

## Commodity Highlight: Fresh-market Asparagus

Asparagus is believed to have originated in the eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor regions where it has been cultivated for over 2,000 years. The Greeks and Romans used asparagus as both food and medicine, and the Romans dried it to be eaten during the off season. A perennial and member of the lily family, asparagus has reportedly been grown in U.S. home gardens since colonial times. However, asparagus was not produced commercially in the United States until the mid-19th century.

In the United States, asparagus is largely sold in dark green form although some white or light green asparagus can occasionally be found. Asparagus is a good source of vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, and folic acid. Sold fresh, frozen, or canned, asparagus is low in fat and contains no cholesterol but when canned, asparagus loses some of its potassium and vitamin A.

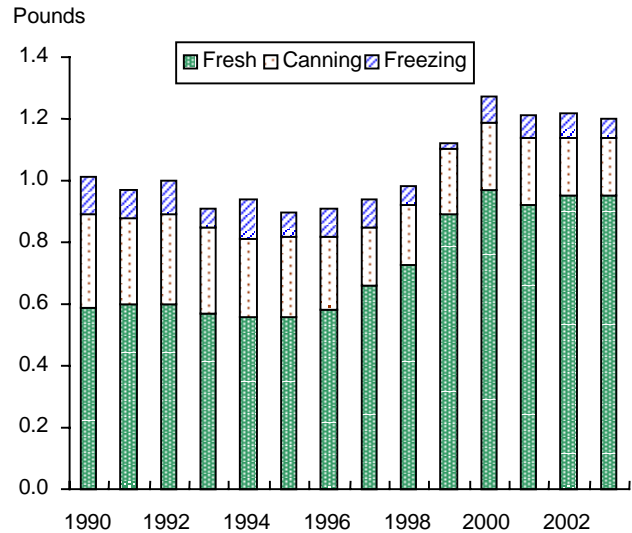
The United States is the world's third leading producer behind China and Peru, with 138 million pounds for fresh market and 71 million pounds for processing (2001). California, Washington, and Michigan are the leading fresh-market States.

- U.S. asparagus (fresh and processed) is produced on 2,672 farms (1997 Census).
- The farm value of the U.S. fresh-market crop was \$137 million in 2002.
- Fresh-market use was a record 273 million pounds in 2000 but moved lower the next 2 years.
- Fresh per capita use has averaged 0.95 pound during 2000-02, up 60 percent from 1990-92 and nearly 3 times higher than 1980-82.
- California accounts for three-fourths of the fresh-market asparagus grown in the United States.
- Imports have been trending higher over time, accounting for 60 percent of domestic use in 2001.

In 2001, the United States imported 157 million pounds of fresh-market asparagus valued at \$117 million. This

Figure 7

### U.S. asparagus: Per capita use, 1990-2003



Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.

was 3 times greater than in 1990 and 20 times larger than in 1980 and reflects rising demand. The top sources for imports in 2001 include Mexico (55 percent of import value), Peru (40 percent), and Colombia (2 percent). U.S. import volume peaks during February and March and again in October with 40 percent of all imports arriving during these 3 months. A decade ago, imports were largely concentrated around Easter, but volume has now increased during the summer and fall months. Imports remain lowest during the spring months when domestic shipments peak.

In 2001, the United States exported 32 million pounds of fresh-market asparagus valued at \$40 million. Although the trend has been relatively flat since 1990, it is 65 percent above the volume shipped in 1980. Major export markets in 2001 included Japan (44 percent of export value), Canada (42 percent), and Switzerland (5 percent).

Table 12--U.S. fresh-market asparagus: Supply, utilization, and price

Year	Supply			Utilization			Season-average price		
	Production 1/	Imports 2/	Total	Exports 2/	Domestic	Per capita use	Current dollars 1/	Constant dollars 3/	
	-- Million pounds --						Pounds	-- \$/cwt --	
1980	78.9	7.2	86.1	19.2	66.9	0.29	58.10	101.24	
1990	142.4	43.8	186.2	39.4	146.8	0.59	68.60	79.30	
1998	126.4	109.8	236.2	34.4	201.8	0.73	124.00	120.16	
1999	145.5	142.3	287.8	38.1	249.7	0.89	131.00	125.13	
2000	150.4	159.4	309.8	36.6	273.2	0.97	117.00	109.46	
2001	137.2	157.0	294.2	31.6	262.6	0.92	140.00	127.95	
2002	126.7	180.3	307.0	29.3	277.6	0.97	110.00	99.46	
2003 f	125.0	185.0	310.0	31.0	279.0	0.96	--	--	

-- = Not available. f = ERS forecast. 1/ Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA. Production data were adjusted by ERS for 1970-81 to account for States not included in NASS estimates. 2/ Source: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce. From 1978-89, exports adjusted by ERS using Canadian import data. 3/ Constant-dollar prices calculated using GDP deflator, 1996=100.