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**Moon Cherries extend Stemilt's long summer season**

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By

Kyle Eberth, Northwest editor

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[Stemilt Growers'](#) high elevation cherry orchards provide the vertically integrated grower-shipper with one of the longest cherry seasons in the United States. Headquartered in Wenatchee, WA, the surrounding foothills play host to hikers, bikers, and migrating elk. They also are home to Moon Cherries, grown at 2,640 feet above sea level at Stemilt's Amigos Orchard operated by Kyle Mathison.

The orchard's high elevation means its trees are kept in cooler temperatures throughout the hot Central Washington summer months, setting up Stemilt for an August harvest when most growers are wrapping up their season.

The company is excited to celebrate the 10th anniversary of their A Half Mile Closer to the Moon™ cherries. Brianna Shales, marketing director at Stemilt said, "they are a fantastic finale to the cherry season — a late bloom there this year may give us cherries for Labor Day. We are continuing to plant high elevation cherries that harvest in the late August timeframe — this allows for season extension and more volume to sell during the final weeks of cherry season."

The Northwest has experienced an unusually cool spring this year, across all of its cherry-growing regions, leaving growers and shippers with plenty of questions still to be answered. "The first estimate out of the northwest was delayed because of the cool weather during bloom and how challenging that made it for the industry to estimate the crop, especially in the June timeframe," said Shales. "We know the industry's first estimate came out at 15 million boxes. The crop is very spread out, making for more shipping days this season. At Stemilt, we will be down 30 percent in volume from last year."

Shales said that it's a very unique year, "We know that no two cherry seasons are alike and believe that the lighter crop in the Northwest will lead to good cherry quality and large sizing. Taste and quality are what truly drives our goal of delighting consumers so that we continue to increase consumer demand for more cherries."

July will be the month of the largest cherry volumes from Stemilt and the industry. August is a key time for Stemilt and its Moon cherries.

"The Moon cherry crop is still in bloom, but we have optimism around our late cherry program, especially since it's celebrating its 10th anniversary. We know how important cherries are to the produce department's success in the summer months and will be working with our retail partners to take advantage of every opportunity they can to position cherries in stores and drive sales."

A part of those summer promotions is Stemilt's growing commodity of organic cherries, under their Artisan Organics™ label. "Organic cherries are a challenging crop to grow," said Shales, "but we do

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lead the industry in them — roughly 7 percent of our cherries are grown, certified organic.”

As for packaging, Shales sees a developing trend within the cherry sector. “Top seal packaging continues to appear more in the marketplace,” said Shales. The advantage being it uses less plastic than a clamshell and still allows for great stem quality and visibility of the fruit.

While Cherries are always a premium-priced summer commodity, where that price will land is still to be determined, as growers and shippers await crop size and the added factors surrounding logistics. Shales affirmed Stemilt’s commitment to supporting its partners throughout the season. “We know promotions are key for retailers on cherries to drive traffic and we will work with each one to make the best plan to promote cherries — with both inflation and crop size in mind.”

Regardless of price, Shales was quick to reiterate, “Cherries are a treat after all — 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.”

On the subject of delighting, Stemilt Growers became the first apple, pear, and cherry company to achieve EFI certification on its entire operational footprint.

“EFI is an important certification to us, but it’s the ongoing work of our EFI leadership teams at both the orchards and warehouses that will make an impact at Stemilt through their work to bring continuous improvement projects into our business,” said Shales.

Shales said that Stemilt’s emphasis on EFI is a byproduct of the company’s commitment to excellence in all facets of operation. “EFI validates that small changes throughout our operations will ensure Stemilt is a safe and great place to work,” she said.

As an industry leader, Stemilt is set on ensuring a long and delightful cherry season.

[Kyle Eberth](#)

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## 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.

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