

Apple growers expect smaller-than-average crop, good prices

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Washington state apple growers forecast a smaller-than-average crop this year with the potential to bring in good dollars.

Because the crop endured this summer’s scorching heat, it’s expected to initially weigh in around 8 million pounds below average. Many growers say they’re worried the heat waves may also have compromised fruits’ interiors, potentially shortening storage life. But the good news is that, so far, this year’s apples appear large and colorful, which should command high prices.

“Freight-on-board prices for major varieties look good — very strong right now,” said Brian Focht, manager of the Washington Apple Growers Marketing Association in Wenatchee.

In May, growers projected a crop



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press
Employees work on apple lines at McDougall & Sons Inc.

between 128 million to 135 million 40-pound boxes. After heat waves, the Washington State Tree Fruit Association offered the more modest prediction of 125 million boxes. At the Washington Apple Commission meeting Oct. 21, growers forecasted an even smaller crop, projecting it will weigh in at 120 million boxes in December.

The five-year average is 128.3 million boxes. The record, in 2014, was a 143.6 million-box crop.

Several growers predict that, because fruit may be internally damaged from heat, the crop may shrink from 120 million boxes to 113 million or 115 million boxes over the season.

“The biggest question for me is,

what’s the storability look like?” said Michael Roche, a fourth-generation grower.

Mark Stennes, another fourth-generation orchardist, agreed.

“My big question is just how these (apples) are going to store, you know, January, February, onwards with the heat we had,” said Stennes. “But at first glance, this looks like a really quality crop.”

Orchardists representing various growing regions consistently agreed that, whatever the future unknowns, the 2021 crop looks amazing right now.

Fruit sizing is better than expected.

“We thought we’d have small fruit. Well, we don’t have small fruit,” said Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission.

Growers say color is excellent. Grower Jorge Sanchez called this year’s color “phenomenal,” and

Jim Hazen said it’s “probably the best color we’ve ever seen across the board.”

Early-pick varieties performed worse this year. Most growers at the commission meeting said that, compared to last year’s numbers, they saw volume decreases in Honeycrisp, Gala, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious varieties. Volumes are generally on-target for Fujis, Cripps Pink and many proprietary varieties. Cosmic Crisps are up in volume, as are Granny Smiths.

Overall, most growers saw a 10% to 12% decrease in total crop volume compared to last year.

The domestic market looks strong. New York, Washington state’s top apple competitor, has an approximately average crop volume, while Michigan, the No. 2 competitor, is expected to harvest a 17.3% smaller crop than in 2020. That gives Washington good market positioning.

NW onion shipments down

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Northwest onion shipments are down, dragged by lower yields.

Prices are mixed, and favor big onions.

USDA’s Oct. 25 National Potato and Onion Market Report said Idaho and Malheur County, Ore., producers moved 5,887 loads for the season to date, down 36.7% from 9,304 a year ago. The Columbia Basin moved 8,663, down 9.6% from 9,584. A load is 400 hundredweight.

The report said a 50-pound sack of medium yellow Spanish hybrid onions from Idaho and Malheur County sold for \$5-6, mostly \$6. The year-earlier price was \$6-7.50, mostly \$7.

Medium yellow hybrid



National Onion Association
Northwest onion shipments are down on lower yields. Jumbos are fetching higher prices.

onions from the Columbia and Umatilla basins of

Washington and Oregon sold for \$6-7.50, mostly \$7. The year-earlier price was \$6.50-8, mostly \$7.

Prices for jumbo yellow hybrids are better. From Idaho and Malheur County, they sold for \$14-15, up from \$6-6.50 a year earlier. Columbia-Umatilla jumbos sold for \$12.50-14, mostly \$13. That’s up from \$6-7, mostly \$6-6.50.

“In the medium market, heat was a big story all summer long,” said Mick Davie, USDA Market News reporter in Idaho Falls. “Yields were down in both areas, and that is why shipments are down.”

Onions struggled to gain size in summer’s above-normal heat, “so there are more mediums out there,” he said. That’s pushing prices lower for mediums and higher for jumbos.

Prices for mediums have rebounded in the past seven to 10 days given the big price difference, Davie said Oct. 26.

As for load volume, packer-shippers “don’t have to run as hard because they don’t have the onions,” he said. And with a shorter crop, more available onions are used to fill contracts and fewer are shipped to open-market channels.

Meanwhile, transportation “is very difficult to come by,” Davie said.

Grant Kitamura, co-owner and general manager of Baker & Murakami Produce in Ontario, Ore., said onion shipping volumes probably won’t change much given the low supply, though prices could increase.

Kay Riley, general manager of Snake River Produce in Nyssa, Ore., said it would take substantial additional demand over the holidays to move prices for large onions much higher, but those high prices could boost demand for mediums.

USDA to invest in broadband access for rural communities

Capital Press

USDA will make available up to \$1.15 billion to expand access to high-speed internet in rural areas, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Oct. 22.

He also said \$50 million will be available for 105 rural distance learning and telemedicine projects.

“For too long, the ‘digital divide’ has left too many people living in rural communities behind, unable to compete in the global economy and unable to access the services and resources that all Americans need,” Vilsack said.

The investment is part of President Biden’s Build Back Better agenda by prioritizing economic growth in rural America.

“As we build back better than we were before, the actions I am announcing today will go a long way toward ensuring that people who live or work in rural areas are able to tap into the benefits of broadband, including access to specialized health care, educational opportunities and the global marketplace,” he said.

USDA will begin accepting applications on Nov. 24 for loans and grants to expand the availability of broadband in rural areas

through its ReConnect Program.

To be eligible for ReConnect Program funding, an applicant must serve an area without broadband service at required download and upload speeds and commit to building facilities capable of providing broadband service to every location in its proposed service area.

USDA will prioritize projects that will serve low-density rural areas with locations lacking internet access at required speeds.

USDA will also consider, among other things, the economic needs of the community to be served; the extent to which a provider will offer affordable service options; a project’s commitment to strong labor standards; and whether a project is serving tribal lands or is submitted by a local government, tribal government, nonprofit or cooperative.

USDA has simplified the application and has expanded the program significantly.

Applications must be submitted through USDA’s online application system.

To learn more about ReConnect Program eligibility, technical assistance and recent announcements, visit www.usda.gov/reconnect.

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VIN = 19UUA879EA003953
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VIN = KNDPBAC1G7844679
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VIN = KM8JUCAC4AU024052
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VIN = 1GCGF15T541182809
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VIN = 5NPD84LF4KH403258
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2016 CHRY TNC UT
VIN = 2C4RC1BG1GR214946
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2016 JEEP PATRIOT UT
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RAQUEL PIMENTEL & CASSANRA FISHER
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2005 TOYT TUN PK
VIN = 5TBRT381X55459806
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