenced more than 59 percent of surveyed buyers when they made their purchase.

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