

Crop Report

Wednesday 17rd September to Wednesday 24th September

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.

Lettuce



This summer has been the driest for almost 20 years, with drought conditions extending over many parts of the country. This has provided excellent breeding conditions for aphids, which are having a major impact on the current lettuce crop.

With restrictions on the timing and amount of treatment that is permitted, it is proving very difficult to provide an immediate solution to the problems, despite the additional measures that we have put in place.

As Iceberg grows from the inside out, we have seen aphids contaminate the immature heads and being enclosed as the plant grows around them. This means that contact treatment cannot penetrate to the inner layers and take effect, which is adding to the problems.

Over the past couple of weeks, we have worked with our suppliers and taken significant steps to try to minimise the presence of aphids in lettuce. The actions that we have taken have seen a significant reduction in aphid numbers on both Cos and Little Gem. However, it has proven much more difficult to treat the problem in Iceberg lettuce.

We are continuing with the containment measures that we have introduced, as these are currently working for Cos and Little Gem. These include treating the crop, walking the fields to check the crop before harvesting and leaving any areas of severe infestation in the ground. Both our growers and the Fresh Direct technical team are performing cut tests on all varieties and rejecting crops where we see a proliferation of aphids.

The weather is also helping, as the cooler temperatures slow down the spread of the aphids, which is also being supported by an increase in natural predators such as lacewing larvae.

However, as progress is slower on Iceberg, we are also considering further action to support UK production, which includes looking at importing some product to support British growers.

While we continue to work hard to reduce the impact, the scale of the problem means that it is impossible to entirely eliminate all aphids and is therefore important to remember that all lettuce must be washed before use. We recommend that customers pay additional attention to this process while the current problems continue.

Mushrooms



It has been a very challenging period for growers, with high temperatures in Poland and Ireland leading to reduced yields.

However, the actions we've taken with our suppliers, including 'cooking out' the tunnels, effectively sterilising them and working with supply chain colleagues to maximise availability, has helped to minimise many of the issues and should lead to an improvement.

However, the market remains very difficult particularly for flat and catering mushrooms and we are continuing to work with our three suppliers to move volumes around to maximise availability.

Cabbage



Concessions remain in place to support availability of both red and white cabbage, which are suffering from reduced volumes, with the earlier lack of water and heat affecting the main growing period and leading to a reduction in yield. There are also some continuing quality issues, caused by insect damage and edema which means that more leaves need to be cleared away to reach acceptable quality, reducing head weight and yields.

There is also a weight concession in place for savoy cabbage, which is struggling to make its standard weight due to the growing conditions.

Spring greens also have a concession in place for hearting of the centre, with limited dark outer leaves.

Berries



The current cooler temperatures mean that overall berry numbers have reduced significantly, with strawberries and raspberries seeing the greatest challenges.

While the availability of all berries has been impacted across the market, we are working with our suppliers and have managed to remain fully British, despite the market-wide shortages.

However, with the problems increasing as we approach the challenging end of season, we have put a concession in place for size on strawberries to help support availability.

Blueberries are also becoming more difficult as we approach the end of the British season, and our supplier is grading out more product to maintain quality. We expect our first deliveries of Peruvian stock this week, which should help to improve quality.

Broccoli



It remains a difficult, but improving picture as growers see better growing conditions and significant rainfall.

Larger sized product remains challenging, but we are working with suppliers to maximise supply. While loose broccoli is also challenging, it has slightly better availability as the weight requirement is not as strict.

The main problem is currently with pests, which are being found in large quantities on farms. Our technical team have been in the fields with our suppliers, looking at how we can minimise the impact on customers, including avoiding fields where the greatest issues have been found.

Lemons



We are expecting challenges with supply from mid to end of September, which has been caused by difficult growing conditions and flooding early in the South African season.

We are not seeing shortages and hope to avoid these with the use of concessions. There is already one in place, which allows for a slightly smaller size for large lemons.

We are closely monitoring the Spanish season, as growers are reporting yields are likely to be down.

Grapes



While there are no availability issues, there are some problems with quality.

We delayed moving to Spain due to the very poor quality early season produce, but have since moved white grape supply.

Red grapes will follow next week, but until then we will continue to be sourced from end-of-season Egyptian produce, which currently remains a better option than current Spanish supplies.

Pineapples



There have been some quality issues with pineapples. We are working with suppliers to try to minimise the impact on customers, but there may be some issues at the end of the week. However, these should be short-term.

Cauliflower



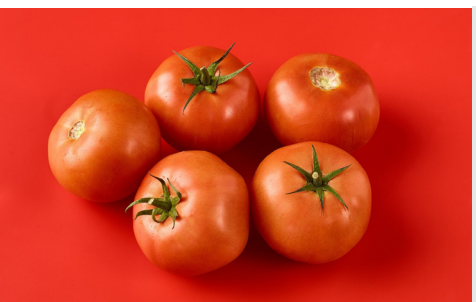
With improved growing conditions, supply is now in a much better position. While availability is good, there is still a concession in place for pests, which remain an issue following the hot and dry summer.

Nectarines and Peaches



Our suppliers have done an excellent job in maintaining end of season stock over the past couple of weeks. However, it is likely that nectarines will come to an end for the season in the next week, while peaches will finish around the end of the month, quality-permitting.

Tomatoes



Beef and round tomatoes will continue to be challenging for the next few weeks, as we approach the end of season cross-over, moving from the Netherlands to Spain and Morocco. With the slowdown in production, growers are having to use more backward crop to meet demand. However, this is not unexpected as this seasonal changeover is generally one of the most difficult periods of the year for quality and availability.