

What's New in B.C.

SPOTLIGHT ON B.C.: APPLES AND CHERRIES

Canada's fruit industry has adapted well to our cold climate and short growing seasons. Southwest British Columbia enjoys about 180 frost-free days every year, and is one of the top two fruit producers of in the country. Our pristine agricultural resources have enabled B.C. growers to produce premium-quality fresh apples and cherries (HS code: 080810: Apples, Fresh; and HS code: 080920: Cherries; Sweet or Tart, Fresh) that are sought in markets as far away as Asia, Europe, South America, and the Middle East.

The tree fruit industry has been experiencing difficult economic times for a number of years, especially for traditional varieties of apples and soft fruit. Newer varieties have resulted in better prices and improved returns for growers. Many growers have adopted a new variety strategy as a way to improve profitability, as new varieties tend to sell at a price premium over older ones. Varieties such as Royal Gala, Fuji and Ambrosia commanded significant returns at their introduction and have continued to do so for a number of years after. Some cherry varieties such as Lapins, Skeena, Staccato and Sweetheart are highly successful. The industry is currently replanting new varieties at the rate of about 600 to 800 acres per year.

APPLES

In 2011, B.C. produced about 24% of the apples grown in Canada and was the third largest producer after Ontario and Quebec. The total marketed production from B.C. in 2009 was 96,614 metric tons with a farm gate value of C\$36.7 million. This represented about 26% of the national farm gate value of apples in 2011 (Statistics Canada).

About 60% of all planted land in B.C. orchards is planted apples. Nearly 92% of the apple crop is sold fresh with British Columbians consuming around 25% of the apples grown in B.C. The rest of the crop is processed, with apple juice being the most popular processed product.

Of the \$14.4 million in fresh apples exported from B.C., 74% went to the U.S. Out of the top 10 markets for B.C. apple exports, six are in Asia and two are in South America. There has been a significant decrease in B.C. apple exports since 2006, when B.C. exported \$28.1 million worth of fresh apples. That number went down to \$14.4 million in 2011.

B.C. apple growers, like most Canadian apple growers, have been experiencing falling incomes due to world oversupply, weather-related disasters, retailer consolidation and increased foreign competition, both in the domestic and export markets. Washington State is the biggest competitor, producing around 30 times more apples annually than B.C. due to its warmer growing climate. The oversupply of Washington state apples has forced prices below the cost of production. However, the market situation is changing as prices have improved from the low in 2009. The industry is responding with packinghouse cost saving measures that should increase grower returns in the long run.



CHERRIES



B.C. is the number one producer of sweet cherries in Canada, accounting for 87% of the planted acreage of the total sweet cherry production. B.C.'s marketed production of sweet cherries was 9,370 metric tons in 2011, with a farm gate value of C\$30.8 million. This represents 93% of production in Canada and over 93% of the national sweet cherry crop farm gate value.

Canada's sweet cherry area expanded 30.4% since 2006 to 4,178 acres in 2011. Of this acreage, B.C. accounted for 86.6%. 97% of the sweet cherry crop is sold fresh; the rest of the crop is processed.

The main varieties grown in B.C. are Bing, Lambert, Van, Lapins and Sweetheart. Newer varieties like Sweethearts are late harvest varieties, which are receiving high returns in eastern and offshore markets.

In 2011, Canada as a whole exported \$42 million worth of cherries. B.C. was responsible for almost 95% of these exports, totalling \$39.98 million. Hong Kong, U.S. and Taiwan are the top three markets. Of the top 10 markets for B.C. cherry exports, five are in Europe and another four are in Asia. Exports have experienced significant growth since 2006, when B.C. exported \$18 million worth of cherries. That number has more than doubled to almost \$40 million in 2011.

Fresh food statistics from Euromonitor International show that global volume sales of fresh cherries rose by 17% over the 2006-2011 review period, outperforming other high-end fresh fruit "treats" like strawberries and grapes. In 2011, cherries emerged as the second most dynamic fresh fruit category, achieving a 4% volume gain, ahead of cranberries and blueberries.

To learn more about the Canadian fruit industry, please consult the following Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada industry report: www4.agr.gc.ca/AAFC-AAC/display-afficher.do?id=1294265926815&lang=eng.

MEDIA MONITORING

B.C. growers replant with tastier, crunchier varieties

Vancouver Sun – May 2012

Old lunch-box favourites such as the McIntosh that many of us grew up with could be a lot harder to find on store shelves over the next decade as the trend to plant sexier varieties of apples grows.

Sleeker, crunchier and tastier apples such as Ambrosia, Gala and Honeycrisp have replaced the softer, mealy types like McIntosh, Spartan and Red Delicious as the top sellers, says Nick Ibuki, a horticulture research technician with the Okanagan Plant Improvement Corporation.

Just as the McIntosh once replaced the 1950s-era Spartan as the most-popular apple, now it looks as though the Ambrosia has knocked out McIntosh for top spot in the fruit bowl.

To find out more, please visit: www.vancouversun.com/news/growers+replant+with+tastier+crunchier+varieties/6670282/story.html.

Big cherry crop expected

Kelowna Capital News – May 2012

Close to ideal winter and spring weather conditions should result in a large crop of cherries this year, reports Hank Markgraf, B.C. Tree Fruits (BCTF) senior field advisor. "We were lucky we didn't experience any of the frost issues that other parts of Canada did," he commented.

A fairly mild winter and a long blooming period with little in the way of freezing temperatures during bloom point to a good season which may be early as well.

He is forecasting BCTF will see eight million pounds of the sweet little red fruits, nearly double that of the previous year, when a late, cool spring created some hardship for growers.

For more information, please visit: www.kelownacapnews.com/news/151961265.html.

EXPLORING URBAN CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR APPLE CULTIVARS

What does it take to breed a best-selling apple variety? Scientists at the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre (PARC) in Summerland, B.C., are collaborating with industry to find the answers, and have come up with some interesting market research along the way.

For example, PARC scientists conducted research at the 2010 Apple Festival at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver to explore apple preferences among urban consumers of different ages, genders, and ethnicities. Three apple varieties were evaluated for their taste and appearance: Ambrosia, Honeycrisp, and the as yet unnamed SPA 493 variety, which was developed by the PARC apple breeding program. (The SPA 493 apple will be named at the 2012 UBC Apple Festival in the Fall.)

A total of 1,182 consumers successfully completed the demographic survey, taste, and visual assessments. The “sweet” and “tart” apple preferences of the participants were also noted. Statistical analysis was conducted for the European and Asian sub-groups only, due to insufficient sample sizes on all other ethnic groups. Eighty-eight percent of Asian consumers identified that they usually ate “sweet” apples while European consumers identified that they ate both “sweet” and “tart” apples.

Consumers who usually ate “sweet” apples gave significantly higher scores for the “sweet” apple (Ambrosia) than the other two apples. Likewise, consumers who usually ate “tart” apples rated the “tart” apple (SPA 493) significantly higher than the other apples. Both consumer groups rated the neutral Honeycrisp apple least. Both the red Ambrosia and SPA 493 apples scored high on their appearances, while the Honeycrisp’s green colour scored lower, likely due to a perceived association between green apples and sour taste.

This research, conducted under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Developing Innovative Agri-Products program, is the first of its kind to document ethnic, age, gender, and choice differences among consumers in an urban market. It will be used to assist industry to understand and more appropriately market apples to their consumers.

The apple breeding program at PARC Summerland began in 1924. The program continues to focus exclusively on traditional breeding methods that have produced some of the world’s most popular apples. The ultimate goal is to provide high quality apple cultivars for Canadian apple growers with attributes such as high fruit quality, high yields, disease resistance, distinctive appearance and flavour, and good storage and shelf life. It takes 20 years to develop each new variety.

To view the full report (Report on Urban Consumer Preferences for Apples, Dec 10, 2010), please visit: www.picocorp.com/research_and_development.

For more information, please contact the BC Regional office at 604-666-6344 or email: atsbc@agr.gc.ca.
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