California Strawberry Farming

Strawberry Farmers: There are approximately 300 strawberry growers in five distinct areas of California: Watsonville/Salinas, Santa Maria, Oxnard, Orange County/San Diego, and the Central Valley. Many of these multi-generation farming families grow both organic and conventional strawberries.

Sustainable Farming: California strawberry growers are recognized world leaders in sustainable farming, funding research in ways to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use, conserve water, and protect the soil. They continue to invest millions of dollars in sustainable and innovative farming methods, more than any other commodity group in the world. All California strawberry farmers incorporate some organic farming methods into their operations.

Protecting Communities and the Environment: California strawberry farmers are leading stewards of healthy soil, and clean water and air. Decades ago they pioneered drip irrigation as a water conservation tool for California agriculture. They have earned worldwide recognition for environmental protection, receiving the US EPA's Stratospheric Ozone Protection Award for efforts to protect the earth’s atmosphere.

Research: With a 50-year investment in agricultural research, California strawberry farmers lead the world in research dedicated to reducing pesticide use. Sustainable farming practices include innovative integrated pest...
management (IPM) strategies that work with nature to control pests, advanced irrigation management practices, and new strawberry varieties.

Food Safety: One of the first groups to develop a comprehensive food safety program, California strawberry growers serve as the model for other produce commodities. These efforts were recognized in 2010 with the prestigious NSF International Food Safety Award.

The California Strawberry Commission offers a comprehensive food safety program for strawberry growers, ranch managers, field supervisors or any other farm-level employee with food safety responsibilities. The program teaches key food safety practices necessary to minimize the risk of microbial contamination.

Workforce Opportunities: The California Strawberry Commission offers educational opportunities for farmers, ranch managers and crew supervisors, training more than 1,000 employees annually. These workshops provide continuing education and skills development for mid-level management workers on the farms. Topics include safety, communications, conflict resolution, pesticide safety, sexual harassment prevention and heat illness prevention.

Production and Acreage: California grows about 88 percent of the US-grown strawberries on approximately 34,000 acres along the California coast. Statewide fresh strawberry production averages 50,000 pounds per acre each season. Last year, 206,040,481 trays of fresh strawberries were harvested – that's more than 1.8 billion pounds of strawberries!

Availability: California strawberries are available year-round. In winter, strawberries ship from Southern California; production moves north with the warming spring temperatures. Volume peaks in April through August when production in districts overlaps and an average of six to seven million trays a week are harvested. After June 1, about 50% of the crop is harvested.

Climate: California's unique coastal environment with its western ocean exposure provides moderate temperatures year-round. Warm sunny days and cool foggy nights are the perfect combination for growing strawberries.

Harvesting and Planting: All California strawberries are hand-picked to ensure only the highest quality berries are harvested. Strawberry plants continually produce new fruit throughout their season. During peak season plants are harvested every three days.

California strawberry plants are first grown in a nursery and then transplanted annually into growers’ fields in raised beds. The beds are covered with plastic mulch to keep the berries away from the soil and help conserve water. Drip irrigation reduces disease problems by keeping moisture away from the fruit while using water more efficiently.

Farms in Watsonville/Salinas and Santa Maria harvest from March through November. Oxnard and Santa Maria produce a second crop beginning in October and ending in December due to late summer plantings. Oxnard and Orange County/San Diego produce strawberries during the winter, making California strawberries available all year long.

Post-Harvest and Shipping: State-of-the-art, postharvest techniques assure the best quality. Once strawberries are picked, they are rushed to a cooling facility where huge fans draw out field heat. When cooled, the strawberries are loaded onto refrigerated trucks for same-day shipment. Keeping the fruit at 32 degrees Fahrenheit during transport helps ensure a quality product for consumers across the country.