

# Apricot yields up slightly after winter chill, growers say

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — Growers say that apricot yields in California are up slightly this year, partly because trees got their full amounts of chilling hours last winter.

An official estimate is due out next month, but farmers and marketers expect to see an average-sized crop in the range of 50,000 tons, the California Farm Bureau Federation reports.

That would be an increase from the 45,000 tons harvested last year, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service in Sacramento.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Fresh apricots from Burlison Fruit Stand in Dairyville, Calif., fill a bin. Growers say this year's apricot yields in California are up slightly from last year.

"It's been a good crop," of Burlison Fruit Stand in Dairyville, Calif. "They just

all of the sudden got ripe, too."

Not every grower has seen the increase. At R and K Orchards in Corning, Calif., the apricots' size and quality were fine but volumes were light, co-owner Karen Mills said.

"We got a quarter on some of our varieties, and on some we had less than a quarter," Mills said while helping customers at a farmers' market in Redding.

More than 300 California growers covering 17,000 acres produce 95 percent of the apricots grown in the United States, according to the industry website califapricots.com. Apricot

harvest will continue for the rest of this month in the San Joaquin Valley, the Farm Bureau noted.

The cold nights last winter helped many fruit and nut trees in California to receive all the chilling hours they'd need to set a good crop by the middle of January. Trees need a certain number of hours under 45 degrees before they'll begin to accumulate heat and commence blossom.

The chill in the air marked a contrast to the winter of 2014-2015, when higher-than-normal temperatures led to an uneven bloom and disrupted development of some crops.

Apricots are one of many summer fruits and melons that are hitting supermarket shelves in abundance. Among other crops, according to NASS:

- The picking of Valencia oranges continues. Growers last month began to pick what is expected to be a 21 million-carton crop, which would be a slight increase in production compared to last year.

- The cherry harvest was almost completed last week with only a couple of sheds still packing.

- Cantaloupes were being harvested last week, and other melons were irrigated and prepped for harvest.



Courtesy of Lamb Weston

The Lamb Weston potato processing plant in Richland, Wash., will expand, according to the company. The \$200 million investment will give farmers another reliable customer, the state's potato commission says.

## Lamb Weston to expand its Wash. potato processing plant

Farmers benefit from more demand

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

Potato processor Lamb Weston will invest \$200 million to increase the french fry-making capacity of its Richland, Wash., plant, creating 128 full-time jobs and taking advantage of the world's growing demand for easy-to-prepare food, the company announced June 8.

Lamb Weston cited forecasts by Euromonitor International, a market research company, that the demand for frozen potato products will grow by 2.6 billion pounds by 2020.

The company says its new french fry line will produce more than 300 million pounds a year.

"We have a tremendous opportunity to help our customers realize their global growth projects, but we need to make more french fries to do that," Lamb Weston President Greg Schlafer said in a written statement.

The Richland potato processing plant was built in 1972 and employs 500 workers, according to the company.

The company said it plans to begin construction on the east side of the current plant immediately and expects to be finished by fall 2017.

A company spokeswoman said she didn't have information about the plant's current capacity or a wage range for the new jobs.

Lamb Weston's expansion should benefit farmers by increasing competition among processors for potatoes, Washington State Potato Commission Executive Director Chris Voigt said.

Contracts with processors cushion farmers from relying on sales to the more volatile fresh potato market, he said.

"If you attract processors to your state, it gives you more options," Voigt said.

"I think our industry is excited about this," he said. "It means we need to supply more potatoes."

About 90 percent of Washington's potatoes are processed, Voigt said.

Gov. Jay Inslee issued a statement saying he was pleased Lamb Weston was reinvesting in Washington.

"This next generation of food processing in Richland is the perfect match of our agriculture and technology industries, which is why I worked

intensively with the company to help them choose our terrific site."

Inslee in 2015 supported extending favorable tax rates that state lawmakers granted to food processors more than a decade ago. The tax breaks were due to expire, but the Legislature renewed them for another 10 years.

Lamb Weston is a subsidiary of ConAgra Foods Inc. ConAgra announced in November that by fall 2016 it will split into two separate companies, Lamb Weston and ConAgra Brands.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, U.S. consumption of frozen potato products surpassed fresh potato consumption in 1993.

If Congress approves the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, Japan and Vietnam will phase out tariffs on U.S. potato products.

The potato industry estimates that would increase sales to Japan by \$10 million and boost sales to Vietnam to \$10 million from \$3.75 million within five years. French fries would make up a major part of those increased sales, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission.

## Coba joins U.S. trade mission headed to Ukraine, Romania

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

The USDA is heading a trade mission to promote U.S. farm goods in a couple of unlikely locations: Ukraine and Romania.

The Eastern European countries rank 86th and 82nd, respectively, as destinations for exports of agricultural and related products from the U.S.

Last year, the U.S. shipped \$75 million of farm goods to Ukraine and \$81 million to Romania — collectively less than 1 percent of the amount purchased by Canada, the top U.S. trade partner.

However, the two nations have gained in geopolitical importance due to tensions with nearby Russia.

While the military conflict in Ukraine has been prominent, Romania has also drawn the ire of Russia over a U.S. missile defense system within its borders.

The trade delegation, scheduled for June 13-17, is led by USDA Acting Deputy Secretary Michael Scuse and joined by several representatives of state governments, companies and organizations, including Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Though Oregon doesn't currently ship many farm goods to Ukraine or Romania, Coba said the trade mission is an opportunity to explore those markets and show U.S. support for the two nations in light of their problems with Russia.

The trade mission will include meetings with government officials from the host countries and U.S. embassies, as well as tours of facilities owned by multinational agribusiness firms Archer Daniels Midland Co. and Bunge.

Coba said she hopes to learn about the state of each country's middle class, which represents a potential market for Oregon's high-value farm products.



Capital Press File

Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, has joined a USDA trade mission to Ukraine and Romania.

The value of U.S. farm exports to Ukraine has plummeted from its most recent high of \$321 million in 2013 to last year's level of \$75 million, according to USDA data.

Fish products and planting seeds are among the major U.S. commodities shipped to Ukraine, though they've decreased along with total exports in recent years.

Oregon would benefit from the demand for these products, so it will be useful to learn whether the drop-off was caused by tariffs, political turbulence or other barriers, Coba said.

Pork, poultry and eggs have

also been among the top farm exports to Ukraine.

Exports to Romania have fluctuated widely over the past decade, between \$47 million and \$96 million, with shipments increasing nearly 60 percent over the prior year to \$81 million in 2015.

Soybeans, tobacco, planting seeds and distilled spirits are among the most prominent ag-related exports to that country. The U.S. had a trade deficit in agricultural goods with both countries in 2015, importing about \$158 million from Ukraine and \$154 million from Romania.

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