

Commodity Highlight: Fresh-Market Pears

Pears belong to the *Malaceae* family, which also includes the apple and quince. Various species are known to have originated in Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa, but none are native to the Americas. The United States accounts for 5 percent of world pear production, ranking third behind China (52 percent of world output) and Italy (6 percent of world output). U.S. pear production is largely concentrated in the Pacific Northwest, but commercial production can also be found in 45 other States. Washington is the top producer with over 40 percent of U.S. output, followed by California and Oregon.

In 1997, pears were grown on 8,062 U.S. farms covering 77,917 acres (1997 Census of Agriculture). Relative to the 1992 census, these figures declined 18 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Bearing acreage in 2003 was reported at 63,150 acres, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Bearing acreage has declined almost consistently since 1994.

Pears are a versatile fruit—popular around the world as a fresh fruit product but consumed also in processed forms such as canned and juice. The fresh use sector accounts for a major part of world pear use. Over the period 2000-02, the United States produced an average of 1.9 billion pounds of pears for all uses, with about 58 percent sold for fresh use. The average annual farm value of fresh-market pears was \$178.3 million, making up 70 percent of the farm value for the U.S. pear crop. For the current season (2003/04), approximately 61 percent of the estimated 1.8 billion pounds of utilized production will be sold in the fresh market, up 12 percent from a season ago.

Export markets have become increasingly important in many countries that produce pears, especially to

major producers experiencing large production growth. In the United States, production continues to expand at a faster rate than the growth in domestic consumption. Hence, U.S. producers continue to explore market opportunities beyond the domestic market. Exports as a share of U.S. pear production are already more than double the share during the 1980s, reaching 35 percent in recent years. The United States ships pears to several countries across the world but neighboring countries, Mexico and Canada, account for close to 80 percent of its exports annually. Although U.S. exports to these two large markets have increased from levels earlier in the decade, average export growth over the past five seasons have been more pronounced in many smaller markets in Central and South America and in the Caribbean.

U.S. fresh pear consumption has been increasing gradually over the last three decades, but declining production in more recent years has slowed the trend. Americans now consume an average of 3.1 pounds of fresh pears per person yearly, holding fairly steady from the 1990s but up from 2.4 pounds in the 1970s.

Imports have helped maintain a fairly steady supply of fresh-market pears in the United States in the last several years. With volumes up substantially from the 1970s, imports' role in domestic consumption have more than quadrupled to an average of 15 percent during 2000-02. About half of the imports come from Argentina and more than one-fourth are from Chile. Rounding the top five international suppliers of fresh pears to the U.S. market are South Korea, China, and New Zealand.

For the most recent information, see: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publication/fts>

Table 6--Fresh pears: Supply and utilization

Period	Supply			Utilization		
	Production 2/	Imports 3/	Total	Exports 3/	Domestic	Per capita use
	-- Million pounds --					
Decade average:						
1970s	579.6	19.6	599.2	73.3	525.9	2.4
1980s	770.6	51.0	821.6	116.1	705.4	3.0
1990s	1,010.9	146.1	1,157.0	286.1	870.9	3.3
Recent seasons: 1/						
1998/99	1,027.6	190.5	1,218.1	305.2	912.9	3.3
1999/2000	1,072.4	199.0	1,271.3	336.8	934.5	3.3
2000/01	1,094.3	187.6	1,281.9	370.2	911.7	3.2
2001/02	1,086.3	175.8	1,262.1	380.3	881.8	3.1
2002/03 4/	1,005.7	190.3	1,196.1	352.6	843.5	2.9

1/ Season beginning July. 2/ Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA. 3/ Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce. 4/ Preliminary.

Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.