

CROP REPORT

Wednesday 1st May to Wednesday 8th May

Get the insight you need to plan more effectively and manage your menus with our latest report from the field, brought to you by our expert produce team.

Potatoes



Potato supply continues to be challenging. In addition to previously reported shortages, for example of Maris Piper, we are now seeing salad potatoes/mids become increasingly problematic.

We are anticipating the availability and quality issues to continue, particularly as we get further into the stored crop. In the meantime, we will continue to work with technical teams and growers to try to maximise availability and minimise quality issues.

However, with the market situation as it is, there will continue to be problems for the remainder of this season.

In addition, the wet weather has delayed planting in some areas of the country, which is leading to concern that we will have a slow start to next season, extending the current problems.

On prepped potatoes, the position also remains challenging, and we are working with processors to try to manage supply, as they try to minimise problems with availability and quality, which is reducing yields.

With machinery being used for longer periods as processors try to maximise yields, we are seeing an increase in mechanical problems, which is exacerbating an already challenging picture.

Apples



There are some potential challenges with availability of Granny Smith's apples, as we expect a premature end to the Northern Hemisphere season coinciding with El Nino impacting availability of Southern Hemisphere fruit.

We are working with suppliers to monitor the situation and will provide further updates as the season progresses.

We are also very likely to see issues with red or bi-coloured apples from the Southern Hemisphere, which are not expected to colour up as much as they should. This may require colour concessions as the season progresses. The main cause is the lack of differentiation between day and night temperatures.

Lettuce



Hailstorms in Spain have had a major impact on the lettuce crop, destroying a significant amount of the mountain crop. This is having a particularly severe impact on the iceberg variety due to its structure.

We are working with suppliers to try to identify additional stocks from alternative growers and origins in order to mitigate the impact on customers.

We expect to move to the UK around the third week of May, and should have a more accurate view of this within the next week or so.

Weather and planting update



According to a report in the Guardian this week, the past 18 months have been the wettest since records began in 1836. And, February 2024 saw the South of England endure the wettest month over the same period. It was also the warmest February on record.

The Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) has reported that this winter's excessive rains have led to fields being so waterlogged that they cannot be planted or are too wet for tractors to apply fertilisers.

As an example, we would expect the potato crop to be in the ground by now, but growers are reporting that there has only been between 20% and 70% planted, depending on the area. Other arable crops are showing a similar picture, with planting delays across most areas of the country and most types of produce.

Avocados



There is an improving picture with the availability of avocados as we see the first deliveries of the new season from major producing nations, including Peru and South Africa. While it is not currently a major problem, there are some mixed maturities with the early fruit from these new origins, with a variation in oil content causing some uneven ripening.

There are currently some issues with global shipping, for example with strong winds delaying ships in South Africa and, while we do not expect shortages of avocados, we are maintaining a watching brief.

Berries



The seasonal transition to the UK is now underway. However, the quality of end of season fruit from Morocco and Spain is not as good as we would like.

This is putting some pressure on the UK early season fruit, which has itself been challenged with low light levels, cold and rain, leaving the industry reliant on the glasshouse crop.

We are therefore utilising product from a range of different origins over the next few weeks as we seek to maximise availability and quality while the UK harvest catches up.

We expect to be fully in the UK for strawberries from week commencing 13 May, shortly followed by other varieties.

Broccoli and Cauliflower



We are not currently seeing availability issues, but we are carefully watching the forthcoming transition to the UK, where planting has been delayed by the wet weather (see weather update for more information).

This has been made worse by hailstorms in Spain, which has damaged some produce, along with significant changes in temperature which brought crops forward, leading to shortages.

We will continue to monitor the situation as we get closer to the UK season, and provide further updates as the situation becomes clearer.

Lemons



Heavy rain in Swaziland has affected the early season quality of lemons from that region. We are also seeing some shipping delays from South Africa as strong winds delay the departure of vessels bound for Europe.

We are not anticipating major problems as we will also be sourcing Spanish produce alongside South African, where the quality of the product is looking good.

Melons



We're approaching the end of the Central American season, where we continue to see some quality issues with the Galia variety. Our growers continue to undertake additional checks to try to remove these at source. We also have a concession in place for watermelons.

We remain on track to transition to Spain around the middle of May, where producers are reporting that the crop is looking better.

Savoy cabbage



Poor weather ended the UK season between two and four weeks ahead of expectations. This caused some problems as Spanish product was not fully available.

However, the situation will begin to improve as imported volumes grow over the next week. We expect full availability to be around one to two weeks away.

Parsnips



Parsnips remain very challenging with limited availability following the wet weather and poor harvest conditions, which are bringing the UK season to an early end.

We are working hard to identify remaining stocks of UK produce and anticipate that we may be able to continue for the next couple of weeks before stocks run out.

However, with the Spanish season unlikely to have any significant volume until mid to late May, there are likely to be industry-wide availability issues for the next few weeks.

We will continue to work with our suppliers to mitigate any impact on customers as far as we can.

Spring Greens



There are still some market challenges with Spring Greens as a result of the poor weather conditions, which caused problems with harvesting of fields, leading to some being written off.

There are some improvements, but it is likely to be another week or two before the fields have fully recovered. In the meantime, we are working with contingency suppliers to try to mitigate shortages.

Tenderstem broccoli



There has been some heavy rain in Kenya, which has affected the quality of Tenderstem broccoli from that area. There has been some severe flooding, with water four feet deep in places, at the airport in Nairobi, which has caused product awaiting departure and caused further delays.

We are continuing to work with our suppliers to identify additional stocks from Spain, although growers there have been affected by hailstorms damaging crops. We anticipate issues for another one to two weeks before we see normal availability levels returning.

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Working together to serve our customers amazing produce and products

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