

# Apricots enjoy centuries of popularity

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**  
For the Capital Press

The apricot is one of the “oldest” crops in California, according to the Apricot Producers of California.

“The history of the California apricot started 4,000 years ago when it was discovered on the mountain slopes of China,” said producer’s president Bill Ferreira. “From there this ancient fruit found its way across the Persian Empire to the Mediterranean. Spanish explorers introduced the apricot to California in the 18th century.”

In 1792 the first major apricot crop was produced in California. By 1920, the California apricot was flourish-

ing in the Santa Clara Valley. Eventually California apricot farms found their way to the San Joaquin Valley.

Today, about 150 growers raise 10,200 acres of apricots in the state. About 70 percent of the crop is processed as canned or frozen — the majority of frozen apricots are used for jams and preserves — dried or turned into baby food. The balance sold fresh.

Over 70 percent of the total tonnage consists of one variety, the Patterson, with the balance a mix of other varieties for fresh market. They are canned in Modesto and Lodi, frozen in Watsonville and Atwater, dried in Patterson and Sanger, and a lesser amount in Hollister. Baby food is pro-

cessed in Medford, Ore.

“Apricots are very fragile; they require a large amount of hand labor to prune, thin and harvest,” Ferreira said. “The blooms are greatly impacted by rains at bloom time, the fruit by rains at harvest.”

Because apricots are harvested early, few pests attack them. The twig borer is the main pest, and most growers control them by the use of pheromone confusion strips. Thus apricots require little or no pesticide, just fungicide at bloom time, he said.

Fresh market harvest begins the end of April, with apricots for processing harvested in June. By the beginning of July, harvest is completed.

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