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Sage Fruit sees growth and opportunity in abundance this apple season

By

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Sage Fruit Growers, based in Yakima, WA, farm several thousand acres of orchards throughout central and eastern Washington. While specializing in pears and cherries, the bulk of Sage's manifest is Washington apples. "By using the most efficient growing methods available, we are able to deliver high quality products to our customers year-round," said Kaci Komstadius, vice president of marketing at Sage Fruit.

Washington state produces more apples than any other state in the country. The first orchard in the state was planted in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains in the 1820s, and today Washington boasts over 175,000 acres (and still growing) of apple orchards. "The rich, volcanic soil, arid climate and our advanced growing techniques allow this region to excel in apple production," said Komstadius.

Located in the heart of the Pacific Northwest, Sage Fruit's family of growers have a long and storied history in Washington tree fruit; many of whom are third and fourth generation growers.

While last year's apple crop was down roughly 20 percent over the 2021 season, Sage Fruit notes the 2023 outlook is up in volume and quality. Komstadius said, "The apple industry will see a 30 percent increase in volume this season over last." Those same positive numbers bear true in Sage's manifest forecast, and then some.

Sage is looking forward to an excellent apple season, even with a late bloom due to cooler pre-seasonal temperatures across the Pacific Northwest. Komstadius said, "The growing conditions have been ideal for producing good size, excellent color, and a delicious flavor profile." The current industry estimate places Washington apple volume around 134 million boxes. Sage will see expanded volume across all varieties, "which will allow us to better serve our customer base year-round," said Komstadius.

Sage's new crop kicked off in early August with Galas and will continue through mid-November ending with Pink Lady. Komstadius added, "With the advancement in technology and controlled atmosphere storage, all seasons are apple season, as we're able to carry our core varieties until the new crop 2024."

The demand for organic produce has remained strong. As such, Sage has continued to grow its organic program. Komstadius said, "This season, we will see a significant increase in our overall organic volume over last season," noting its largest organic growth in varieties like Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji and Granny Smith.

Volume isn't the only thing growing, as Komstadius noted several new faces to the Sage Fruit

organization over the summer. Stephanie Herron joined as a sales representative and Cindy Alarcon joined the team in a sales manager role. Additionally, Sage has welcomed Noah Croft in the business development manager position and Brad Hansman as a category analyst.

Komstadius emphasized Sage Fruit's consistent supply and quality across conventional and organic varieties, as a note of distinction and separation for the company. Similarly, the group's attention to customer service serves as the backbone of Sage's organizational advantage. "With market representatives across the country, our retail partners will have no trouble building a customized program to best suit their needs," said Komstadius.

This season Sage Fruit will again partner with Chelan Fruit. They join Sage's family of grower-packer-shippers to enhance the marketing, sales and distribution of Washington-grown tree fruit.

Chelan Fruit brings with it nearly 3,000 acres of farming operation, complete with packing and cold storage facilities. The additional acreage spans the northern growing region of Washington state, providing Sage Fruit with greater geographical diversification. Komstadius said, "Partnering with Chelan Fruit has increased our company's ability to supply our customers with the best tasting, highest quality tree fruit Washington State has to offer."

Sage Fruit offers top-selling varieties like Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji, Granny Smith, and Pink Lady, while they continue to increase popularity of branded varieties like Cosmic Crisp and SugarBee. "We look forward to another great season selling SugarBee apples which are available to our retail and wholesale partners, in both conventional and organic. The SugarBee is an outstanding apple that consumers have come to know and love," said Steve Clement, CEO of Sage Fruit Co.

SugarBee harvest begins in early-to-mid-October, and will be offered in several pack options. This customization gives Sage the ability to build unique programs utilizing marketing and merchandising techniques designed to drive sales at retail. Komstadius said, "By having both Conventional and Organic SugarBee apples this crop season, we will be able to keep our retail customers and consumers happy with our ability to supply both product lines."

On the retail front, Komstadius stressed the need for high visibility graphic and clean packaging. Additionally, "If the space permits, keeping apples refrigerated is ideal, as they retain more moisture, hold their shape, and maintain their crisp texture." Providing the consumer with the best eating experience possible to ensure repeat purchases.

Sage partners with retailers in a myriad of ways to maximize product movement, with in-store displays that grab the consumers' attention, or offering point-of-sale bins and marketing materials to help create the displays, along with providing information about the product flavor, availability, best uses, or comparison guides, along with in-store or digital promotions.

"Though consumers are currently facing many economic challenges, apple sales have been steady across all varieties this season," said Komstadius. Additionally she noted, during these inflationary times, apples continue to be a healthy, affordable option for people.

For the third year in a row, Sage Fruit has teamed up with the National Breast Cancer Foundation for the month of October. "We have designed a five-pound Breast Cancer Awareness poly bag that will be available for retail," said Komstadius. Shipping late September through late October, one dollar of every case purchased will be donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation on behalf of the purchasing party.

[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.

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