

Apricot Cultivar Situation in North America

DAVID W. RAMMING¹

The most limiting factors for apricot growth and production are climatic conditions such as fluctuating winter temperatures and late spring frosts, and incidence of diseases. Apricot production fluctuates greatly from year to year because of these variables. Therefore, only a few areas in North America are suitable for commercial production of apricots with the cultivars currently available. The major apricot producing areas are California, Washington State, British Columbia, Michigan, Utah, and Ontario.

Production and Acreage

The average production for the most recent 5 years for which data are available is shown in Table 1. California produces about 96% of the apricots grown in the United States. In 1977, 143,000 tons of apricots were harvested, of which 58% was canned, 28% dried, 8% frozen, and 6% sold fresh (3). California apricot acreage has declined during the last 10 years. In 1965 there were 36,039 bearing acres and now there are only 27,422 bearing acres and 1,461 non-bearing acres of apricots (2). The six major districts that produce the majority of apricots in California are Stanislaus County, San Joaquin County, Contra Costa County, Solano and Yolo counties, Merced County, and San Benito and Santa Clara counties. The acreage of apricots per county is shown in Figure 1. Most of the new plantings also are in these six major districts, although some new plantings for the fresh market are being made in Fresno and Kern counties. There are also some new trial plantings in Los Angeles County.

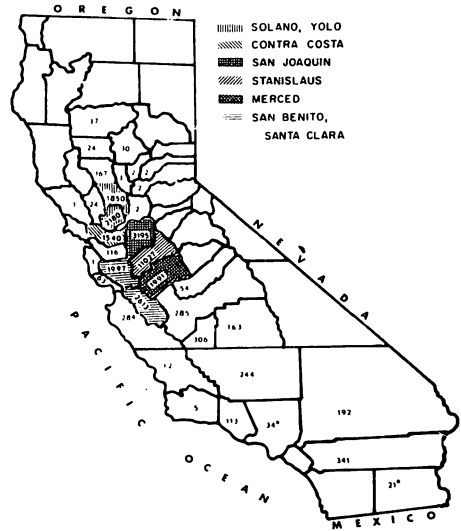


Fig. 1. California apricot acreage in 1977.

Washington State produces 2,000-3,000 tons of apricots annually from about 1,500 acres. In 1977, 2,600 tons were produced (5) and the estimated production for 1979 is 2,000 tons. About 80-85% of the crop is sold fresh on the local market and in the nearby cities of Seattle and Spokane, and in Portland, Oregon. The acreage has remained fairly constant for the last 10 years, although some orchards are being replaced by houses in the Yakima Valley. The highest production was during the 1940's when an average of 21,490 tons was produced annually. During that time, 30-35% of the apricots were processed. Plantings are expected to increase slightly due to increased demand and good prices.

¹Fruit Production Research, USDA-SEA-AR, P. O. Box 8143, 2021 South Peach Avenue, Fresno, California 93747.

Table 1. Apricot production and acreage in North America.

<u>REGION</u>	<u>AVG. PRODUCTION (TONS)</u>	<u>APPROX. ACREAGE (1977)</u>
CALIFORNIA	143,000 (1973-77)	28,893 acres
WASHINGTON	2,764 (1973-77)	1,500 acres
BRITISH COLUMBIA	3,138 (1972-76)	500 acres
UTAH	2,304 (1973-77)	350 acres
MICHIGAN*		600 acres
ONTARIO*		80 acres

*no production figures available

British Columbia produced about 2,600 tons of apricots in 1978. Most of the crop was processed, with 38% used for juice, 30% being canned; 32% was sold fresh. The acreage has declined drastically from 2,010 acres (201,000 trees) in 1954-55 to 1,300 acres in 1960 and to only slightly over 500 acres in 1970 (7). However, the acreage does seem to have stabilized at this point.

Utah has produced an average of 2,304 tons of apricots during the last 5 years (1973-77). Production has fluctuated widely because of late spring frosts and diseases. For example, in 1975, 5,000 tons were produced; in 1977, 1,800 tons; and in 1972, no apricots were produced commercially (4). The acreage has been declining slightly. In 1972 there were 425 acres of apricots (6), while now there are about 350 acres. Almost all the production is for the fresh market.

An area in which the apricot industry and plantings are expanding is Michigan. Acreage has increased to about 600 acres. All new plantings are on good sweet cherry sites in the northwestern part of the lower peninsula, where spring frosts are only a limited danger. Roadside markets and processors (for baby food) are the principal markets.

Another area that shows the beginning of an apricot industry is Ontario. There apricots for the fresh market are grown in the Niagara and southwestern Ontario districts. As of 1976, about 75-80 acres (7,475 trees) of apricots existed, of which 2,254 trees were only 1 to 3 years old (1). The increase in planting is due to the availability of improved cultivars developed at the Harrow and Vineland stations. These cultivars are better adapted for Ontario conditions than those cultivars developed on the West Coast.

Cultivars and Trends

The two major apricot cultivars currently grown in California are Blenheim (includes Derby and Royal), with 12,437 acres, and Tilton, with 12,488 acres. Blenheim is used for the fresh market, although some are frozen, dried, and processed into juice. The acreage of Blenheim is decreasing. Tilton is the principal canning cultivar, although it is gaining preference as a dried apricot. Four new cultivars, Patterson, Tracy, Modesto, and Westley, were released by F. W. Anderson for the processing industry. All are F₂ seedlings from Perfection. Only Patterson, which ripens 10 days earlier than hilton, appears suitable for canning and is being endorsed by the canners. Most of the apricots grown

outside the major apricot districts in California are for the fresh market. Interest is centered around the very early maturing cultivars Castlebrite, Improved Flaming Gold, Katy, Royal Roza, and Pinkerton which have been planted for this purpose.

The major apricot cultivars grown in Washington and British Columbia are Wenatchee Moorpark for the fresh market and Tilton for processing. Cultivars of minor importance are Blenheim, Perfection, and Riland. Roza and Skaha are two promising cultivars that were recently introduced.

Moorpark and Chinese (Early Large Montgamet) make up most of the production in Utah. The Moorpark is large and soft, while Chinese, a local cultivar, is medium in size, firm, has sweet pits and fair storage ability. Many cultivars are being tried in the new plantings.

The major cultivar grown in Michigan is Goldcot. Goldcot has small fruit but it has the ability to set heavy crops and it is an open-pollinated seedling of Perfection. Two new cultivars, Harcot and Traverse, are being planted on a trial basis and will extend the season.

Apricot cultivars that are being grown in Ontario are Goldcot, Veccot, Sunglo, Harcot, Velvaglio, Goldrich, and Vivagold. The last four, plus Harogem, are new cultivars that appear to be promising.

Continued improvement of apricot cultivars is needed to produce cultivars that are more widely adapted and more suited for marginal growing areas than those currently available. In addition, there is a need for improved cultivars for the principal com-

mercial areas. To meet these demands, cultivars with tolerance to fluctuating winter temperatures, later blooming to escape late spring frosts, resistance to diseases, i.e. *Cytospora*, *Cytosporina*, *Pseudomonas syringae*, *Xanthomonas pruni*, *Coryneum*, and *Sclerotinia* sp., better fruit quality and greater firmness need to be developed.

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