

Given 25 Years of Production Innovations, Is the Time Right for Sustainably Profitable Fresh Market Sweet Cherries in Michigan?

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The past 25 years have seen a wide range of fresh market sweet cherry production innovations, from improved varieties to precocious and vigor-controlling rootstocks, to diverse strategies for reducing climatic risks like spring frost and rain-cracked fruit, to greater labor efficiencies with new orchard training systems, to “smart” orchard mechanization technologies, all while consumer demand remains among the strongest of all tree fruits. Is the time right for Michigan growers to consider what it takes to profitably and sustainably produce fresh market sweet cherries for regional markets?

Fresh market sweet cherries have maintained premium consumer sales prices for several decades, yet grower profitability can be limited by crop loss to winter bud damage, spring frost damage to flowers, and summer rains that crack fruit, as well as fruit brown rot and bacterial canker that can damage flowers, fruit, branches, and entire trees. The potential for profits has driven major sweet cherry production and acreage increases worldwide as well as production innovations - new large-fruited cultivars, vigor-limiting rootstocks, light-efficient canopy training

systems for more labor-efficient orchards and better fruit quality, and technologies for microclimatic modification to protect against frosts, rain, hail, and drought.



With continuing, and likely increasing, strong regional consumer demand for locally-produced fresh market sweet cherries, this presentation will review the various production innovations of the past 25 years that could help Michigan growers achieve consistent, profitable crops of high quality sweet cherries to take advantage of this market opportunity.

Resources:

Cherry Training Systems - a free 63-page guide, download at:

https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/files/PNW_667_Cherry_Training_Guide.pdf

Also available as a free smart phone or tablet application on Apple or Android app stores.

Also: Sweet Cherries, a comprehensive production book available at:

<https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/book/10.1079/9781786398284.0000>

or <https://www.amazon.com/Sweet-Cherries-Agriculture-Lynn-Long/dp/1786398281>