Heat is on for Dutch apples and pears

With additional watering, production of both major topfruit categories is expected to increase in the Netherlands

Dutch apple and pear producers are expecting an earlier start to the new season, as well as larger crops thanks to an increase in production area for pears and, in the case of apples, a recovery from last spring's untimely frost.

According to figures from Dutch growers association NFO and the Fresh Produce Centre, fruit currently on the trees has withstood this summer's especially dry conditions thanks to extra watering, and harvesting should begin around a week earlier than last year.

The groups forecast an apple crop around 259,000 tonnes and a pear crop around 398,000 tonnes. The available volume of Conference, the variety that makes up almost 80 per cent of the Netherlands' pear production, is expected to be in the region of 312,000 tonnes.

"Despite the drought, growers of apples and pears expect a good harvest this year," said a spokesperson for the Fresh Produce Centre. "By giving them extra water, apples and pears have not generally suffered much from the drought so far."

They added: "The end result is of course only known at the end of August when the harvest starts."

This year's production is said to be of good quality and should offer "excellent" taste as a result of the many hours of sunshine witnessed during the past few months.

"There is also little hail damage so far," the spokesperson continued. "It is important, however, that the fruit trees can continue to receive sufficient water until the harvest.

Compared with last year, both topfruit crops will be larger, although that is largely because of how a late frost in the spring of 2017 hampered the subsequent harvest.

"A better comparison can be made with the 2016 harvest year. This shows that the total apple production in 2018 will be lower than in 2016 due to a smaller area."

This year, pear production has exceeded the 10,000ha-mark, according to figures from Statistics Netherlands, with planted area for Conference up 5 per cent year on year.

The area taken up by apple trees, meanwhile, has continued to decline and is now around 6,710ha.

With a share of over 40 percent, Elstar is by far the most commonly grown apple in the Netherlands. This year, the country is expected to turn out 106,000 tonnes of Elstar, with the second most prevalent variety Jonagold (including Jonagored) coming in at 66,000 tonnes.

Other pear varieties include Beurré Alexander Lucas and Doyenné du Comice, which are forecast at 29,000 tonnes and 26,000 tonnes respectively this season.