

PNW pear sales post a good start

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Sales of the 2016 Pacific Northwest pear crop are off to a good start with generally strong pricing and high quality.

A year ago, the pear crop suffered from too much cork, a decay brought on by calcium deficiency caused by too much heat early in the growing season.

This year, the price of Bartlett is down compared to a year ago because of a record crop, and the price of d'Anjou is up because there's fewer of them.

As of Nov. 18, the 18.7 million, 44-pound-box crop is right on the June 2 forecast and is 2 percent larger than the 2015 crop but 7 percent less than the 20.2-million-box average of the past five years, according to The Pear Bureau Northwest in Portland.

The record is 21.6 million boxes in 2013.

The Bartlett crop is a record this year at 4.8 million boxes. There are 89,200 boxes of Red Bartlett and 350,156 boxes of Starkrimson and other summer-fall pears.

The winter category is led by 8.6 million d'Anjou, 3.2 million Bosc, 1 million Red d'Anjou, 319,833 Comice, 53,784 Seckel and all others at 165,904.

Regionally, Wenatchee leads with 8.7 million boxes, followed by Mid-Columbia (Hood River, Ore.) at 6.7 million, Yakima at 2.3 million and Medford at 927,160.

The average wholesale asking price of U.S. No. 1 grade Bartlett, size 80, in the Yakima and Wenatchee districts was \$24 to \$29.90 per box on Nov. 21 compared to \$28 to \$32.90 a year ago,



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Hernaldo Flores works in pre-size sorting of d'Anjou pears at Duckwall Fruit in Hood River, Ore., on Oct. 12. Established in 1919, Duckwall is one of the top pear packers in Oregon.

according to USDA Market News.

While lower, that's still "very good from a historical perspective," said Bruce Grim, manager of the Washington and Mid-Columbia Pear Marketing Associations in Wenatchee.

"Last year was amazing on the Bartlett side. It was a small crop. Prices started high and just went higher. There were some amazing returns. This year won't match that because there's several hundred thousand more," Grim said.

Prices averaged \$40 per box last year on U.S. No. 1 grade Bartlett, he said.

U.S. No. 1 grade d'Anjou, size 80, in Yakima and Wenatchee was \$30 to \$34.90 on Nov. 21 compared to \$28 to \$30.90 a year earlier and

Bosc U.S. No. 1, size 110s, was \$20 to \$24.90 compared with \$22 to \$24.90.

As of Nov. 18, 35.6 percent of the PNW pear crop was sold and shipped compared to 39.4 percent a year ago and more than 37 percent in two of the three years before that.

Kevin Moffitt, president of The Pear Bureau, said exports are down because of a strong dollar and fewer small fruit, which is preferred in export markets.

"The bottom line is we need to sell more fruit domestically right now and we're not. We have to take up the slack from lack of export," he said.

The large apple crop also is competition, he said.

But Grim, who manages the Washington Apple Mar-

keting Association as well as the two pear marketing associations, said regardless of crop sizes, apples and pears don't compete much.

He said the slower pear movement percentage is not statistically significant.

"We're moving at a decent pace for the crop size we have and prices are remaining at very decent levels," Grim said.

"We are slightly behind in shipments but it's not a huge crop so it should be a year of good returns," Moffitt said.

The Pear Bureau, the promotional arm of the Northwest pear industry, is marking its 85th year, having been incorporated in the summer of 1931, several years before receiving a federal marketing order.



Rick Bowmer/Associated Press File

In this 2011 file photo, water flows through the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River near Cascade Locks, Ore. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is closing the river from Dec. 12 through March 20. The extended closure allows the corps to make repairs at six dams on the river system, including navlock controls at Bonneville Lock and Dam and new operating machinery for the downstream gate at Ice Harbor Lock and Dam.

PNW industry gears up for 14-week river closure

Biggest worry is unforeseen delay of reopening

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Ag industry representatives say they're as ready as possible for an upcoming 14-week closure of the Columbia-Snake river system that carries their crops and goods.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is closing the river from Dec. 12 through March 20. The extended closure allows the corps to make repairs at six dams on the river system, including navlock controls at Bonneville Lock and Dam and new operating machinery for the downstream gate at Ice Harbor Lock and Dam. Information from the corps includes repairs costing at least \$33 million.

The closure affects grain traffic and other commodities that use the river system for overseas export, said Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

"This is an investment in U.S. infrastructure and ultimately an investment in the reliability of U.S. products," she said.

"The industry has taken all the steps it can to prepare for the long closure," said Dan Hart, general manager of Almota Elevator Co. in Colfax, Wash. "(The corps) was extremely proactive in getting the word out to all affected parties so there was ample time to plan for the disruption."

Companies must have their last barge loaded by Dec. 10, said Damon Filan, manager of Tri-Cities Grain in Pasco, Wash., and an industry representative on the Washington Grain Commission.

Grain companies aren't likely to get all the barges they ordered, due to rainy weather that slowed the fleet down, Filan said.

"We'll probably get 90 to 95 percent of the barges we have ordered," he said. "We

still have contracts we have to fill, so we may have to figure out ways to buy rail or whatever we'll have to do."

The biggest concern is unforeseen complications that delay reopening, Hart said.

"This could have a serious financial impact on shippers and exporters if it were longer than a day or two," he said.

The corps held stakeholder outreach sessions and monthly conference calls leading up to the closure. Calls will be weekly during the closure to keep stakeholders informed, Meira said.

The closure is a week less than a river closure six years ago, Meira said. At that time, there were more unknowns, she said.

"What we learned is, with the proper planning and funding, it could be done," she said. "I think there's a lot more confidence from all involved that we're prepared for success a second time around."

Last time, wheat prices were high and moving higher before harvest, Hart said. A large percentage of the crop was priced and ready to move, and export sales were on the books before the closure.

This year, with sluggish market conditions and prices at eight-year lows, a higher percentage of the crop is left in the country, Hart said.

"There could still be some variabilities that might make it a little bit tight," Filan said. "There's so much grain in the world that, if we can't supply — and I think we can — someone else will."

The industry reps say the closure is necessary to maintain a vital river system.

"This is the way you want to get this work done, rather than waiting for something to break and then having an unplanned, catastrophic closure with major impacts in the region and ultimately in other parts of the nation," Meira said.

Cattlemen pick Walla Walla rancher for president

Producer: Let's tell our side

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The new president of the Washington Cattlemen's Association, Tyler Cox, says cellphone and internet service isn't the best where he lives in Walla Walla County.

That's life in cattle country. "It's something fairly common in our membership," he said.

Yet, one of his goals as president is to get cattlemen and consumers better acquainted through social media.

"I'd hate to put words in the mouths of my customers, but it sounds to me like they would like to have some sort of connection," he said. "We have nothing to hide. We're proud of what we do. Come have a look."

Cox, who had been first vice president, was installed Nov. 11 at the cattlemen's annual convention in Cle Elum. He will serve a two-year term, taking over from Bill Sieverkropp of Ephrata.

The group is affiliated with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. In Olympia, the cattlemen's association maintains a high profile, lobbying legislators and commenting on execu-



Courtesy of Washington Cattlemen's Association

Walla Walla rancher Tyler Cox was selected president of the Washington Cattlemen's Association at the group's annual convention Nov. 11 in Cle Elum. Cox says ranchers should try to connect with consumers. "We're proud of what we do," he says. "Come have a look."

utive branch proposals. The group's executive vice president, Jack Field, heads up the staff.

The group's wide-ranging policy interests are reflected in the many resolutions that were adopted at its annual convention. The resolutions touch on animal diseases, property rights, endangered species, predators and, of course, regulations.

Asked whether state or federal regulations concern him the most, Cox said, "There are plenty to go around."

Cox said he looks forward to meeting with state lawmakers during the up-

coming 2017 session.

He said he's learned from prior sessions that urban lawmakers are willing to listen. "Most of them have been pretty happy to at least hear what I have to say."

He said he doesn't want to force-feed facts to people, but he would like to clear up misconceptions about ranchers. "There are plenty of people with an ax to grind against our industry," he said.

He said he would like to impress upon people that ranchers have a lot in common with everybody else.

"We do the whole getting the kids to soccer and baseball practices," he said.

"My family doesn't operate any differently than others," Cox said. "We feed our family beef without any hesitation whatsoever."

Another goal will be to get younger people involved in the cattlemen's association, he said.

"It's been my experience that if you ask people to take on responsibility, they will be happy to try."

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