

CROP REPORT

Wednesday 13th March to Wednesday 20th March

Get the insight you need to plan more effectively and manage your menus with our latest report from the field, brought to you by our expert produce team.

European farmers' action



Although farmer protests are continuing across Europe, they are having limited impact on supplies coming to the UK.

Most disruption is being caused by French farmers, albeit they are not having a significant or ongoing impact on shipments. However, while the protests are continuing, there is always the chance that individual loads will be delayed.

Our supply chain team continues to work with our logistics partners to minimise delays, rerouting vehicles as required.

Tomatoes



With Ramadan having started, we are in close contact with our Moroccan suppliers so that we can react quickly in the event of a repeat of the export ban that was imposed across the state last year.

We are already in a much stronger position, having increased the number of origins for our tomatoes, reducing our reliance on Morocco at this time of year from around 45% to around 15%.

On round tomatoes, we have seen some quality issues due to the warm weather in Southern Europe/North Africa causing fruit to colour up more quickly on the plant before it reaches the right size, but we've widened our specification to allow smaller fruit which is delivering better quality.

Plum and Intense tomatoes are also seeing some ongoing quality issues with the product breaking down as it struggles to maintain sufficient shelf-life. On both these and round tomatoes, we are working with growers to strip plants of over-ripe fruit and picking the remaining crops at an earlier stage.

We have also introduced additional checks at all stages of supply chain from the farm to the depot, which has reduced the number of rejections.

On beef tomatoes, we have diverted much of our requirement to Egypt, which has helped to raise the quality and availability of the produce as we approach the end of the Moroccan season.

Berries

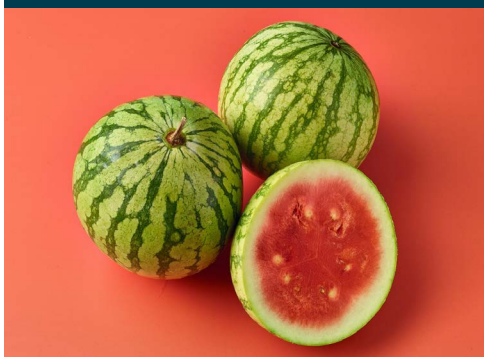


There is currently an issue with fruit coming from Morocco as we transition from the Agadir region to the more central Moulay Idriss Zerhoun area, where the temperatures are very low for the time of year. The overnight cold, which is seeing lows of around 4 degrees, is impacting the growth of the crop and its ripening. While the market is very tight, we are not currently anticipating major shortages.

Raspberries are the worst affected, followed by strawberries and blackberries.

There is better news on blueberries, which are currently being sourced from South America and are in very good supply.

Melons



There is good news on melons as the vessels that were delayed en route from Central and South America have started to dock in the UK.

As we move into the Central American season, the product availability looks to be satisfactory, with the notable exception of Galia, where yields are reported to be lower than expected. This could have an impact as we get further into the season.

We currently have a size concession on watermelons as they are slightly smaller than usual.

Potatoes



While there is no change in the situation with potatoes, we are continuing to include it in the crop report as a reminder that we are expecting both quality and availability of potatoes to be problematic, and potentially deteriorate, over the coming months as we get further into stored product.

As we've also previously highlighted, the quality problems are impacting processed potatoes, with lower quality raw material causing issues for manufacturers. With quality and availability not expected to improve, the issues will continue to deteriorate throughout the season.

Spring Greens



As we reported last week, the recent inclement weather has caused some issues for Spring Greens. The situation has continued to deteriorate and most of the current crop is being written off as it cannot be harvested.

This is leading to gaps as the next fields are currently two to three weeks away from being ready, even under concession. We are working with suppliers to try to identify additional stock, but as this is a widespread problem, it is unlikely to be resolved until the new fields are harvested in a few weeks' time.

Avocados



The market for avocados continues to be very short as we enter the pinch point of the season, ahead of the larger growing regions in Peru and South Africa reaching full production.

We have been working closely with our suppliers, utilising produce from a number of origins as we try to mitigate the problems that we have seen over the past few weeks. As a result, we do currently have supplies in stock and are balancing supply and demand well.

Cabbage



Some of the more specialist cabbage varieties continue to be heavily affected by the wet weather, which has seen gaps in supply as fields cannot be harvested and the product written off.

We are working with growers to try to identify additional supplies of Savoy, Kale and Cavolo Nero where we can, as we work to try to minimise the impact of the shortages.

Grapes



There is good news on the grapes front as supply has returned to normal following the recent shipping delays. However, as some grapes are currently coming from India, there could be some further ad-hoc delays with the well-reported problems in the Red Sea.

We are also monitoring the situation with Chilean grapes carefully as there have been some delays to the start of the season. This has the potential to manifest itself as shortages in mid-April.

Limes



There has been significant rainfall in Brazil, which has the potential to impact the quality of limes in the coming weeks.

We are working with our technical team to monitor the situation.

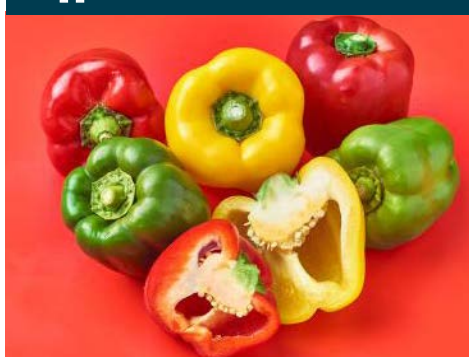
Parsnips



The persistent wet weather and flooded fields have led to some serious issues with the parsnip crop, leading to the product rotting in the ground and diseases such as canker. This will mean an imminent and early finish to the UK season.

With imported product not likely to be ready until around the start of May, the UK is facing around a month or so of limited availability. We will work with suppliers to try to identify additional stocks, but as this is a market-wide issue impacting retail and foodservice, it is likely that the next few weeks will be very challenging.

Peppers



We have seen some intermittent issues with the quality of Class 2 peppers. We are working with suppliers and technical teams to try to minimise this, including picking the produce at a slightly more backward stage, albeit that could also lead to some additional colour break.

The next couple of weeks will start to see older peppers phased out and the newer ones coming in across Spain, soon to be followed by Dutch. This is much earlier than normal for the Dutch season, which has been driven by the mild winter.

