



Media release

11 January 2021

Cherry harvest devastated by rain but growers grateful to have the staff to help salvage crop

Central Otago cherry growers have been dealt another blow this season with heavy rain just after New Year causing major damage to fruit about to be harvested.

Although the full extent of the damage is yet to be quantified, it is expected that up to 50% of the season's bumper cherry crop has been lost due to splitting, resulting in the loss of \$50 million in export revenue to the country.

In addition to heavy rain damaging fruit, flooding caused damage to buildings on orchards located around Earnscleugh when the Fraser River broke its banks. The impact of the weather event isn't confined to just this season as damage to trees will potentially affect next season's crop.

The sad news comes after growers were starting to feel optimistic that most of their fruit would be picked thanks to the fantastic response from New Zealanders and stranded backpackers helping with the harvest.

While summerfruit growers are well aware of the role weather plays in their livelihoods and make preparations to mitigate it when it occurs, the persistent and heavy nature of the rainfall had not been experienced in 40 years. Despite most growers being natural-born optimists, watching their year's work and income wiped out will be a devastating blow to many.

'It is incredibly sad to see growers lose so much of their crop in this way,' says Summerfruit NZ chief executive Richard Palmer. 'Growers are working hard to harvest the remainder of the crop, and with good weather ahead there is still substantial work for pickers and packers.'

'We also feel for all the people who came to help with the harvest as they responded so generously to the industry's call for help.

'Damage to the other summerfruit crops – apricot, nectarine, peach and plum looks to be fairly limited and with the remaining cherry harvest, provides ongoing opportunity for some harvest staff. The viticulture sector is also looking to take on more workers sooner to provide employment for cherry pickers

'We are working hard to assess what the impact will be on both orchards and the workers, and are looking at how we can keep people in work for the summerfruit harvest followed by apple, grape and pear harvests,' says Richard Palmer.

The industry is also grateful for the support from Ministry of Transport to ensure flights to export markets were maintained despite the ongoing rain and uncertainty. A full freighter with 100 tonnes of cherries aboard left last night for Taipei.

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About Summerfruit NZ

Summerfruit NZ is the industry body that represents growers of apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, and plums, and advocates on their behalf to government on a broad range of issues. It also undertakes work in key areas including biosecurity, market access, research & development, and by growing relationships between growers, marketers, retailers, and exporters.