

Fruit

Apple Production

Apple production in the Commonwealth totaled 250 million pounds, down 60 million pounds from 2001 and down 70 million pounds from 2000. The season began with a normal winter and spring. Fruit bloom and set was somewhat heavy but a late freeze and frost thinned the crop. Some producers saw above average losses.

Dry conditions persisted over the fruit region during the spring with precipitation finally arriving the first two weeks of May. Unusually dry weather with drought-like conditions remained the entire summer with much needed relief finally arriving from a widespread front that covered most of the state. Sporadic hail and deer damage further reduced the crop in selected areas. Fruit size was small and production suffered due to the adverse weather conditions.

Peach Production

Peach production totaled 7 million pounds in 2002, down 1 million pounds from the previous year and down 2 million pounds from 2000.

The 2002 season was very similar to 2001. The winter was milder than normal leading to early bud development. A heavy frost and late freeze greatly reduced the crop. Orchards received plentiful rainfall during the first half of May. However, the next three months were critically dry further reducing size and quantity.

Grape Production

Grape production in Virginia increased in 2002 with the production of the Vinifera varieties accounting for the majority of the overall production increase. Producers harvested a crop valued at \$6.2 million, receiving an average price of \$1,350 per ton.

Virginia ranked 11th nationally in commercial grape production and 10th for bearing acreage.

Virginia's grape producers harvested 4,600 tons of commercial grapes in 2002, up nearly 10 percent from 4,200 tons produced in 2001. The 2002 total was up nearly 20 percent from what was produced in 2000.

Vineyard acreage (bearing and non-bearing) has increased from 1,418 acres in 1995 to 2,220 acres in 2002, a 57 percent increase over that time span.

The Chardonnay variety made up 32 percent of Virginia's total Vinifera production harvested in 2002. Also, Virginia's most popular variety accounted for 34 percent of all the Vinifera variety bearing acreage and 24 percent of the total vineyard acreage statewide.

Merlot and Viognier producers saw significant production gains in 2002. Merlot producers harvested 115 tons more in 2002 compared to 2001. Producers of Viognier variety

harvested 153 more tons in 2002. The 2001-2002 winter continued a three-year pattern of relatively warm benign winters for Virginia grapevines. Poised therefore for abundant crops, many growers were affected by unusually late damaging frosts during the third week of May. Parts of Virginia, particularly the eastern and western Piedmont and parts of Southside Virginia, also suffered severe drought during the period from June until September. Some non-irrigated vineyards showed drought stress by early August. For most, the dry summer and early fall lessened disease pressure and crop quality was very high, particularly for white varieties such as Chardonnay, Viognier, and Sauvignon blanc. Rains in September and October made it somewhat more difficult to achieve concentrated, ripe flavor and aromas in later-maturing red varieties.

