

Washington cherry harvest off to good start

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ORONDO, Wash. — Cherry harvest is off to a decent start in Central Washington with good quality, strong early prices and apparently not too big a labor shortage.

“Fruit quality is outstanding. We really have some outstanding sugar in our fruit this year,” said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers in Yakima, the industry’s promotional arm.

Demand was out-pacing supply with 3 million, 20-pound boxes shipped as of June 19 and South Korea as the single biggest market averaging almost 40,000 boxes per day, Thurlby said.

That same morning in Orondo, 16 miles north of Wenatchee, a small army of 105 young H-2A-visa guest-workers, just a week on the job from Mexico, picked Orondo Ruby cherries at Griggs Orchards.

“We’ve increased our H-2A by 50 percent from last year, but we’ve had a lot of domestics stopping by, which is nice, and we’ve been hiring them,” said John Griggs, co-owner.

Labor has been tight for years industry-wide, but Griggs said California’s cherry crop, always earlier than Washington’s and Oregon’s, was light this year, which freed up pickers to move north sooner this year. He said he had 87 domestic pickers



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
A wagon load of Orondo Ruby cherries during morning break at Griggs Orchard near Orondo, Wash., June 19. The cherries are sorted and packed by Chelan Fruit Co. and sold by Chelan Fresh Marketing.

and could use 30 more. He was a week into full harvest with three to four to go.

California was still shipping a few boxes on June 19 and will finish just shy of 4 million, 18-pound boxes, Thurlby said. The Pacific Northwest, with Washington the bulk of it, expects to pick 20.4 million, 20-pound boxes into August, down 22.7 percent from last year’s record 26.4-million-box crop.

Tom Riggan, general manager of Chelan Fresh Marketing, said wholesale prices started in the \$80- to \$90-per-box range with limy-ited volume in the first two weeks of June. As of June 19, prices were around \$55 to \$70 per box, depending on fruit size. Cherries were selling at \$4.99 and \$7.99 per pound in

Wenatchee grocery stores.

Marketers will quickly adjust prices downward to help retailers make Fourth of July sales prices as volume substantially increases, Riggan said.

“Demand is there and quality is phenomenal. Size profile is better than last year and sugars are very high, so it’s setting up so far so good. When quality is there, it flies off the shelves,” Riggan said.

Helicopters were busy in the greater Wenatchee area June 15 and 16 blowing off cherries from rain. Griggs said he had two helicopters fly once over his orchards in Orondo and three to four times over his orchards farther north near Beebe Bridge, east of Chelan.

“We’ve come through re-

China tariffs worry cherry marketers, growers

YAKIMA, Wash. — Washington cherry marketers and growers are concerned about the escalating trade war between the U.S. and China.

In retaliation to Trump administration tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum, China imposed tariffs on many U.S. goods including 15 percent on cherries, which was on top an existing 10 percent entry tax and 13 percent value added tax.

“Cherries are on the list to receive another 25 percent tariff to retaliate against the latest U.S. tariffs,” said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers and the Washington State Fruit Commission in Yakima.

“It’s a tragic shame that our growers are being thrown under the bus four times over. Obviously we are taking a huge hit in this trade war,” Thurlby said.

However, one marketer said short-term pain will be worth it if it results in fairer trade in the long-term.

The industry expects South Korea and the U.S. to absorb more cherries, Thurlby said.

“Unfortunately, we have our promotional funding on the table in China and trying to guess what will happen tomorrow makes it tough to move our funding out of China and into other markets,” Thurlby said. “It’s safe to say we expect volume to be down in China this year.”

The Pacific Northwest shipped 3.2 million, 20-pound boxes of cherries to China in 2017, valued at approximately \$127 million. It was 13 percent of the crop.

Tom Riggan, general manager of Chelan Fresh Marketing in Chelan, said China is a good market but that he’s being very conservative about how much fruit he ships there now.

“Fruit has been detained. If they find any decay, they’re holding cherries for up to seven days to test it. If that continues there will be a serious reduction. We’re being very conservative. It’s a day-by-day deal,” Riggan said.

He said he hopes that, like before, a resolution is negotiated soon so the entire season to China is not damaged.

— Dan Wheat

ally well. I haven’t seen any rain was not very long in splits so far. I think it’s be- ration,” Griggs said. cause it stayed cool and the Longer rain followed by

hot weather swells and splits cherries, ruining them for market.

Thurlby said he was hearing more concern about wind than rain from growers throughout Central Washington.

Norm Gutzwiler, a Malaga grower south of Wenatchee, was preparing to start picking June 21 and he was having no trouble finding pickers because of those coming up from California.

Charles Lyall, a Mattawa grower, called labor “pretty decent with a few shortages.” He said he was able to pick most of his early varieties and Bing on time, struggled to get and keep pickers and had 130 domestics at his peak. He said he paid them 23 to 28 cents per pound. Griggs said he’s paying his H-2A and domestic pickers 33 cents per pound.

Lyall said while his early Chelans and Tietons were light at just 2.75 tons per acre, size was good 9- and 8-row and sold to Malaysia and China at \$85 per box.

“It was good, but not a home run. It will pay the bills. It was gorgeous fruit. I wished I’d had a bit more tonnage,” Lyall said.

He was finishing Bing harvest at a “sweet spot” of 6 tons per acre and in the \$22 to \$24 per box range on 11-row, a smaller size.

Lyall started harvest on June 3, just a day or two behind his neighbor, John Doebler, who was first in the Northwest.

Scenic designation for Nehalem River raises concerns

Certain changes to landscape within quarter-mile subject to one-year delay

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Oregon parks officials believe a portion of the Nehalem river qualifies as “scenic,” but potential restrictions have met with consternation from agriculture and local government representatives.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has completed a study concluding that 17.5 miles of the Nehalem river meets the criteria for scenic designation, such as free-flowing water, outstanding views and recreational opportunities.

The report was submitted on June 13 to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission, which oversees the agency and plans to vote on a “scenic” recommendation as early as November.

Restrictions meant to protect the natural features of scenic waterways can be problematic for landowners, particularly the requirement they notify OPRD at least one year before making certain changes to their property within a quarter-mile of the river.

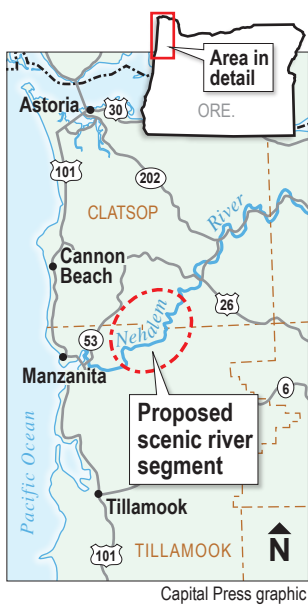
During that time, the landowner can negotiate with the agency over possible alternative plans or a sale of the property.

In the forested areas surrounding the Nehalem River, the primary concern would be delayed timber harvesting, which is already regulated under the Oregon Forest Practices Act, said Mary Anne Cooper, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

“It’s a complicated structure that’s on top of anything else,” she said.

Changes to roads or farm buildings may also be hindered by the requirement, Cooper said.

Though the rules for scenic rivers do make allowances for agriculture, the construction or modification of a structure — such as a pump-



Capital Press graphic

house — must be compatible with the surrounding aesthetics, she said.

Whether or not a design is visually obtrusive is a highly subjective question that could prove problematic for landowners, she said.

The scenic designation is also meant to protect river flows, potentially interfering with the development or transfer of new water rights, Cooper said.

The protections may have implications for water quality, which is already regulated under other laws for agriculture and forestry.

The Farm Bureau is also skeptical whether the 17.5 mile stretch actually meets the criteria for a scenic designation, since the landscape has long been managed, she said.

“There are homes and roads throughout the area, so it’s not really undisturbed,” she said.

Tillamook County’s Board of Commissioners has also come out against the scenic designation, arguing that restrictions on logging will violate the state government’s duty to generate revenues from property donated by the county.

“Although we support public uses on the Nehalem River ... we cannot support the proposed designation as it fails to take into account the primacy of timber production on properties which the County decided to the State decades ago,” according to a letter sent by the board.

Say ‘Cheese:’ Tillamook opens its new visitor center

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

TILLAMOOK, Ore. — MEMBERS of one of the Northwest’s largest dairy cooperatives, the Tillamook County Creamery Association, cut the ribbon to their new visitor center June 19 with fanfare that included politicians, employees and dairy farmers.

Eight-year-old Juliana McCoy traded in a day at camp for a visit to the grand opening with her mom that included a picture with Oregon Gov. Kate Brown. Her visit was sweetened with one of Tillamook’s famous ice cream cones, and in the visitor center’s Farm Room, Juliana tried to beat the average 21 seconds it takes a professional to prep a cow for milking.

“It was worth it,” Juliana declared.

Those activities, and more, are now open to the estimated 1.3 million visitors expected to walk through the doors of the new facility, better known as the Tillamook Cheese factory.

With \$778 million in gross revenues last year, the Tillamook County Creamery Association is the largest co-op in Oregon, employing nearly 900 people. Its approximately 90 farm families — mostly from the Tillamook area — own the cooperative and provide milk for the cheese, ice cream, yogurt and other products.

At the ribbon-cutting, Brown tossed out a question to the audience: “What’s the state drink?”



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Gov. Kate Brown joins Tillamook officials, member-farmers and guests in cutting the ribbon during the grand opening of the cooperative’s new visitor center Tuesday in Tillamook, Ore.



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Among the many attractions inside Tillamook’s new visitor center are informational displays and an observation area where guests can watch how the co-op’s cheese is made.

The front row of dairy farmers had the answer: “Milk!”

State Sen. Arnie Roblan praised dairy farmers for their commitment to the cooperative that has endured for more than 100 years. He jokingly suggested that the name of the new 38,500-square-foot center should be called “Are we there yet?” for the backseat questions excited children have asked on their way to Tillamook since the original

center opened in 1949.

As demand grew, the creamery’s board has expanded, remodeled and rebuilt the visitor center. It is one of the Northwest’s biggest attractions, rivaling Seattle’s Space Needle in the number of visitors it draws, according to association CEO Patrick Critser.

The new building opened to the public June 20, and is open each day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. through Labor Day, then 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. through

mid-June.

Inside the new building, visitors are greeted by pictures and displays of the Tillamook dairy’s history, which began when local farmers shipped their dairy products on the Morningstar, a two-masted ship built by residents to transport goods to Portland. The ship’s image adorns packages of Tillamook cheese and other products.

A staircase at the entryway leads to a long hallway divided into farm education rooms, a viewing gallery overlooking the cheese production facility and the popular cheese-tasting room.

Downstairs are roomy food halls and a marketplace. Visitors can order from three stations that feature yogurts, pastries, ice cream or cheesy meals and snack selections that can be eaten in the cafeteria or on an outside patio.

In the marketplace, visitors can take home cheese and other Tillamook products along with a wide variety of memorabilia.

Weekly fieldwork report

| Item/description (Source: USDA, NASS, NOAA) | Ore. | Wash. | Idaho | Calif. |
|--|--------------|----------------------|-----------|--------|
| • Days suitable for fieldwork (As of June 17) | 6.7 | 6.2 | 5.9 | 7 |
| • Topsoil moisture, surplus | 1% | 3% | 14% | 0 |
| • Topsoil moisture, percent short | 63% | 22% | 35% | 75% |
| • Subsoil moisture, surplus | 0 | 3% | 12% | 0 |
| • Subsoil moisture, percent short | 60% | 17% | 35% | 70% |
| • Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of June 19) | 33-40% below | Normal/ 40% below | 40% below | Normal |

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