SWEET CHERRY PRODUCTION

CALU FACTSHEET

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INTRODUCTION

The demand for cherries in the UK far exceeds domestic production. There are approximately 380ha of commercial cherry orchard in the UK. This area only manages to meet around 5% (by value) of annual expenditure on cherries. The remaining 95%, with a retail value of around £40m, is imported. The scope for increasing commercial cherry production is good, particularly if varieties which extend the traditional season are used.

This factsheet focuses on cherries for fruit production. However, the demand for cherry timber is strong, and this can provide an additional income stream when removing the trees.

Edible cherries are classified as being either sweet or sour. Sweet cherry trees mainly derive from *Prunus avium* (the wild cherry); sour cherries mainly derive from *Prunus cerasus*. Sweet cherries are the most important in the UK market.

The UK cherry season is very short, with home-grown cherries widely available only during July. Intensive research effort is being directed towards developing new cultivars that will extend the season, whilst also providing high yields of desirable fruit, and exhibiting good resistance to common disease problems.

SITE AND PLANTING

Cherry trees will grow on a variety of soils, but they will not tolerate waterlogging of their roots: heavy clays are best avoided. Soils that are shallow, waterlogged in winter, or that dry out very quickly during summer should also be avoided.

Cherries are light demanding and require a good flow of air to help minimise fungal and bacterial infections.

A diverse range of planting systems has been developed for commercial cherry production. The system chosen will depend on factors such as the site's topography, available machinery and labour. Planting densities range from around 600 stems per hectare for "vase" type systems, to around 1500 stems per hectare for single stems on dwarfing rootstocks.

PROPAGATION AND ROOTSTOCKS

Cherry trees for fruit production are propagated by grafting onto a suitable rootstock. Considerable research effort is also being directed to improving the properties of rootstocks. The most commonly used and reliable rootstock is Gisela 5.

As cherry orchards are relatively scarce, sourcing trees is not always easy, and the varieties available may be limited. Possible suppliers include:

- Adams Apples (www.adamsappletrees.co.uk)
- The Agroforestry Research Centre (www.agroforestry.co.uk)

Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas

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Centre for Alternative Land Use
Canolfan Defnydd Tir Amgen

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

- Frank Matthews (www.frankpmatthews.com)

Cultivars must be chosen with care to ensure pollination as most varieties are not self-fertile.

Pests and Diseases

Cherries are susceptible to a range of pests and diseases, this increases the challenge of profitable production. Selection of varieties (both rootstock and scion) that have resistance to disease is a key tool in minimising economic lossess. Many fungal and bacterial diseases gain entry through wounds, so great care should be taken when pruning and carrying out management tasks to avoid damage and cross infection. Damaged and diseased wood should be removed from the orchard and burnt. The most notable problems include: brown rot; silver leaf disease; bacterial canker; blossom wilt and *Phytophthora spp*.

Birds can devastate a cherry crop, the use of netting will reduce losses. Rabbits and voles can severely damage any young trees, including cherries. A range of insects and their larval stages can cause damage of economic significance. Of particular importance is the cherry blackfly.

Yields and Harvesting

Established commercial UK orchards yield in the range of four to nine tonnes per hectare per year.

Sweet cherries for the fresh market are still harvested by hand, leaving the stalks attached. Harvest takes place when the fruit is mature, but still firm, which reduced damage from handling. It is important to keep the fruit as cool as possible during harvesting, e.g. by placing the harvest bins in the shade.

Post Harvest Management

Reducing the temperature of the harvested fruit, and then keeping them at a low temperature is imperative to keep fruit in prime condition. Cooling is generally done by submerging the fruit in cold water, bringing the temperature of the fruit down to <7^{o}C. After they have been sorted, the cherries should then be stored at 0^{o}C.

Costs and Revenues

Prices of stock are variable, ranging from around £8/stem to £15/stem depending on variety and quantity ordered. Other costs to consider include: land preparation; planting; on-going management and pest / disease control (including netting & tree guards if used); harvesting labour; potentially cooling equipment and storage space; marketing (if direct sales); and transport (if wholesale).

Wholesale prices for cherries during 2009 ranged from £1.50/kg for second grade fruit to £5.00/kg for first class fruit at the beginning and end of the season (when fewer British cherries are available). Retail prices can reach £10/kg at select Farmers Markets, although around £6/kg is more usual.