



Strategies for Profitability

Prices for processing fruit have historically been significantly lower than those for fresh fruit. However, processing is often a useful outlet for fruit that cannot be sold fresh (e.g., small fruit from overset pollinizers). Growers should carefully analyze all options before deciding to plant a block of cherries specifically for the processing market.

In central and eastern Oregon, planting processing cherries may allow growers to hire a workforce early in the season that will remain available for harvest of later-maturing fresh-market cultivars. In western Oregon, growers may find processing cherry production attractive if they can keep costs to a minimum. Some western Oregon growers mechanically harvest processing cherries to keep costs low; however, mechanically harvested cherries can have lower stem counts and, therefore, return less than hand-harvested cherries. In either situation, growers must carefully manage yield and production strategies to be profitable. Several approaches can reduce costs and increase the potential for profit.

Limit Inputs

It is often possible to limit the amount of inputs in a processing block. Depending on the cultivar and harvest timing, pruning, fertilizing, and pest and disease control may be minimal compared with a fresh block.

Harvest labor is always the highest cost in any orchard operation. Many Willamette Valley growers harvest cherries mechanically. Although this significantly reduces labor costs, mechanically harvested cherries are worth less than hand-harvested cherries because they often have fewer stems.

Establish a Pedestrian Orchard

Another method to reduce labor costs is to train trees to a pedestrian orchard system, such as a modified multi-leader system (e.g., Kym Green Bush; KGB). Pickers can increase their productivity by up to 70% when they harvest from the ground without using ladders.

For More Information

Sweet Cherry Cultivars for the Fresh Market. PNW 604. (Includes a compatibility and bloom timing chart.) <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

Annual Wasco County Sweet Cherry Production Results. <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/wasco/orchard-economics-0>

Increase Precocity and Mature Yields

Using precocious, productive rootstocks such as Gisela 6 and Gisela 12 can provide early, high yields into maturity. Grafting such rootstocks to precocious, productive cultivars such as Sweetheart can provide very high yields. Training systems with little establishment pruning, such as the Vogel Central Leader, can also increase tree precocity.

Summary

Although the processing cherry industry has changed in recent years, it continues to be important for Oregon growers. The brining, freezing, and canning markets provide an important outlet for pollinizers, sort-outs, and fruit raised specifically for processing. Keeping the processing cherry industry profitable so Oregon growers can continue to take advantage of these markets is a challenge today and for the future.

Photos: page 1 and 6, Jeff Olsen and EESC, respectively, © Oregon State University; page 2, courtesy Van Well Nursery; page 4, Corianne Denby. This publication replaces OSU Extension publication FS 57, *Sweet Cherry Varieties in Oregon*.

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