



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Ivan Silva picks Rainier cherries in Mike Prey's orchard in Orondo, Wash., on June 18. Harvest peaked in June but will continue until mid-August.

Compressed crop squeezes cherry prices

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Pacific Northwest cherry growers set another record for the most cherries harvested in June and are headed toward an early or mid-August finish of what likely will turn out to be an 18.8-million-box crop.

That's down a bit from the 19.7-million-box forecast in May and the record of 23.2 million, 20-pound boxes in 2014. As of July 12, 17.5 million boxes had been shipped so far this season.

The crop was too compressed, with supply coming from many areas at one time, said Roger Pepperl, marketing director of Stemilt Growers LLC in Wenatchee.

"Selling 12 weeks of season in eight weeks this year wasn't ideal for anyone, retailer or grower," Pepperl said. Stemilt will finish shipping in three weeks, he said.

The season started early with 500,000 boxes harvested in May and reached a 12.5 million record in June, said James Michael, domestic promotions director of Northwest Cherry Growers, the industry's promotional arm in Yakima.

In several recent years, cool spring weather pushed more harvest from June to July and August. But a warmer spring last year brought a record 10.1 million boxes in June. This year's warm spring brought an even earlier season.

Daily shipments from packers peaked at 595,000 boxes on June 25 compared with 655,000 on July 11, 2014, Michael said. Last year, there was a 30-day streak averaging 500,000 boxes per day, he said. This year, there were 11 days, from June 15 to 26, of half-a-million boxes per day or greater, he said.

The crop was early and growers pushed to harvest after hot weather around June 8 and knowing more hot weather

was coming, he said. They managed to get most low-elevation fruit harvested before triple-digit temperatures hit again, he said.

Demand outstripped supply for Fourth of July sales, Michael said.

"We had one of the best Fourth of Julys ever in advertising and promotions but we could have had more consistent supply leading up to it," he said.

Bud Riker, a Wenatchee Heights grower, said promotions didn't match the crop and that buyers were not prepared for early fruit. Late June and early July heat damaged quality and along with oversupply from Okanogan County caused prices to fall by two-thirds to where no one could make money, Riker said.

"Many warehouses were on hold because they couldn't sell fruit and the only option was processors," he said.

Tree Top Inc., Excel Fruit Brokerage and another processor took all the fruit they could at 55 cents a pound, which was breakeven or a loss for growers, Riker said.

Fresh market whole prices have been \$10 to \$20 per box when they should be \$30 to \$40, but hopefully prices will improve on the last of the late varieties, Riker said.

Growers dealt with rain and lack of labor early in the season, then labor improved and heat became an issue, Michael said. There was also some hail, but there have been worse seasons, he said.

Heat, rain and hail were not catastrophic but reduced the crop about 10 percent, Michael said.

"High heat increases doubles (a defect of two cherries grown together) the next season. We saw that this year from last year," he said.

Harvest is now centered in the hills above Wenatchee, Brewster and Hood River and in Montana, he said.

Wildlife managers report on campaign to deter wolf attacks

Update coincides with season's first depredations of livestock

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has collared wolves, hired range riders and signed agreements with ranchers to prevent wolf depredations, according to a department report, whose release was upstaged by the killing of two cows in northeast Washington.

WDFW's update on its deterrence activities was made public Friday, the same day WDFW investigators concluded wolves from the Dirty Shirt pack had killed two adult cows on a U.S. Forest Service grazing allotment in Stevens County.

The cows, in a herd of 83 cow-calf pairs, are the first livestock confirmed killed by wolves in Washington this year and the first since at least 26 sheep were killed last year by the Huckleberry pack, also in Stevens County.

WDFW carnivore section manager Donny Martorello said the department is using "time-tested" methods to prevent such depredations, but can't quantify how successful they are.

"It's not something we can

directly measure. We know these are good measures to be doing," he said.

Until Friday, the Dirty Shirt pack, like most of the state's 16 wolf packs, had never been known to kill livestock, according to WDFW.

The pack was first documented in 2013 in the Chewelah area and had six members as of April, including an adult female wearing a radio-tracking collar.

"You never know where the conflicts might occur," Martorello said. "Most of the time, there's peace in the valley."

The rancher has moved the herd to a lower elevation, and WDFW has had two range riders in the area since Friday in an effort to haze wolves and stop more depredations. The calves paired with the two cows that were killed have been accounted for, Martorello said.

Stevens County Cattlemen's Association President Justin Hedrick said Monday he doubted non-lethal measures will stop more depredations. "None of it has worked to date," he said.

Kettle Range Conservation Group Executive Director Tim Coleman said he believes wolf

attacks can be prevented by non-lethal means. "Wolves are opportunistic. They take whatever they can. You want to take that opportunity away from killing anymore cows. Hopefully that solves the problem."

The deterrence update includes new information on the size and location of 15 wolf packs. The report does not cover the Whitestone pack, which is managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

For the current grazing season, WDFW reported it has 41 agreements, up from 33 a year ago, with ranchers to share the costs of non-lethal protection measures, such as range riders, guard dogs, electrified fences and fladry, which are ribbons that flap in the wind. WDFW estimates it will spend more than \$300,000.

"In general, we've gotten a positive reaction. We're talking with more producers in the state all the time," Martorello said. "For a few producers, signing an official contract with the state is not something they want to do."

The producer who lost cows to the Dirty Shirt pack

did not have an agreement with WDFW. Wildlife officials say they are discussing an agreement with him now and providing daily updates on the pack's movements. He has not been identified by the department.

WDFW has contracted with five range riders, up from three a year ago, and has 11 people assigned in areas with wolf packs to resolve conflicts between wildlife and landowners.

The department reports it has captured and fitted 11 wolves with radio collars in the past year and now has collars on 14 wolves in 10 packs. The collars enable wildlife managers to track packs to document breeding pairs, the key measurement of success for the state's wolf recovery plan.

WDFW reports it has had no reports of depredations by the Huckleberry pack since last year. Although WDFW confirmed 26 sheep depredations, rancher Dave Dashiell reported losing about 300 sheep.

"I think the proactive strategies we've pursued over the past year have put us on the right path and reinforced the importance of working with livestock producers to minimize conflicts with wolves," WDFW Director Jim Unsworth said in a written statement.

USDA official: Women farmers have credibility

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SILVERTON, Ore. — Since women make most food-buying decisions for U.S. families, female farmers can establish strong credibility with those key consumers, according to a top USDA official.

"Women relate to women," said USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden. "Women do have a special role."

Female farmers operate in a largely male-dominated world, which prompted Harden to launch a "Women in Agriculture Mentoring Network" to help them connect with role models who experience similar hurdles.

During a roundtable forum on July 13 in Silverton, Ore., Harden said she was heartened by the 20 percent of principal farm operators in Oregon who are female.

Women farmers who served on the panel said they didn't feel like they faced higher barriers to success in agriculture, which Harden said was unique in her experience traveling across the U.S.

"This room would not be full everywhere. You're really lucky here," Harden told the group of women gathered at the Oregon Garden Resort.

Once a female demonstrates she knows what she's talking about, there's usually no impediment to gaining "traction" in agriculture, said Molly Pearmine-McCargar, a Gervais, Ore., grower who spoke on the panel. "Once you get respect and credibility with your audience, it's not a problem," she said.

The panel participants said that Oregon farmers generally face similar challenges whether they're male or female.

Shelly Boshart-Davis, whose family operates a farm and trucking business, said that the state and federal governments need to take steps to improve transportation for agriculture.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Deputy USDA Secretary Krysta Harden speaks at a panel of women farmers during a recent stop at the Oregon Garden Resort in Silverton, Ore. To the left sits Barbara Boyer, of McMinnville, Ore., and to the right sits Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

For example, the Port of Portland lost two major container ocean carriers this year, which has complicated life for farmers who rely on exports, she said.

If companies avoid importing goods along the West Coast due to labor concerns, there will be fewer empty containers available for agricultural exporters, Boshart-Davis said.

Amy Doerfler-Phelan, whose family farms multiple crops in Oregon's Willamette Valley, said she's concerned about the lack of economic development in the eastern and southern portions of Oregon that are less populated.

"We need to have opportunities in other part of our state," she said.

Pearmine-McCargar said that insufficient labor and the need to mechanize harvest are top priorities, while Bar-

bara Boyer, who farms near

McMinnville, Ore., said she is concerned about farm succession.

Aspiring young growers often face the prospect of paying back student loans on top of the other financial burdens of running a farm, Boyer said.

The federal government should examine forgiving student debt for farmers, as it does for certain other professions with social value, she said.

"It takes legislation, but it's a great idea," responded Harden.

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