

Fruit Summary

Apples

Apple production in the Commonwealth totaled 300 million pounds, up 30 million pounds from 2003 and up 50 million pounds from 2002. The growing season began with cold temperatures along with snow during the end of January and the beginning of February. The snow helped insulate the trees from the harmful cold temperatures of the early season. Blooming was on schedule and pollination was good with fruit set very heavy. Very few growers realized any losses due to late frost or freezing weather during the spring. Many orchards experienced above average rainfall from early spring through the end of summer which allowed for sufficient growth. Other orchards suffered from crop damage caused by the remnants of hurricane Ivan, Jeanne, Charlie, and tropical storm Bonnie. Even with all the rain from spring through early fall, the crop conditions were generally good as harvest began. Adverse weather at harvest time caused crop losses to be slightly higher than normal.

Peaches

The 2004 season began with a somewhat mild winter. Snowfall in January and continued colder weather until spring kept trees from blooming early. There were a few areas receiving frost and freeze damage, however this was not widespread. Bloom and set was heavy. The growing season from May through September received ample rainfall contributing to good fruit size. Producers commented that the crop was large, however quality was down and unsold/unharvested was higher than normal. The late season hurricanes did not affect the peach crop.

Grapes

Grape production in Virginia increased in 2004 with the production of the Vinifera varieties accounting for the majority of the overall production. Producers harvested a crop valued at \$4.8 million, receiving an average price of \$1,300 per ton. Virginia ranked 10th nationally in commercial grape production and 9th for bearing acreage.

Virginia's grape producers harvested 3,700 tons of commercial grapes in 2004, up nearly 3% from the 3,600 tons produced in 2003.

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Virginia acreage (bearing and non-bearing) has increased from 1,418 acres in 1995 to 2,360 acres in 2004, a 66% increase over that time span.

The Chardonnay variety made up 31 percent of Virginia's total Vinifera production harvested in 2004. Also, Virginia's most popular variety accounted for 29 percent of all the Vinifera variety bearing acreage and 20 percent of the total vineyard acreage statewide.

Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Vidal Blanc represented the top four varieties produced in the Commonwealth in 2004. Chardonnay producers harvested 134 tons less in 2004, but still remained first in production. Cabernet Franc producers harvested 15 tons more in 2004, and Merlot producers harvested 118 tons more in 2004. Also, Vidal Blanc producers harvested 72 more tons in 2004 compared to 2003.

The 2004 grape production season began with a mild winter, with some vineyards experiencing bud and cane/trunk injury that may have resulted from the previous winter. Spring brought above average temperatures and timely showers which assisted growth. As the season progressed hurricanes Bonnie and Charley left Virginia wet and cold. Temperatures quickly recovered back to normal, but heavy rains persisted throughout the growing year. Growers contended with downy mildew pressure and other disease due to the timing and frequency of rain along with the limited amount of sunlight during the growing season. Remnants of hurricanes Gaston, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne hurt fruit quality for growers who were unable to harvest early. Some varieties fared better than others, but producers who sprayed fungicide on a regular basis, pruned back their vines, and harvested early maturing varieties before the hurricanes swept through the state were able to combat some of the issues faced during the 2004 growing season. Overall, yields were similar to last year. The 2004 season, like 2003, was another challenging one, but Virginia's grape growers still managed to produce a quality crop.