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NORTHWEST CHERRY GROWERS EXPECT A HIGH QUALITY CROP OF SWEET CHERRIES

YAKIMA, Wash. – With cherry harvest beginning in just a couple of weeks, the Northwest Cherry Growers are predicting a high quality crop of large, sweet fruit.

Based on weather conditions in the Pacific Northwest, growers are expecting early season varieties to begin coming in a few days earlier than usual, possibly around June 1, with the crop expecting to peak the last week in June. An increase in the production of later season cherries, though – a trend similar to the 2006 crop – will likely result in a more consistent availability of cherries throughout the season, with availability expected through mid-August.

“Over the last few seasons, growers have been planting more late season varieties so we expect to have a steady volume of fruit starting in early to mid-June and continuing through the first part of August,” said B.J. Thurlby, president of the Washington State Fruit Commission.

If warm weather continues, cherry growers expect a large crop in the range of 150,000 tons. In addition to the most popular variety, Bing cherries, growers expect an increase of more than 10 percent in the volume of Rainier cherries, a very popular variety generally available from late June through early August.

Cherries are a delicate, labor-intensive fruit and only a few places in the world have the right combination of climate and soil conditions to grow them. As such, they are one of the few remaining truly seasonal fruits.

“There’s a very small window of opportunity for buying Northwest cherries and then they’re gone for another year,” Thurlby said. “Consumers should start looking for cherries in early June, just in time to kick off summer in style.”

More than 2,500 growers from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and Montana work year-round to produce the region’s famous fruit. Growers from these states had been selling their prize cherries for more than 100 years before they officially created the Northwest Cherry Growers in 1947. Today, the United States is a world leader in the production of sweet cherries with more than 70 percent coming from Northwest Cherry Growers.

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