



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Elias Pablo dumps Tieton cherries from his picking bucket into a bin at Lyall Orchards in Desert Aire, Wash., on May 25. Early cherries often are exported to Asia. Washington has an added export opportunity since California's exports fell short.

Wash. cherry growers have good export opportunities

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — Washington cherry growers have good opportunity for exports after California fell short of its normal exports.

California finished cherry sales over the Memorial Day weekend of a crop cut in half by rain damage. That and a strong dollar diminishing foreign buying power held California cherry exports this season to about 25 percent of the crop, B.J. Thurlby, Northwest Cherry Growers president in Yakima, said at the Five State Cherry Commission meeting in Richland on May 25. In the past, California has exported 50 percent of its crop, he said.

"Washington should have good opportunity for exports," Thurlby said.

Early California districts around Bakersfield usually have a high percentage of exports with the Brooks variety, but rain reduced quality and kept exports down, said Tate Mathison, sales desk director at Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee. The company's subsidiary, Chinchiole Stemilt California, in Stockton, picks, packs and markets California cherries.

The Pacific Northwest, chiefly Washington, exported 5.9 million, 20-pound boxes of cherries, 30.7 percent of its crop, in 2015. The estimated gross wholesale value was \$284.5 million, according to the Northwest Cherry Growers 2015 annual report.

With domestic sales, the crop totaled 19.3 million boxes

worth \$826.7 million.

Canada was the top export market at 1.9 million boxes valued at \$91.7 million. China with Hong Kong was second at 1.7 million boxes for \$86.9 million.

Other top markets: South Korea, 761,000 boxes; Taiwan, 406,000; Mexico, 238,000; Japan, 233,000; Australia, 145,000; and United Kingdom, 119,425.

Northwest Cherry Growers budgets \$1.7 million on export promotions and the priorities are China, South Korea, Southeast Asia and Mexico, said Keith Hu, Northwest Cherry Growers international program director.

Japan, Taiwan, the UK, Europe, Australia and Brazil are not great priorities because of the exchange rates, poor economies and the "timing of our product this year," Hu said.

Taiwan is a "problematic" market because of lack of buying power, minimum residue levels of pesticides and its maturity as a market, he said.

"We have over 3,200 retail stores in the world committed to promoting Northwest cherries," Hu said.

Roadblocks are the strength of the dollar, a global economic slowdown and price pressure from Turkish cherries "overflowing" into Western Europe and China, he said. "We could have a short window of opportunity in Europe this year. Three shippers have plans to go in. We haven't finalized European promotions yet."

Lighter PNW cherry harvest underway early

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — Pacific Northwest cherry growers have started their earliest harvest on record and hope rain and excessive heat stay away from a light crop.

The 2016 crop is estimated at 18.3 million, 20-pound boxes by the Five State Cherry Commission that met at the Red Lion Hanford House Hotel in Richland on May 25.

The forecast is down from estimates earlier this month of 20.7 million and 19.8 million boxes. It's also down from the 2015 final of 19.3 million and the record of 23.2 million in 2014.

"We think this is a moderate crop. We know Rainier is shorter than last year and early Bing is especially down," said B.J. Thurlby, president of the industry promotional arm Northwest Cherry Growers and the Washington State Fruit Commission in Yakima.

Thurlby blamed the reduction on a "weird, flash bloom," a compression of bloom timing. But he said a record 548 degree days between earliest and latest growing areas indicate good harvest spread.

The first Chelan and Tieton cherries being picked look great, he said.

John and Debra Doebler, growers at Sentinel Gap north of Mattawa, began picking Chelans May 18, their earliest start ever and five days earlier than last year. They were the first in the state both years and their cherries were the first packed, May 19 this year and May 24 last year, by Stemilt Growers LLC in Wenatchee, the nation's largest sweet cherry producer.

"We bloomed four days later than last year and began picking five days earlier. The key was warmer than normal nighttime temperatures," said West Mathison, Stemilt president.

Maturity at the Doebler orchard also is aided by heat reflected from basalt cliffs.

"It's just been hot. All I can say is I'm excited to be done," Debra Doebler said.

It normally takes about two weeks to pick their 30 acres of cherries.

A few miles to the south at Desert Aire, grower Charles Lyall began his third day of picking on May 25. He had 90



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Andreas Licona, foreman at Lyall Orchards in Desert Aire, Wash., shows how sparse Tieton cherries are on a tree.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Rafael Tellez picks leaves out of a bin of Tieton cherries at Lyall Orchard in Desert Aire, Wash., on May 25, before they are trucked to Blue Bird Inc. in Wenatchee for packing.

pickers for 110 acres and they were finishing Tieton trees quickly because cherries were few per tree.

"Our Bings are especially light. Everyone's scratching their heads. I've thought it might have something to do with last summer's heat messing up buds," Lyall said.

Two streaks of 100 degree-plus days last June accelerated harvest, glutted the market after the Fourth of July and depressed prices.

Thurlby said he hopes such June heat doesn't happen again but that some people think it will.

"Cherries are great in the 90s and can absorb the low 100s, but it's a tough road at 110," he said.

With harvest of 10 million boxes anticipated in June and

12 million before the Fourth, ad prices of \$1.99 to \$3.99 per pound are needed in mid-June through July 20, Thurlby said.

"The key is to keep the train rolling," he said. "People lose interest. Retailers lose faith when they don't get the volume they want."

It will be a challenge to build sales momentum because early volume will be light, he said.

"I think the later you go the more normal the crop gets. Demand right now is pretty extraordinary. We need fruit that tastes good and moves through retail shelves," said Mike Wade, manager of Columbia Fruit Packers in Wenatchee.

"We need to pick good quality, not too green or too soft," said Gip Redman, vice

president of field services, Oregon Cherry Growers, Salem.

Oregon growers are eager for a better crop after last year's half crop due to a November 2014 freeze.

"With cooler weather this week, I think our early stuff will be the 31st (of May) and the first. I think we'll be 20 to 30 percent up from last year, not quite full crop yet," said Megan Thompson, chairwoman of the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission.

The Oregon delegation forecast: 6,000 tons for Hood River, up from 4,860 last year; 22,000 tons for The Dalles, up from 16,766; and 1,000 for Milton-Freewater, up from 158 for a total of 29,000 tons compared with 21,784 in 2015 and 40,246 in 2014.

Washington growers forecast a total of 152,000 tons compared with 165,267 in 2015 and 185,968 in 2014.

The Wenatchee district is estimated at 80,000 tons and the Yakima district at 72,000.

"Rainiers and dark sweets are down. We think there will be compression and our number may be lower," Norm Gutzwiller, a Wenatchee grower, said of the Wenatchee district.

Idaho is forecast at 2,000 tons, Montana at 1,700 and Utah at 200.

The Five State Cherry Commission adopted an \$18 per ton grower assessment for promotions.

Ranchers say outgoing Idaho Cattle Association leader will be greatly missed

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Cattle industry leaders say Wyatt Prescott, who led the Idaho Cattle Association as executive vice

president for six years, will be sorely missed.

Prescott recently announced he is stepping down from that position.

"Most people in the industry consider Wyatt to be one

of the best (ICA executive vice presidents) ever," said Leadore rancher Carl Lufkin. "He has done an outstanding job during his tenure there. I don't know how we'll ever replace him, in my opinion."

"Wyatt has done so much for us it's hard to single out one thing," said Rogerson rancher Jared Brackett. "He did a lot of things well. We will definitely miss him."

Brackett, Lufkin and Leadore rancher Carl Ellsworth, all past ICA presidents, said one of Prescott's greatest achievements was greatly increasing membership by proving to ranchers that they were getting something in return for their dues.

Lufkin said ICA membership has almost doubled, to more than 1,000, during Prescott's tenure.

"Wyatt's people skills and his job quality has brought a lot of confidence back to membership," Ellsworth said.

Prescott helped create the ICA's annual grass futurity, a fundraising contest that pulls in about \$40,000 a year for the group that is used to provide scholarships.

"He was the brainchild behind that," Brackett said.

Prescott said he is leaving his ICA position to get his family, which includes wife, Christie, and their two young children, closer to his own ranching roots.

"My end goal is to get my family closer to the land and the cattle, which is how I grew up," he said.

Prescott will also contract with the University of Idaho to help complete and



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Wyatt Prescott, the outgoing executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, right, chats with Michael Parrella, dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, during a May 20 going-away party.

then manage the Rock Creek Ranch project. The 10,000-acre ranch in Blaine County is owned by the Nature Conservancy and Wood River Land Trust.

The goal is for the ranch to have a memorandum of understanding with UI that will allow cattle-related research to be conducted there.

Lufkin said Prescott was instrumental in helping formulate that plan. "I know he'll do a great job there."

"We're hopeful there will be some research and data come out of there that will really help the industry, especially on the sage grouse issue," he said.

Prescott said he will continue to be involved in policy development issues on behalf of agriculture during Idaho's legislative sessions.

He said one of the highlights of his time at ICA was getting "to work with and be on the best operations in the state of Idaho. I got to learn from the best of the best and that's been a real pleasure."

"Getting to know this network of people that make up Idaho's cattle industry is like no other opportunity you could ever have," he said. "It's been a real honor."



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