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EU expecting apple crop of 12m tonnes



Largest production for more than a decade presents new challenge for marketers in light of Russian import ban

Europe will produce its largest apple crop in more than a decade this season, it has been revealed, making the task of finding room in the market for the fruit even more challenging in the light of Russia's decision to shut the door on imported fresh produce from Europe and the US.

Forecast at just below 12m tonnes, the crop will be 9 per cent higher compared with last year and 12 per cent more than the three-year average, while pear volumes are set to fall by 2 per cent year on year to 2.27m tonnes.

The figures, issued by the World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA) at this year's annual Prognosfruit conference in Istanbul, suggest there will be even greater pressure on the market following Russia's recent decision to ban imports of fruit including apples from EU countries including Poland as well as the US – although delegates attending the conference did suggest a sizeable downturn in the Turkish, Balkan and

other southern European apple and pear crops could help ease the situation.

"Despite a number of market uncertainties due to the tense international geopolitical situation, the European sector is committed to address any market access challenges and at the same time to explore new opportunities within emerging markets or markets with reduced availability," a spokesperson for WAPA said.

Poland itself is set to produce a crop of 3.54m tonnes this year, 12 per cent more than in 2013, while Italy will see a similar rise to 2.39m tonnes. Russia itself is anticipating a 4 per cent increase in domestic apple volumes, with neighbouring Ukraine due to have 10 per cent more fruit.

Russia is the world's largest apple importer, so the impact of what looks set to be at least a year-long blockade could be massive, with prices expected to fall as a result.

In the US, two of the country's major apple-growing states have also forecast large crops for 2014, contributing to an overall 11 per cent rise in forecast production: Washington said it was expecting to produce a **record volume**, while New York's production will be **above the five-year average**.

Among the other major Northern Hemisphere apple sources, only China (-7 per cent), Turkey (-24 per cent) and the Balkans (-31 per cent) are going to see a significant fall in production.

As far as specific varieties are concerned, WAPA said Golden Delicious production would increase by 2 per cent to 2.59m tonnes; Gala by 7 per cent to 1.29m tonnes; Idared by 4 per cent to 1.10m tonnes and Red Delicious by 6 per cent to 635,000 tonnes.

As for pears, production of the Conference variety will decrease by 1 per cent to 889,000 tonnes, Abate Fetel will increase by 17 per cent to 356,000 tonnes,

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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and William BC will fall 9 per cent to 256,000 tonnes.

Elsewhere in the Northern Hemisphere, pear crops have either grown compared to last year, such as in the US (+0.3 per cent), Russia (+4 per cent) and Ukraine (+2 per cent), or shrunk, such as in China (-4 per cent) and Turkey (-29 per cent).

In the balance

In a statement, WAPA said experts attending Prognosfruit 2014 were of the view that Europe's new crop would be nicely balanced when taking into account the larger crop in the northern and central part of the EU but with a lower crop in some southern EU Member States, the Balkans and Turkey.

"The coming season could consequently start on a positive note with very importantly no overlap of stocks from last season," the group said.

Indications suggest that excellent climatic conditions across Europe at various critical times in the growing season have combined to produce outstanding quality and maturity in EU apples and pears.

"Sizes are larger than previous seasons," WAPA reported, "with fewer counts to be sold. Experts report that the crop will be one week earlier compared to average picking date and almost three weeks earlier compared to last year. This will have the effect of extending the marketing season."

The high quality of the crop will provide strong marketing advantages to gain new customers and consumers, agreed Daniel Sauvaitre, vice-president of WAPA and Hans Van Es, chair of the Prognosfruit Coordination Committee:

"The larger crop will offer some growth opportunities with all varieties and the outstanding quality of both apples and pears this season will match consumers' expectations," they said.

"It will also allow the European industries to explore new markets around the world resulting in a strengthened position of European apples and pears on international markets."

More than 260 representatives of the international apple and pear sector are currently in Istanbul for what is the 38th annual Prognosfruit Conference.