

Apples to flow between U.S., China

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — China will be allowed to export apples to the United States beginning May 26 and the U.S. will be allowed to export all varieties of apples to China “on or around May 26,” according to Northwest Fruit Exporters in Yakima.

The USDA has announced those developments, said Fred Scarlett, NFE manager.

“I think it will be a valuable market for the industry,” he said.

A reciprocal agreement between the two nations was an-

nounced on Jan. 26. Paperwork and protocol to make it happen is just wrapping up.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture cannot inspect any shipments for China until it receives USDA approval and importers still need to get permits, Scarlett said.

Washington apple shippers have been working for years to gain full varietal access to China and China has been working for years to sell its Fuji apples in the U.S. Washington shippers dropped their opposition to Chinese access into the U.S. a few years ago in hopes it would open

the door to selling more U.S. apples to China.

Red and Golden Delicious apples from Washington, Oregon and Idaho were allowed into China in 1993. They were banned from August 2012 to Oct. 31, 2014, after disease was found in some shipments.

When shipments resumed Nov. 1, they were immediately hobbled by work slowdowns at U.S. ports.

Nonetheless, close to 1 million 40-pound boxes of Washington Red Delicious have been shipped into China since then, Scarlett said.

Red Delicious is the main variety left in abundance to be shipped this season. Shippers and the Washington Apple Commission have said full access will be more helpful after this fall’s harvest.

Scarlett said he does not know when or where the Chinese are planning their first exports to the U.S.

The combined China-Hong Kong market peaked at 3 million boxes in 2010-2011. The Apple Commission and other industry officials are hopeful China will become a major market of 10 million boxes annually in a few years.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Ninfa Duarte loads a tray of Red Delicious apples into a box for shipment at McDougall & Sons Inc., Wenatchee, Wash., on April 9. Almost 1 million boxes of Red Delicious have been shipped to China this season and other varieties are now being allowed.

Calif. cherries wrap up light

5.7 million boxes expected in early season

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — California will wrap up its early cherry season about the end of May, dovetailing nicely with Washington’s crop and likely short of its estimate.

That’s what Tate Mathison, sales director at Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, told growers at the Five State Cherry Commission meeting in Richland, May 20.

Mathison was just back from the company’s subsidiary in Stockton, Chinchiole Stemilt California.

“As of yesterday, California was just under 3.5 million (18-pound) boxes and 260,000 were shipped yesterday which was a good shipping day,” he said.

The California Cherry Advisory Board in Sacramento estimated the crop at 5.7 million boxes, down from an 8.5-million-box norm, due to lack of winter chill and too much heat during pollination.

Harvest started April 11 near Bakersfield, beating the most recent early record of April 14, 2005. Harvest is now centered in Bings in the Stockton, Lodi and Delta areas.

California quality is the best in years, said Rob Stewart, manager, Stadelman Fruit, Zillah, Wash. That helps Washington by setting a good experience with consumers, said Mike Taylor, Stemilt vice president of sales and marketing.

Half the Bings were treated with a dormant breaking agent to push fruit early, Mathison said.

“We may have five or six good shipping days left in the state,” he said. “I think they will pick short of the estimate. It will be a struggle to get to 5 million.”



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Cherries are a ways out from harvest at Ruiz Orchard east of Sunnyside, Wash., on May 20. Cherries were riper in the Tri-Cities and

Vineyard adds new dimension to Iverson Family Farms

By JAN JACKSON
For the Capital Press

WOODBURN, Ore. — The Iverson family, well known producers of corn, grass seed, wheat, pumpkins, green beans and an annual tulip festival, are now growing grapes and selling wine.

The wine from the six acres of grapes they planted six years ago has been so well received they are converting another two to four acres next year.

Ken Iverson, who is managing the vineyard, credits his son John with the idea.

“The family has a policy that for a grandchild to come back and be part of the farm he must graduate from college and work for someone else for two years,” Ken said. “John did that, and after two years at Oregon Vineyard Supply, he is now the first third-generation member of the Iverson family team. It was his idea that we plant the grapes. The family talked it over, decided to take out some wheat and grass seed fields and here we are.”

They chose the white Spanish grape Albarino, a Moscato table grape, a Pinot Noir and the hybrid French wine grape Marechal Foch.

“We were thinking more about selling grapes when we started, but decided that since we already had the infrastructure and scheduled events, it would be a good idea to add our own wine,” Iverson said.

Laura Lacy, who also manages the family’s four-acre formal gardens (and is marrying into the family in June), is handling sales and marketing and the tasting room.

“It has been a labor of love. Together, Ken and I took as many classes as we could at Chemeketa’s Northwest Wine Studies

Center in West Salem and together with his brother Nels, we are now putting the tasting room together.”

To carry out the farm theme, Nels fashioned bar stools out of old tractor seats that sit up to a highly polished bar made from a beam he salvaged 25 years ago from an old building.

“We held wine tastings in the tulip field on weekends during this year’s festival and the response and sales exceeded our expectations. Our slightly pink sparkling blush Moscato old out in a month and we won’t have more until next spring,” she said. “And we’ve also sold out of both the Pinot Noir and the Marechal Foch. Sean Driggers, from Pudding River Wine Cellars in Pratum, is coming up with a Marechal Foch Port for us and we have already pre-sold cases of that.”

The newly designated tasting room, which opened on Memorial Day Weekend, is located in the complex of buildings that also houses the Wooden Shoe offices and gift shop. Next to the formal gardens, the picturesque setting will give wine tasters a view of the vineyards, Mount Hood, tulips and daffodils in the spring.

Iverson family principal Barbara Iverson is enthusiastic about the new venture.

“It was time for us to do something new and the new wines have been a good choice,” she said. “And, there is lot more to be said for wine tasting events than those that feature wheat or grass seed.”

The Wooden Shoe Vineyard tasting room is open Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. March through December and families are welcome.

For more information, visit www.woodenshoe.com

Early crop gives NW cherry growers high hopes

Record June sales volume foreseen

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — With an early but lighter crop, Pacific Northwest cherry growers anticipate a second year of record June volume and excellent Fourth of July sales.

The 2015 crop is estimated at 19.7 million, 20-pound boxes by the Five State Cherry Commission that met at the Red Lion Hanford House Hotel in Richland. The forecast is down 15 percent from a record 23.2 million boxes last year.

The commission and Northwest Cherry Growers in Yakima represent cherry growers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Utah.

A rising gross domestic product, continuing low interest rates, no gasoline price spike and strong Easter consumer spending all point toward good cherry

sales this season, said B.J. Thurlby, Northwest Cherry Growers president.

The region experienced the earliest bloom on record. Harvest is expected to start about May 22 in the Tri-Cities and Mattawa. A record 10.1 million boxes were shipped last June, and shipments may hit 11 million this June.

“An early crop usually has good pricing pull through,” said West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, the nation’s largest sweet cherry producer.

“It will be a big momentum crop. The month of June will be one for the records but overall tonnage is down,” Mathison said.

“It’s a blessing to be early,” said Mike Taylor, Stemilt’s vice president of sales and marketing.

Mathison and others spoke of more “spurs and doubles,” defect fruit that will reduce packouts. There’s also been some early rain damage.

“Last year, there wasn’t

a whole lot of rain. That’s not normal and it’s unlikely to happen two years in a row,” said Doug Pauly, operations manager of Northern Fruit Co., East Wenatchee.

Defects and the prospect of more rain and picker shortages led Wenatchee District growers to estimate their crop at 91,000 tons, down from 102,085 last year but up from the 89,308 ton three-year average. The Wenatchee District is everything north of Interstate 90.

The Yakima District, everything south of Interstate 90, was estimated at 76,500 tons, down from 83,883 last year and up from the 70,200 three-year average.

“Chelans overall are lighter across the state and the Bing crop also is less. Packouts will be lower because of doubles and sutures,” said Mark Roy, vice president of Roy Farms, Moxee.

Washington makes up 85 percent of the PNW crop.

Damage to cherry trees


from last November’s freeze has taken a toll on the Oregon crop, said Megan Thompson, chairwoman of the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission.

“We have trees that look good, trees that are dead and everything in between. Sweetheart and Regina probably took it the worst,” she said.

Oregon growers estimated their tonnage at 22,000 for The Dalles, down from 31,453 last year and down from a 27,833 three-year average. Hood River is 5,500 tons, down from 7,564 and 6,345. Milton-Freewater is 450, down from 1,229 and 1,681. The Willamette Valley is steady at 100.

Sally Symms, of Symms Fruit Ranch in Caldwell, Idaho, said she hasn’t seen any freeze damage and that fruit will come in the second week of June at a level similar to last year. Idaho is estimated at 1,100 tons, close to its three-year average of 926.

Montana is estimated at 700 tons and Utah at 200.



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