

# Big apple states expecting larger crops

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — This fall's U.S. apple crop may be 8 percent larger than 2015, which industry leaders hope is a small enough gain to maintain strong prices.

Total U.S. fresh and processed production was estimated at 263 million, 42-pound boxes at the Premier Apple Cooperative meeting in Syracuse, N.Y., on June 28.

That's 3 percent more than the five-year average, 11 percent less than the large 272.2 million box 2014 crop and less than the record 277.3 million in 1998.

"The estimate is based upon conditions as of June 27 and assumes normal growing conditions to fall harvest," said Mark Seetin, director of regulatory and industry affairs of the U.S. Apple Association, Vienna, Va.

If the estimate holds, the crop will be the fifth largest in U.S. history, he said.

Bruce Grim, manager of the Washington Apple Growers Marketing Association,



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Junami apples are lined up on trays ready for loading into boxes at Zirkle Fruit Co. in Selah, Wash.

who attended the meeting, agreed with Don Armock, a Michigan grower, that with the 2015 crop selling out the new crop should enjoy good prices throughout the coming year-long sales season.

"I'm pretty excited. It appears currency values won't be quite as difficult as the past season for exports and we're coming off a relatively good year in pricing of Michigan, Washington and New York apples," said Armock, president of Riveridge Produce in Spar-

ta, Mich., one of that state's largest apple producers.

Even apples for processing into juice, sauce and baked ingredients have been getting good prices the last six months, he said, adding that it's always better to start a new fall season from strong than weak pricing.

"We had excellent spring-time weather. No frost and excellent post-bloom weather," Grim said of the Washington crop.

Bloom was quick, chemical thinners had good opportunity

to thin the crop, cell division was good and fruit should size well, he said.

Fruit size is the wild card with each size adding 10 percent to crop volume, which is a lot more for Washington than New York or Michigan, Grim said.

Barring excessive heat, hail or other bad weather, the crop should be good quality, he said.

Of the 263 million-box U.S. total, Washington is estimated at 168 million, up 10.7 percent from 2015. Of that, 135 million will be fresh and 33 million will be processed. The Washington industry focuses on the fresh crop number while other states talk total numbers of fresh and processed. Washington is finishing sales of a 115 million-box 2015 fresh crop.

The fresh and processed estimate of the top producers in millions of boxes: New York, 29, up 9.7 percent; Michigan, 28.5, up 16.5; Pennsylvania, 10, down 25; California, 5, down 4.8; and Virginia, 3.8, down 31.6.

Oregon is 3 million, up

12.7 percent and Idaho is 1.5 million, up 11.1 percent.

The Michigan crop was estimated smaller, 26.3 million boxes, a week earlier at the Michigan Frozen Food Packers Association 61st annual Fruit Crop Guesstimate in Grand Rapids.

The Washington State Tree Fruit Association will forecast the Washington crop in early August and the U.S. Apple Association 2016 Apple Crop Outlook and Marketing Conference is set for Chicago, Aug. 25 and 26.

Armock said he thinks the Michigan crop will end up closer to 30 million boxes because it should size up well from heavy king bloom. He said while the southwest portion of the state is down 30 percent due to poor pollination weather, it only makes up 10 percent of the crop. The unknown, he said, is how much the west-central region will produce. Growers there are continuing high-density, replacement plantings for yields of 75 to 80 bins per acre, up from 40 to 50.

"We're trying to keep up

with the times with greater varietal mix and our bins per acre needs to increase," Armock said.

The guesstimate is for 4.8 million boxes of Red Delicious followed by 4.7 million boxes of Gala and then dropping back to 2.4 million Ida Red, 1.9 million Golden Delicious, 1.7 million Jonathan, 1.6 million McIntosh and 1.4 million Honeycrisp followed by others.

New plantings are largely Honeycrisp, Gala and Fuji while Ida Red, Rome, Jonathan and Empire are going down fast, Armock said. Red Delicious is fading but still strong and Golden is staying even, he said.

Movement is toward fresh away from processor varieties for better returns but replanting is limited by rootstock, scion wood and capital availability, he said.

Michigan's harvest starts at the end of August with Paula Red and Gingergold. The Michigan Gala and Honeycrisp harvest will start in early September, a month behind Washington.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Antonio Sanchez picks blueberries in East Wenatchee, Wash., June 27. He's used to other fruit but it was his first day picking blueberries. He was fairly quick within three hours. The berries go to local and Seattle fruit stands.

## Washington leads again in blueberries

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

EAST WENATCHEE, Wash. — Antonio Sanchez said it was his first day picking blueberries but one wouldn't have known watching him.

He was natural and fast, just three hours into the job.

Sanchez and a few others were picking at 8 a.m. June 27 in an East Wenatchee field owned by Wenatchee's River of Life Foursquare Church. The berries are sold at fruit stands and farmers' markets locally and in Seattle, said Elizabeth Navarrete, the church's field manager.

In its third season, the field will produce about 6,000 pounds in June and July, she said.

It is just one of many newer blueberry fields in the state.

Washington will lead the nation again this year in blueberry production, having surpassed Georgia for that distinction last year.

Washington was forecast at



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Elizabeth Navarrete, blueberry field manager for River of Life Foursquare Church, fills 15-pound boxes with berries. The field will generate about 6,000 pounds this season.

118 million pounds for 2016 at the Michigan Frozen Food Packers Association's 61st annual Fruit Crop Guesstimate in Grand Rapids, June 22. That's up from an actual harvest of 110 million pounds in 2015.

Michigan is estimated at 101 million pounds, up from 73 million, and followed by Oregon at 100 million pounds, up from 95 million.

Other 2016 blueberry estimates in millions of pounds: British Columbia, 170; California, 70; Georgia, 67; North Carolina, 45; New Jersey, 45;

Florida, 13.5; Mississippi, 6.5; and Indiana, 2.5.

The national blueberry estimate, including British Columbia, is 738.5 million pounds, up from 632 million in 2015.

Alan Schreiber, administrator of the Washington State Blueberry Commission in Pasco, could not be reached for comment. A year ago, he said demand is stunningly high and stored stock was virtually all sold. About 70 percent of Washington's blueberries are processed into dried and juice concentrate versus being sold fresh.

Consumer awareness of health benefits of blueberries is driving demand, Schreiber said last year. Blueberries are a good source of dietary fiber and vitamin C and are high in antioxidants which protect against cancer, heart disease and other age-related diseases.

Washington has grown in production more than other states because it has less pest pressure, high yields and good growers, Schreiber said.

## Washington Ecology to write guide to 'best' ag practices

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Ecology will develop voluntary "best management practices" for agricultural activities, responding to what federal regulators say is a shortcoming in the state's plan to protect waterways.

The Environmental Protection Agency last year demanded Ecology undertake the initiative to continue to qualify for federal funding for water-quality projects.

The EPA, along with conservation groups and tribes, accused the state of being too vague about how it will prevent pollution from agriculture.

In response, Ecology has hired a Seattle consultant, Ross Strategic, to interview farmers and ranchers to begin identifying ways to prevent pollution.

Ecology officials say they plan to spend several months contacting interested parties and likely won't get down to actually writing what they are calling a technical guide until early next year.

The officials say the practices described in the guide won't be mandatory, but following them would shield producers from being fined for an event that caused pollution. That is the benefit the producer would receive for using the guidance, according to an agency spokeswoman.

Ecology started the process with a June 20 letter to producer groups, environmental organizations, tribes and other government agencies.

"Our ultimate goal is to develop implementable, scientifically based guidance that the agriculture industry will



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Workers harvest cucumbers at a farm in southwestern Washington. The state Department of Ecology plans to develop a guide to "best management practices" for agriculture at the direction of the Environmental Protection Agency.

embrace and is beneficial for healthy farms and clean water," Ecology water quality program manager Heather Bartlett wrote.

Cattle Producers of Washington Vice President Scott Nielsen said he had no objections to Ecology's plans, though he said he was concerned that the guidance could eventually turn into a mandate.

"At the end of the day, if you're not following their best management practices, are you in violation? I think that's the fear," said Nielsen, a Stevens County rancher.

Ecology's special assistant on water quality, Kelly Susewind, said the agency does not intend to use the best management practices as a new set of rules.

The guide will make clear the farming practices that Ecology considers effective in preventing pollution, he said. "The regulation will stay the same, which is, you can't pollute," he said.

Washington Cattlemen's Association Executive Vice President Jack Field said he hopes producers can influ-

ence Ecology to adopt flexible guidelines.

"Am I a little nervous? Absolutely," he said. "There's a lot of reasons to be concerned, but we can't be in a situation where we can't engage."

Washington Farm Bureau's first vice president, Aaron Golladay, co-chairs Ecology's Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee, along with Ecology Director Maia Bellon.

He said he suspects there will be a push for mandatory buffers.

"Every time we turn around, the end game is the same," he said. "Big, dumb buffers."

The EPA last year identified the lack of best management practices for agriculture as a "gap" in the state's plan to control pollution from farms, streets, timberlands and other sources.

In written comments on the plan, the federal agency demanded Ecology "identify mechanisms the state will use to implement those BMPs."

An EPA spokeswoman said the agency gives states the option of making best management practices voluntary or mandatory.

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