



- Advertisement -

Slow build to a special season for Northwest cherries

By

Kyle Eberth, Northwest editor

May 24, 2022

The Northwest cherry season has been a test of patience for growers and shippers, as Mother Nature has had a chilling effect this spring. Low temperatures have been recorded across all cherry-growing regions with some districts reporting lower than 30 degrees Fahrenheit. Wenatchee, WA, tied a 1986 record of 26 degrees for April and a record-setting 16 inches of snowfall for April, obliterating the previous record of half an inch.

[Northwest Cherries](#), based in Yakima, WA, delayed releasing its round one crop report as orchard survey teams had yet to compile usable data for their initial crop projection — pushing its release back a week. “Unfortunately, the ultra-cool spring weather across the Northwest has our estimators waiting for the little green cherries to show themselves,” said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherries.

Industry experts agreed that April was too early for an accurate assessment of how the overnight lows may affect the cherry crop. “We know it will have some effect on cherries because areas that harvest in the June timing were in bloom during this time and pollination conditions were not ideal,” said Brianna Shales, marketing director for Stemilt Growers.

While frost damage is problematic on its own, the cool temperatures have the added effect of delaying fruit development and slowing bloom pollination. Simply put, bees and trees have ideal operating conditions — when it’s too cold nobody wants to work. The mid-April cold streak delayed the cherry “drop” period, where the fruit must finish splitting through their shucks.

“It seems we go a few years without a major frost event that covers the whole state and everyone forgets,” said Dan Davis, director of business development for Starr Ranch Growers. “This is why we have wind machines and under-tree and over-tree watering systems deployed as needed.”

Even with an unusually cool spring, NW Cherries reported some nice fruit developing in early districts and updated its harvest estimate to the first week of June. The key, said, James Michael, vice president of Northwest Cherries, “is not all growing regions are the same — bloom was well underway in many regions [before the cold hit] and there is every reason to believe that there will be windows of the season where volume will allow for promotions.”

Current projections show an elongated cherry season with peaks in volume coming early and late. “The crop is very spread out, making for more shipping days this season,” said Shales.

When the round one crop report was released, NW Cherries estimated 150,000 tons of cherries or 15 million 20-pound boxes for the 2022 season. “Though not as large as some recent seasons, the 2022 crop is still a promotable cherry crop and too valuable to be re-allocated to a hidden away display,” said Thurlby. Citing a 2009 Northwest Cherry Growers study, Thurlby said, “that even in

recessionary times, fresh sweet cherries from the Northwest were the No. 1 dollar-per-square-foot item in the summer produce department.”

He added, “Previous reports conveyed cherries were the only summer fruit shown to have a strong statistical correlation between an increase of shelf space and an increase in sales dollars.”

While much of the talk around NW cherries has been about the weather, Davis said the team at Starr Ranch is excited for the fast pace that accompanies cherry season. “Cherries are a fun time of year and we look forward to the dialog with all of our core partners, no matter the challenge presented to us — that’s the game we’re in.”

While volume will be down, price optimization is top of mind as is finding the right balance to reward growers and encourage shoppers to grab that extra bag. NW cherries will have opportunities for promotion and should be front and center in retailer storefront.

“Cherries are a treat after all,” said Shales. “If the quality is strong and the consumer experience is great, cherries will continue to be sought after by shoppers — delighting is our plan and promise here at Stemilt.”

Warmer days are ahead, NW cherry harvest is coming and retailers should expect consistent high demand from consumers who understand cherries are a healthy, sweet treat, that are best enjoyed fresh.

[Kyle Eberth](#)

About Kyle Eberth |



Kyle Eberth is new to the produce industry, but has grown up around it, in proclaimed "Apple Capitol of the World," Wenatchee, WA. For the past 14-years he has worked in the non-profit sector with an emphasis on brand storytelling, community engagement, and donor relationships.

Kyle graduated from Whitworth University (Spokane, WA) in 2007. He and wife Kelsey were married shortly thereafter, when they moved to Wenatchee to launch their careers. Kyle is "Dad" to Brooklyn and Hudson, together the Eberths enjoy skiing, biking, their family and friends, and playing together in the beautiful place they get to live.

[Print](#)