

AGRICULTURE 2025

State apple crops stabilized in 2024 at 124 million boxes

WASHINGTON state's 2024 apple crop showcased a return to stability, with growers producing an estimated 124 million 40-pound boxes of apples.

This figure marks a 9% decline compared to 2023, signaling a shift toward more typical production levels after recent years of dramatic fluctuations.

As always, the diversity of apple varieties grown in Washington continues to captivate consumers worldwide. Leading the pack, Gala apples accounted for nearly 19% of the state's total production. Close behind were Granny Smith apples at 14.5%, followed by Red Delicious (13%) and Honeycrisp (12%).

One rising star in the apple world, the Cosmic Crisp, saw its production grow to around 12 million boxes—a significant jump that now represents 9% of the state's crop.

Known for its crisp texture and sweet-tart flavor, this variety has gained traction in both domestic and international markets since its debut just a few years ago.

The quality of this year's apples was particularly noteworthy.

Favorable weather conditions, including cooler nights as the harvest approached, contributed to vibrant coloring and enhanced flavor profiles across multiple varieties. However, the hot summer months—especially in July and August—led to smaller fruit sizes in some varieties, notably Honeycrisp.

Despite this, medium-sized apples have remained in high demand among consumers, ensuring strong marketability.

Labor continues to be an issue for Washington's apple industry.

Rising wages, coupled with agricultural overtime regulations, have increased costs for growers. Many are turning to automation and other



The 2024 Washington state apple crop saw a stable return.

technologies to offset these challenges, particularly in harvesting and packing.

Washington apples are a cornerstone of both the state's economy and its identity.

As the largest apple-producing state in the country, the state's fruit is exported worldwide, with top international markets including Mexico, Canada, and several Asian countries.

This global demand shows the importance of adaptability within the industry, ensuring that Washington apples remain a favorite among consumers everywhere.

Cherries

The state's cherry season was successful.

From the sweet Bing to the

tasty Rainier, Washington state cherries once again proved why they're a summer favorite.

The harvest, estimated at 17 to 18 million 20-pound boxes, highlighted the state's reputation as the nation's top cherry producer.

The season began in early June, a little ahead of schedule, thanks to a mild spring

that created optimal growing conditions. Growers reported excellent pollination and fruit development.

Among the season's stars were Bing cherries, known for their deep red color and intense sweetness, which hit their peak in mid-June.

Rainier cherries, a premium

variety known for their golden hue with a blush of red, followed closely behind. Other top varieties, such as the tart-sweet Chelan and dark, firm Skeena cherries, rounded out the offerings, giving consumers a wide selection of flavors and textures to enjoy.

Lapins brought late-season sweetness to the table, while

sweethearts and Regina cherries extended the season into late July, despite some setbacks.

A January freeze impacted trees in higher elevations, limiting the late-season harvest in certain areas.

Washington's cherry farmers also benefited from minimal overlap with California's harvest, allowing their fruit to dominate the market during peak summer months.

Pears

The state's total pear production last year is estimated at 10.6 million boxes, which is down about 31% from the five-year average. Industry

Trees didn't produce as many blossoms, due in part to a cold January, which damaged or killed them because of freezing weather.

Washington is the nation's largest producer of pears, growing nearly half of the U.S. supply. This year's harvest brought a broad array of pear varieties, including the classic Bartlett, Bosc, Anjou (both Green and Red), and Comice, alongside specialty varieties like Seckel and Forelle.

Among the first to be harvested were Bartlett pears. Following closely behind were the Bosc pears, which have a firm, slightly spicy texture that's perfect for cooking and baking. The Anjou varieties, which come in both green and red forms, offer a well-rounded sweetness that makes them perfect for a variety of uses.

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Farmers want agritourism law reforms

MARY FEUSNER
Washington State Journal

OLYMPIA — Farmers across the state say regulations are getting in the way as they develop products they can sell directly to the public.



Warnick

From pumpkin patches to u-pick berry farms, the impacts are real, a state panel was told Jan. 16.

industry to supplement our income, we wouldn't be able to make it," said Robby Rutledge, owner of Rutledge Family Farms in Tumwater.

To carve out new rules, Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, introduced Senate Bill 5055.

The bill establishes new zoning laws for all farms, which in turn would lower property taxes. The bill also allows farmers to repurpose areas of land unsuitable for agricultural use and remove commercial standards now in place for agritourism. It would also allow agritourism venues to receive beer and wine licenses.

Hilary Jensen, president of Jensen Farms in Kittitas County, said the state issued a cease-and-desist order in October 2016 during the height of her pumpkin selling season. The order said the farm was operating illegally because buildings were approved for residential use only. Jensen had to apply for a commercial building permit and retrofit the buildings to sell pumpkins legally.

"It cost \$6,000 to do all that at a time when I was only open eight to 10 days out of the year," said Jensen.

Keith Stocker, president of

Stocker Farms in Snohomish, said this year his family could not have survived off the commercial market price for blueberries. If Stocker had sold to canneries they would have received 68 cents a pound. Instead, with a u-pick operation at the farm, they were able to make \$3.25 a pound.

According to the Washington State Department of Commerce, agriculture and food manufacturing operations support more than 171,000 jobs in the state of Washington. The industry is responsible for over \$21 billion in revenue each year.

Increasing prices and less beef predicted for 2025

REFLECTING ON 2024, cattle inventories continued to decline despite expectations that many producers might retain cattle and focus on rebuilding.

Total 2024 beef production are forecasted to show an increase of 0.3% year over year, as opposed to initial estimates of a 3%-4% reduction. Beef production was bolstered by

higher-than-expected slaughter rates and larger carcass weights.

In 2024, carcasses averaged nearly 20 pounds heavier than the previous year. Despite ongoing concerns about reduced demand, retail beef prices increased by 3.5% year over year.

The ban on importing live cattle from Mexico into the U.S. due to New World Screwworm

(NWS) remains ongoing as the two countries work to set up quarantine procedures.

Highlighting the extent of the impact, USDA lowered their quarterly 2025 beef production forecast into quarter four 2025. When cattle prices in the Southern Plains increased more than \$15 per cwt during the month of December, the USDA also responded by

increasing their 2025 cattle price forecast.

Beef production for 2025 is forecasted at 25.6 billion pounds, down 5% from the previous year. Cattle prices are forecasted to modestly increase, while domestic beef consumption is expected to decrease by 3.5% largely due to less beef production and higher prices.

Report: Wine sales may be nearing a bottom

RECENT DATA SUPPORTS that wine sales are on track to have declined again in 2024, but the rate of change has slowed. Some think the industry may be nearing a

bottom with markets returning to near normal conditions following the pandemic's off-premise and direct-to-consumer sales boom.

Despite some optimism,

wine inventory levels remain elevated and demand down. It will likely take another three to five years for the industry to balance supply with demand. The lower value wine market

continues to be the most challenged, but there are reports of wineries achieving success in the \$40 / bottle range as well as the premium and ultra-premium categories. There has also been some success in accessing non-traditional markets such as airlines.

This harvest season saw generally good quality fruit, average yields in Oregon and Washington. In California and Washington, there are numerous reports of growers considering or actively removing acres and/or utilizing minimal inputs. Reducing inputs could have longer term implications for productivity and/or costs. While values have held relatively constant, transaction levels are flat to down.

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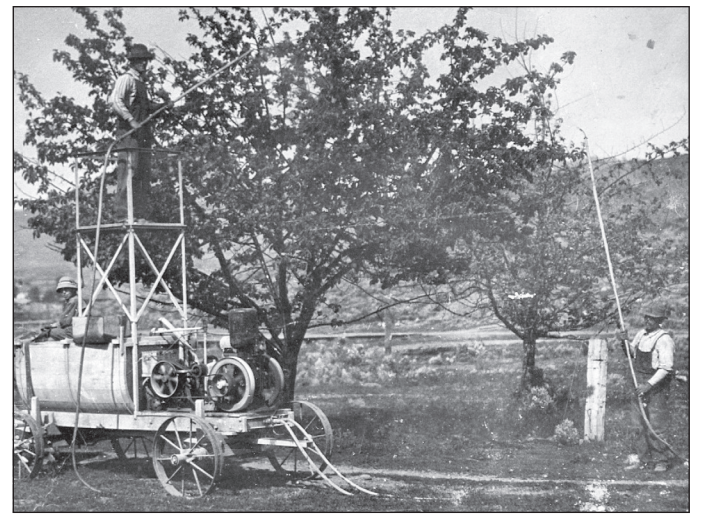
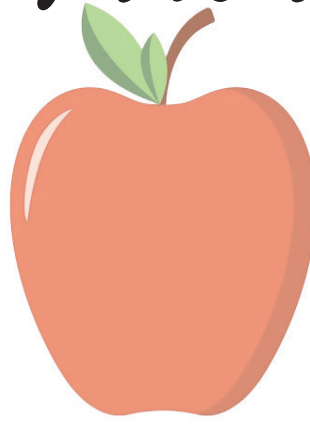
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Goods wait to be shipped from Okanogan in the early 1900s.

AGRICULTURE Through the Years



FRANK S. MATSURA | Okanogan County Historical Society
Unidentified men spray an apple tree in the Okanogan area.



H.S. ALBERTSON
Donald H. Eaton (from left), Cashmere, and Mr. Albertson and his son pause along an irrigation ditch on Pogue Flat near Omak around 1916. Omak Mountain shows in the background. Eaton, later father of Okanogan resident Dee Camp, and his mother and brother were visiting the Albertson family.



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A farmer prepares to ship a load of apples in the 1950s.

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GUEST COLUMN

Why Washington state-grown food is facing a crisis

EVEN THOUGH locally- and regional- ly-grown food is celebrated in Washington state, the reality is that fewer and fewer types of crops are being grown in the state, particularly west of the Cascades. But if more and more people are wanting food grown close to home, why are crops that have been grown in the state for generations - like asparagus, strawberries, and barley - continuing to dwindle and disappear here? It's certainly not because



DILLON HONCOOP

of an inability to grow them in Washington. The range of climates and soils across the state can grow just about any kind of food, aside from things like tropical fruits. Washington's agricultural economy has always been dominated by a long list of specialty crops. But for a crop to be produced anywhere, it takes more than just the possibility of growing it. Jay Gordon, a sixth-generation Southwest Washington farmer, explained the ugly truth about why the list of crops grown in the state continues to dwindle, and how decisions in Olympia contribute to the decline. Gordon, who also serves as policy director for the Washington State Dairy Federation,

said the problem often is the loss of infrastructure, like canneries and mills, that it takes to process, package, store and sell those crops to a large population. "When you not just lose the processors, but lose that infrastructure because the processor's saying, 'Look, I'm outta here, and I don't want to compete against my own assets, so I'm going to bulldoze them,' it's really concerning, it's just hard to see getting that back," he said. As the costs to grow and process food in Washington state continue to skyrocket, thanks in part to regulatory and tax burdens from Olympia, many food companies are finding it hard to remain profitable here, according

to Gordon. So they move to other parts of the country, or even offshore, where land, labor, fuel, and many other inputs are much less expensive. And Gordon said when they depart, they don't want to leave behind a facility that one of their competitors could potentially buy and use, so they remove their equipment and flatten the facility before leaving. A recent casualty of this struggle is the Great Western Malt Mill in Vancouver, Wash., Gordon said. He had been one of a group of local farmers growing barley for the mill, but the closure's left him trying to figure out what crop to switch to, as his options continue to dwindle.

Gordon listed several different companies across the state making similar moves, affecting tens of thousands of acres of crops. "When you see five, six, seven, eight, nine old businesses shutting down over the last year and a half (to) two years, that's kind of a trend line, that's not the right direction," said Gordon. He points to Washington's 2021 Climate Commitment Act as another cost burden for companies that's accelerating this harmful trend. Gordon said that if new regulatory costs like the CCA's carbon tax create a situation where it's easier for companies to leave rather than be able to innovate to meet new standards, not only does the

region lose, but ultimately so does the climate. Gordon's hope is to raise awareness of the issue among lawmakers in Olympia to encourage a different approach to regulating the regional food system that encourages positive changes without causing the loss of infrastructure and diverse food crops. "Really what the Climate Commitment Act should be doing is sending a signal not to run, but to invest and innovate," said Gordon.

DILLON HONCOOP is the communications director at Save Family Farming, a Whatcom County-based organization dedicated to advocating for family farmers. For more information, see savefamilyfarming.org.

Horticulture meeting at a glance

Feb. 6 Okanogan County Fairgrounds Agriplex

OKANOGAN — Orchardists and others in the tree fruit industry can learn about growing, pest management and other topics during the annual Okanogan County Horticultural Association meeting Feb. 6.

The event starts at 9 a.m. in the Okanogan County Fairgrounds Agriplex, 175 Rodeo Trail.

Three state pesticide education certification credits will be awarded to those attending the day's programs.

9 a.m. Fire blight

Tianna DuPont, WSU Extension

The latest updates on fire blight research from a multi-state project.

9:30 a.m. Organic preharvest fungicides

Achour Amiri, WSU

Amiri will address preharvest key infection times and provide an update on the efficacy of tools available in organic

10 a.m. Apple Maggot Update

Will Carpenter, Pest Board

10:10 a.m. Break

10:30 AM Codling moth management reminders

Dani Gray, WSU Extension
Remove sources: wild trees, bin piles, unpruned pollinizers. Mating disruptions works by delaying mating. Coverage

10:55 a.m. Avoiding resistance in organic codling moth management

Tobin Northfield, WSU Entomology
Rotations. Numbers of virus applications.

11:20 a.m. New codling moth tools

Betsy Beers, WSU Entomology
Efficacy information on new codling moth products.

11:40 a.m. Mating Disruption

Glen Thayer, Pacific BioAg
Importance of point sources. How hand applied vs aerosols work. Using combinations of hand applied and aerosols in hot spots.

12:10 p.m. Lunch -

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1:40 p.m. Apple and cherry fertility: getting the best bang for your buck

Bernardita Sallato, WSU Extension

2:20 p.m. Transitioning to organic panel

Jeff Lutz, Farm Bureau

3:00 p.m. Policy update

Jeff Lutz, Farm Bureau

3:20 p.m. Closing and pesticide credits

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Right: new 600 horsepower irrigation pump

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