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Stemilt Growers hyping 5 River Islands cherries from California

By

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For 60 years, Stemilt Growers has grown, packed and marketed its “world famous fruit,” including fresh apples, pears, cherries, stone fruits and organic tree fruits.

“We’ve been long known for our cherries,” said Brianna Shales, marketing director for the Wenatchee, WA-based company. “Stemilt’s cherry season allows a continuous supply from the beginning of the season in May, to the end, usually in late August — though it will be early August this year. Because cherries are a volatile crop, we are particular about freshness, flavor and quality to bring consumers a great tasting piece of fruit all season long.”

Stemilt has been among the nation’s cherry leaders for more than a decade, a credit to leadership that hasn’t wavered over the years.

“Stemilt accounts for more than 15 percent of total Northwest cherry volume on a daily basis in North America,” Shales said. “During certain parts of the season, it is much higher at about 80 percent of shipments. One part of our offerings that has evolved is an increase in organic cherries, Rainier cherries and our participation in the ultra-exclusive Skylar Rae cherry program. We also continue to extend our season by growing higher elevation cherries.”

Cherries are a delicate fruit and require a special level of care throughout the packing process. For that reason, the company’s goal is to put cherry freshness back into the hands of retailers and consumers with a strategic cold chain.

“This cold chain starts as soon as we pick cherries from the tree, to when they ship in refrigerated trucks,” Shales said. “We strive to pick, pack and ship cherries within a 24 to 48 hour window to maximize freshness. If we can consistently deliver a quality product, this can drive purchases since cherries are mostly bought on impulse. Having the right varieties, farming practices, and technology is what helps us pick, size, and sort cherries with accuracy so we can help the retailer win with freshness.”

The California cherry season has already begun, and Washington is also poised to start in early June so there will only be a slight overlap this year which will provide good volume for the Fourth of July.

“The only real downside is we won’t have a lot of late season cherries because of winter damage, and we’ll see cherry volume from the Northwest dip down after July,” Shales said. “That means promote cherries when you can, early and often, to make up those dollars you won’t make on the back end of the crop. Every cherry year is different, so we don’t know for sure what’s to come, but this is what we’re planning for.”

Stemilt partners with top retailers in North America and also export cherries to key markets including Australia, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

“The secret between buyer and grower relationships is to keep close communication because the crop can change quickly,” Shales said. “The best results will happen when retailers can adapt with the crop. Our mission is to help retailers be successful during these times.”

Stemilt is looking forward to sharing its 5 River Islands cherries from California’s unique Delta region as some of the first dark sweet cherries of the season. The cherries will be available in late May-early June for about three weeks.

“These cherries are big, deep red, crispy, and have incredibly complex sweet and tangy flavors,” Shales said. “In July, Kyle’s Pick cherries will be available for retailers to offer consumers something special. Stemilt reserves its biggest and best premium cherries to promise firm, sweet, juicy fruit inside with that branded pack.”

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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