PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. PEACH and APRICOT PRODUCTION LOWER

OLYMPIA, WA, July 12, 2006--The July 2006 forecast of U.S. **peach** production is 1.06 million tons, down 11 percent from 2005 and 19 percent below the 2004 crop. Half of the 28 Freestone peach estimating States expect increases in production from last year, while 12 States decreased their production from the previous season, and two States showed no change.

In Washington, production is forecast at 21,500 tons, up 3 percent from last season but equal to 2004 production. Expectations are Washington's peach crop will be similar in size to last year's crop. Overall, spring conditions have been favorable.

The California Clingstone crop is forecast at 380,000 tons, equal to the June 1 forecast but 21 percent below the 2005 crop. Rain during March and April along with below average temperatures have California growers concerned about their 2006 Clingstone peach crop. Warmer temperatures toward the latter part of April helped fruit growth. Early variety peaches reportedly have the best fruit set, while the late and extra late varieties appear to have lighter sets. Harvest began in the Kingsburg area on June 22, eleven days later than last year. Harvest is expected to begin in Yuba and Sutter Counties around July 15. Fruit sizes are reported to be excellent but quality is expected to be less than average due to gum and split pits.

The California Freestone crop is forecast at 380,000 tons, equal to the June 1 forecast but 1 percent below the 2005 crop. Wet, cool weather during the spring has delayed progression of California's crop. Fruit set in the early varieties was reported to be normal. However, set in the mid to late season varieties was reported to be lighter and inconsistent. This lower set is likely the result of frost which occurred earlier in the season. The primary varieties harvested to date include Zee Diamond, April Snow, Sweet Scarlett, May Snow, Brittney Lane, Crimson Lady, Spring Snow, Spring Flame, and Crown Princess.

Georgia’s peach crop is forecast at 42,000 tons, down 16 percent from the June 1 forecast but up 5 percent from 2005. Hot, dry weather during June reduced Georgia's peach crop. Smaller fruit size has reduced production from last month's expectations. However, because of the dry conditions, quality has been good to excellent with peaches tasting extra sweet. Isolated hail damage has hurt some orchards and additional freeze damage began to show up on a few varieties.

The South Carolina peach crop is forecast at 60,000 tons, equal to the June 1 forecast but 20 percent below 2005. A late frost and freeze occurred during bloom and early fruit development. Widely scattered hailstorms also caused extensive damage to some producers’ peaches. Other growers are reporting a good peach crop. Tropical storm Alberto provided ample precipitation for most of the State during the middle of June. Additional thunderstorms continued to provide moisture later in June aiding in fruit development and size.

In New Jersey, production is forecast at 35,000 tons, equal to 2005 production but 8 percent above 2004. Fruit set is rated good to excellent. However, thunder storms caused some fruit loss around the State. Peaches are sizing well and prospects are currently good. Pennsylvania's production is forecast at 29,500 tons, up 11 percent from 2005 and 28 percent above 2004. Most growers report a good to excellent peach crop.

Michigan's peach crop is forecast at 13,500 tons, down 4 percent from 2005 and 28 percent below 2004. A late April cold snap damaged some orchards, especially in the southwest region. However, the crop seemed to recover nicely. By early June, peaches were nearing 2 inches in size and thinning was underway. Fewer bearing acres contribute to the decline in potential peach production.

Peach production in Illinois and Missouri is up 3 percent and 16 percent, respectively. Production is down in both Alabama and Texas by 42 percent and 63 percent, respectively. Drought conditions in these 2 States have contributed to reduced production. The Louisiana crop is 23 percent below last year's production. Unseasonably warm weather in February induced an early bloom followed by freezing May temperatures which destroyed many blooms. The North Carolina crop is equal to last year, at 6,000 tons, while Tennessee's production slipped 300 tons to 1,700 tons. Kentucky, at 850 tons, showed a 100 ton increase from 2005.

The final forecast for the 2006 **apricot** crop is 44,500 tons, down 45 percent from last season's production and 56 percent below 2004. California's 2006 apricot production is forecast at 39,000 tons, 5 percent above the June forecast but 48 percent below last year's production. If realized, this will be the lowest production on record. California's production represents 88 percent of the 2006 U.S. apricot crop. Freezing temperatures during mid-February adversely affected early blooming orchards. These early blooming orchards were caused by unseasonably warm winter temperatures. The weak and staggered bloom, mostly caused by the mild winter temperatures, was further adversely impacted by rain and hail storms. However, fruit size is exceptional on this small crop. Harvest began about one week later than normal and is expected to be finished by mid-July. Washington's production, at 5,200 tons, is down 12 percent from last year and 24 percent below 2004. Early spring frosts and hail combined to reduce prospects for Washington's apricot crop. The 2006 Utah crop, at 300 tons, is up 20 percent from 2005 but 9 percent below 2004. Favorable growing conditions contributed to the upturn in this year's production.

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