



FRESHVIEW
Foods Ltd

Crop report - December

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The latest updates on the marketplace to help plan menus, what to look forward to and what to avoid.

Spanish overview

Most winter crops have been delayed by later plantings taking place because of the heat waves in Spain. This is proving a challenging overlapping period for some product lines from UK local crops and from the Continent which are also almost finished. This is keeping prices for most products rather high.

Potatoes

Storms hit potato harvest

Floods have taken their toll on UK potato production with the crop set to be one of the smallest on record. Expect prices to rise.

Storm Babet has taken its toll on those harvesting potato crops.

Sandy McGowan, managing director at potato breeders Cygnet Pep, based in Tayside, said: "Our growers had lifted about 85 per cent of their seed potatoes before Storm Babet arrived and harvesting has been very difficult since then.

The Yorkshire potato crop is 80 per cent cleared, according to Rufus Pilgrim, managing director at ware potato supplier R S Cockerill based near York, with removing the last 20 per cent proving very challenging.

"Some of the ground was already very wet, but then there was as much as 130mm of rain in 48 hours, so a lot of water is still not going anywhere. Potatoes on lighter soils in the Vale of York should get cleared, but growers on heavier outlying areas will definitely have their challenges," he said.

There are no official estimates on the area of potato crops planted in the UK this year. But it is likely that pressure on profitability last year led to a 10 per cent reduction on the 2022 area taking it to 103,500 hectares, according to newsletter World Potato Markets.

Average five-year yields of 44.2 tonnes/hectare would have resulted in a 4.575 million tonne crop, but average performance is more likely to have been at 40t/ha, which would be a 4.14mt crop. That would be the smallest on record following the drought-impacted crops of 1975, at 4.542mt and 1976 4.777mt and the rain-affected 2012 crop 4.658mt. As recently as 2017, 6.2mt of potatoes were produced in the UK and in the 1990s crops of more than 7mt were regularly harvested.

British Growers Association CEO Jack Ward last month that potato production has dropped by nearly a million tonnes in a year – equating to around 20% of total potato output, according to government data – because growers have "just said 'we're not doing it'"

The decline in British potato growing has meant that imports of frozen chips or fries has reached record levels, providing massive returns for the mainly Belgian and Dutch companies supplying them. In the year to August 2023 the UK imported 825,000 tonnes of frozen potato products, 13 per cent more than the year before. The value of that trade was up 53 per cent to £940 million.

Vegetables

Cabbage:

Red and white cabbage

This is still in good supply and excellent quality. Smaller sizes are becoming more scarce and pushing the price up. After Christmas we can expect the average size across the board to increase.

Spring and savoy cabbage and sprouts

All still coming through in excellent quality with no foreseen issues. Prices remain stable.

Leeks

Leeks remain stable in terms of quality, supply and price limited availability continues, the recent weather and rain has made it more challenging. Prices are still high and will remain similar next week as the Spanish are just yet starting but very limited quantity.

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Broccoli

This will be Spanish, most of the UK has finished, a lot has been ruined by the heavy rains in October and November.

Cauliflower

This will be a mixture of UK, French and Spanish all depending on the weather. A lot of heavy rain in the UK and France has damaged/delayed a lot of crops.

Courgettes

After recent warmer weather a few weeks ago production increased slightly, the yield has since dropped over the past few weeks as the temperatures have become cooler. This is good and in favour of the crops but has affected volume. Prices have been increasing as a result, the quality is very good.

Fruit

Stonefruit:

Plums

Spanish plums will finish early December and we will move over to South African fruit. Prices will rise and the fruit is a little smaller.

Peach/Nectarine/Apricot

We will also have available South African peach and nectarine, like the plums prices will be higher and the sizes will be smaller.



Citrus

Italian blood oranges – should be starting at some point in December, The dark flesh colour is due to the presence of anthocyanins, a family of polyphenol pigments common to

many flowers and fruit, but uncommon in citrus fruits The flesh develops its characteristic red colour when the fruit develops with low temperatures during the night.

Sometimes, dark colouring is seen on the exterior of the rind as well. This depends on the variety of blood orange. The skin can be tougher and harder to peel than that of other oranges. Blood oranges have a unique flavour compared to other oranges, being distinctly raspberry - like in addition to the usual citrus notes. The anthocyanin pigments of blood oranges begin accumulating in the vesicles at the edges of the segments, and at the blossom end of the fruit, and continue accumulating in cold storage after harvest.



Seville oranges or Bitter orange, sour orange, bigarade orange, or marmalade orange

Will be available at the end of December. This is a short season and only last a few weeks. Further info below.

Grapes

Grapes are typically high priced at this time of year as we are between seasons and waiting for the further afield from South Africa/Namibia fruit to start.

Salad

Beef tomatoes

Still relying mainly on whatever production is left from Holland and Belgium as there is hardly anything else yet available from the winter country sources. This tomato

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types of varieties take also a longer period to produce from planting to picking which is approximately around 110/120 days, which is 20/30 days more than any other tomato variety.

Plum tomatoes

More of the same as reported last week since there is hardly any production left in Holland while Spain and Morocco are also still far away from having decent volume becoming available.

Standard loose round tomatoes

No changes, limited volume as more customers keep switching over to Spanish and Moroccan whilst Holland and Belgium are almost finished. This is having a detrimental impact in the market as prices are rather high and will continue for the next few weeks.

Cucumber

The situation is not just yet improving since there is very limited volume left out of Holland and local UK production that is also quickly deteriorating considering the crops are very much finished as well as the Spanish are yet far from starting full production. Strong demand whilst overlapping have increased the prices further across all sizes due to the fact there is not yet sufficient volume to meet demand.

We expect prices to remain strong next week and for production to steadily keep improving the week after next but not in any considerable amount.

The Moroccan production similarly has if anything dropped back from having better volumes two weeks ago.

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Buyers Choice – Seville Orange (daidai, Taitai, Malaga bitter)



From its region of origin in south-east China and northern Burma, the sour orange spread through Japan and India. With the expansion of the Arab Empire in the Near East, sour oranges were planted throughout the region, eventually along the east and north coasts of Africa, and in south- ern Spain during the tenth century and well ahead of the sweet orange in 1450. Sour or bitter oranges are of course both sour and bitter, the former due to the highly acidic juice and the latter to the bitter compound neo- hesperidin.

Seville orange is probably best known for its fruit, used especially for the manufacture of marmalade. However, although there are other uses for extracts from the fruit for flavouring soft drinks and liqueurs such as Cointreau and Curaçao, it is for its importance as a rootstock that sour orange is best known to citriculturists.

The tree has a more upright growth habit and is thornier than the sweet orange. Moreover, it is more cold-hardy and can withstand adverse environmental conditions far better. It makes a hand- some specimen tree, producing abundant fragrant fruit which are capable of hanging on the tree for many months. Sour orange flowers are used in the manufacture of oil of neroli which is used in the perfume industry. The leaves are also crushed and the oil of petitgrain is distilled from them.

This fruit is prized for making British orange marmalade, being higher in pectin than the sweet orange, and therefore giving a better set and a higher yield. Once a year, oranges of this variety are collected from trees in Seville, hence their name. The fruit is round in shape but slightly flattened and depressed at the ends and with a thick, slightly rough ring of uneven texture. The leaves are also crushed which creates a pleasant aroma and oil of petitgrain is distilled from them.