



POTATO GROWERS OF CANADA

LES PRODUCTEURS UNIS DE POMMES DE TERRE DU CANADA

Crop Update August 20, 2020

At press time parts of Eastern Canada are facing moderate to severe drought conditions. Rainfall is critical for this crop. In Western Canada, the crop is running behind schedule as processors push to get new crop harvest underway. Prairie yields currently look average at best.

The view from across the country:

Prince Edward Island:

The optimistic outlook which PEI had in early July, has unfortunately disappeared with high temperatures, record low rainfall, and windy conditions over the past two weeks. In the Bedeque area (the central potato growing area in the province), for example, the average rainfall for June, July, August, is 259.1 mm or 10 inches. In 2001, “the year of the drought” on PEI, the cumulative average for those three months was 138.6 mm or 5.4 inches. This summer the June, July, and August to date rainfall in Bedeque has been 38.6 mm or 1.5 inches. Although this is PEI’s worst case area, it does show the extreme situation that some of the growers in the province are trying to cope with. There are growing districts on PEI which have had a much better summer with timely rainfall events, but they have been very localized making predictions on crop yield almost impossible. At this time the PEI Potato Board would estimate that overall production could be down 15%-20% at a minimum.

Field-fry chip harvest began last week with yields coming in below budget, however the quality and size profile is very good. Cavendish Farms continues to process old crop potatoes, involving a handful of growers while the majority of the remaining 2019 volume is in company storages. Cavendish have indicated they will be starting

new crop on September 10th, which is approximately a week later than normal.

There has been some limited early harvest of table potatoes mostly for local markets, Atlantic Canada, and Puerto Rico.

Test digs on PEI, indicate the crop is falling behind the previous four years data on both yield and size. Growers are concerned about the overall quality of the crop with regard to sugar ends, scab, and off-type. It has been a devastating summer for over half of PEI's family farms and communities.

New Brunswick:

Growing conditions have been hot and dry as well in New Brunswick although the St. Andre area seems to have received a couple more inches of rain throughout the season. Early potato varieties are suffering however the Russet Burbank crop is still holding up.

There is hardly any old crop left on the fresh side, and processing potatoes are on schedule to clean up soon as per contract delivery. New crop harvest has started on chipstock with yields that are only fair, but fields need to be harvested for chip plant schedules. Some early Superiors have also been dug green with lighter yields in the 225 cwt/acre range.

Quebec:

The province was very dry, however it caught the tail end of Hurricane Isaias a week ago which provided some much needed relief. The eastern part of Quebec in particular, could still use more rain.

Old crop is pretty much gone now, although it took longer than expected to move. The large supply of old crop left over, delayed start up harvest on new potatoes as growers waited for the system to clear itself rather than crowd the market during the transition period. Demand has been traditionally quiet with hot summer days and a provincial holiday period for construction workers.

Harvest to date on new crop, shows yields down about 10% with smaller tuber profiles, but otherwise good quality on the early maturing varieties impacted by the heat and dryness. Growers are hopeful that the later varieties will size and provide an average (to slightly below average) yield.

Ontario:

The growing season has been a hot one with dry conditions making it stressful on potato canopies, and heat runners being developed. Parts of the Alliston area where most of the storage crop is located received several inches of rain over the period of a weekend creating some drown outs in low spots. Growers were having difficulty getting sprayers through some fields. The southern part of the province remains dry where fresh harvest is underway. Chip harvest is on schedule with chip companies accepting loads on schedule after old crop cleaned up early and new crop development had been running about a week behind normal.

Manitoba Fresh:

The crop is desperate for rain in the southern part of the province. The dryland area where a large portion of the table potatoes are grown, has received only two rains this season. The crop is 7-10 days later due to a cool, wet spring. Fresh harvest is just getting started and tuber set is not outstanding on early fields.

Manitoba Processing:

The processing area of the province has been dry, with extreme heat issues creating runners and stolons. The crop outlook is mixed with some fields looking tired from the heat stress and others looking better. The crop was running a week behind average in maturity, however one processor started a week ago on Ranger Russets with good gravity and adequate size. Overall the Ranger crop is expected to make average yields, however Shepodies are not as good, having lost some of their set. The Russet Burbank crop is expected to be down in yield. Both processors in the province are running now.

Saskatchewan:

Growers are expecting a better crop than the previous two seasons. Conditions have been fairly dry but not as hot and dry as last year. Most of the potato land is irrigated and pivots have been running for most of the summer. Yield digs show a slightly higher yield than last year with a similar set and better size. Fresh crop harvest will start in the coming days and top killing of seed began this week.

Alberta:

The growing season has been up and down in Alberta, with good planting conditions, followed by a lot of rain that created drown outs throughout the province. The northern region has seen the highest rainfall amounts accompanied by cooler, cloudier growing conditions. There have also been a couple of damaging hailstorms this season. Overall the early estimate of yield potential would seem to be average at best.

Chip harvest has been underway for three weeks and early yields were disappointing. Quality was good, with a smaller sized profile. One fryer has started processing field run Rangers. The other processor is a week away from out of field deliveries.

British Columbia:

The growing season in BC has been a good one after a solid start and occasional rains, in comparison to some recent years where there has been no rain. Many fields are loading down to finish up. Yields are expected to be above average, but it depends on showers over the next few weeks. Growers have seized the opportunity of good markets to move significant amounts of their crop already, easing the strain on storage potatoes. While their clay soils are high yielding, BC growers also know they can be unforgiving in a wet fall, and hope for dry conditions into the last step of their potato growing season.

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