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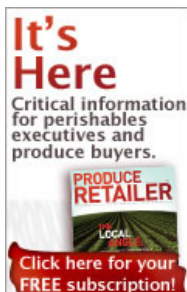
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Crops & Markets

Washington apple volumes near record highs

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Industry officials continue to anticipate early finishes on apple supplies in New York and Michigan, while Washington makes up for the shortages in the East and Midwest with record volumes.

Apple supplies in New York will wind down before June, said Jim Allen, president of the Fishers-based New York Apple Association.

Michigan apple shippers will finish sometime between April and June, compared with last year's finish at the end of July, said Denise Donohue, executive director of the Lansing-based Michigan Apple Committee.

On the other hand, Washington is close to setting record volumes.

According to a March 4 storage report by the Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association, the shipping estimate for the state is just under 108 million boxes — close to the record-setting 2008-09 season at 108.3 million boxes. About 103 million boxes shipped last season.

The state is also getting more packs per bin on red delicious and galas than expected, said Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager for Yakima-based Domex Superfresh Growers.

For Superfresh Growers, volumes are at record levels, Queen said. The company saw record shipments in February.

"We've never seen movement like this really before," Queen said.

Superfresh Growers expects to wind down on galas in July. The company has year-round supplies of fuji, golden delicious, granny smith and red delicious. Braeburn, Cameo, Honeycrisp, Honeyspice, jonagold and Pink Lady, will finish between March and the end of May.

Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, Wash., has surpassed company shipping estimates, said Roger Pepperl, marketing director.

Stemilt expects to have key varieties — red and golden delicious, granny smith and Pink Lady — into late spring and summer.

The shortages from the East and Midwest have created earlier than normal demand for Washington growers, said Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Yakima, Wash.-based Rainier Fruit Co.

Rainier has the volume to pick up the demand, Wolter said. The company will have a normal year-round supply of golden delicious, granny smiths and fuji. Gala supplies will continue into July.

"For retailers that want to stay with domestic product, it's available," Wolter said.

Sage Fruit Co., Yakima, Wash., also saw earlier than usual demand compared with last year, especially on bags, said Kevin Steiner, marketing director.

The company expects steady supplies to continue through spring and summer, Steiner said.

As spring nears Queen expects the market to tighten.

"Prices are going to continue to escalate as some of our larger fruit becomes more scarce," he said. "People will trade down in size a bit to get what they need on their shelves."

Steiner also expects markets to rise as retailers clean up crops in the East and Midwest and place demand on the West.

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Stemilt is moving into its longer-term storage fruit and shipping some of its best apples, Pepperl said.

"The apples coming out this spring are some of our first pick," he said.

Queen said Superfresh Growers was initially concerned that it would have a lot of smaller fruit, but the crop turned out to be larger than expected.

"Eating quality is terrific," he said. "There's lots of good, sweet fruit."



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