

The Fresh Star Packing and Cold Storage facility in Auburndale, FL has the capacity to pack 2.5 million-lbs. of blueberries during the roughly six-week season. Fresh Star is a partnership between Five-Star Family Growers and Alpine Fresh, a Doral produce grower and packer. After the Florida blueberry season ends next month, Fresh Star will bring in blueberries from Alpine's regular foreign suppliers in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Chile and Argentina, reported *The Lakeland Ledger*. [Full Story](#) (Free Registration Required)

The Wisconsin Farmers Union created the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative to establish new avenues for growers and buyers of locally grown fresh produce. The cooperative will be dedicated to allowing farmers better control of their markets and receive profitable prices for their products, aggregating produce to meet the larger volume requirements of intermediate buyers such as grocery stores, restaurants, schools and hospitals, reported *Wisconsin Ag Connection*. [Full Story](#)

Eagle Eye Produce and The Grape Guys formed a partnership called Eagle Eye Produce Grape. The partnership with The Grape Guys will add a substantial fresh table grape program to the increasingly diverse offerings of the Eagle Eye family of companies, reported *The Produce News*. [Full Story](#)

Suntreat Packing & Shipping is now shipping its Gold Nugget specialty mandarins. Suntreat began harvesting Gold Nuggets the week of April 1 and plans to ship them through May, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

In 2012, U.S. exports of value-added, consumer-oriented agricultural products to Korea reached a record high of \$2.8 billion. In 2012, Korean imports of tree nuts including walnuts, almonds and pistachios, were almost exclusively from the U.S. With the new free trade agreement's tariff reductions, U.S. walnut exports increased 21% to reach \$98 million and Korea became the largest U.S. market for shelled walnuts, surpassing both Germany and Japan. [USDA Report](#)

Tea production in Kenya, the world's biggest exporter of the black variety of the leaf, more than doubled in February due to favorable weather conditions. Output rose to 38.5 million kilograms

(84.9 million-lbs.) in February compared with 18.4 million kilograms a year earlier, according to the Nairobi-based Tea Board of Kenya, reported *Bloomberg.com*. [Full Story](#)

Strong demand from Iran raised the price of India's basmati rice to historic highs. The two countries introduced a payment mechanism last June to circumvent sanctions against Iran, leaving India as "probably the only viable supplier [of rice] to Iran," according to a director at Tilda Riceland, a leading basmati rice exporter. The barter system will allow exports to Iran to rise by 20% in the financial year that began April 1, to around 1.2 million metric tons, and Iran was currently estimated to be buying around 130,000 tons of Indian basmati rice each month, the director told *The Wall Street Journal*. [Full Story](#) (WSJ Subscription Required)

Several North Carolina farmers ended up with virus-infected strawberry plants from two nurseries in Nova Scotia. This year's pair of viruses stunts the plants' growth and reduces the number of berries they will produce. Strawberry expert Barclay Poling estimates that 12% of the state's 1,600 acres in strawberry production will be affected. Those acres will still produce fruit, although likely not as much as they typically do. Poling estimates there will be 4% fewer strawberries this year, or 27.6 million berries instead of 28.8 million, reported *Charlotte Observer*. [Full Story](#)

The Trinidad Scorpion Butch T, the world's hottest pepper, has the potential to become the second- or third highest yielding crop per acre monetarily, according to an author and chile expert. The pods of the pepper can fetch as much as a dollar at farmers' markets, reported *Western Farm Press*. [Full Story](#)

Metal pollution from aluminum and nickel may be killing off bumblebees, according to a study published in *Environmental Pollution*. The research finds bumblebees are at risk of ingesting toxic amounts of metals like aluminum and nickel found in flowers growing in soil that has been contaminated by exhaust from vehicles, industrial machinery, and farming equipment, reported *Western Farm Press*. [Full Story](#)

The National Organic Standards Board was urged by the Consumers Union, Food & Water Watch and the Center for Food

Safety to discontinue the use of antibiotics in organic apple and pear production. The groups cite the potential undermining of the integrity of the organic label and threats to public health and consumer expectations, reported *Fruit Growers News*. [Full Story](#)

Washington's asparagus crop is sprouting early for many local farmers. A Pasco, WA asparagus grower stated several farms saw the crop sprout about a week early. The extra time will allow farms to start slow and ramp up for the peak season by hiring workers earlier, cutting more asparagus and saving more from the harvest, reported *KNDU.com*. [Full Story](#)

The ongoing problems of pre-harvest fruit drop and small size sent the 2012-13 Florida orange crop down another 1 million boxes, and few industry observers think that's the last of the reductions until the season wraps up in June. USDA's monthly citrus crop update reported this season's projected orange crop at 138 million, down 1 million from the March report. The agency kept the projected Florida grapefruit crop at 17 million boxes, but it reduced the 2012-13 tangerine forecast by 200,000 boxes to 3.5 million boxes. USDA has reduced its orange crop forecast every month since the initial October estimate of 154 million boxes. The drop problem has sent the farm price for Valencias up more than 16% in three months to \$1.80 to \$1.85 per pound solids, reported *The Lakeland Ledger*. [Full Story](#) (Free Registration Required)

A strain of citrus greening, known as Lam, was found in the U.S. for the first time. The disease was found in a citrus psyllid near Mission, TX, stated the president of Texas Citrus Mutual to *The Packer*. Before the Texas finding, Lam had only been confirmed in Brazil, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

Despite the increase of acreage in North Carolina, grain sorghum seeds may be short in supply this year. Acreage jumped from 10,000 acres to 70,000 acres in the past year, and while some claim 100,000 acres could be possible in 2013, it will depend on how well dealers and growers can coordinate seed buying, reported *Southeast Farm Press*. [Full Story](#)

The impending removal of the fumigant methyl bromide is becoming a dilemma for California strawberry growers. The removal of the fumigant could affect strawberry production, as it is a particularly critical element in the state's \$2.4 billion industry. Methyl bromide was technically phased out by 2005 and its limited use is allowed under "critical-use exemptions" at least through 2014, reported *Western Farm Press*. [Full Story](#)

Analysis of commercially available rice imported into the U.S. revealed levels of lead far higher than regulations suggest are safe. Some samples exceeded the "provisional total tolerable intake" set by FDA by a factor of 120. FDA told the BBC it would review the research, reported *BBC News*. [Full Story](#)

Around 49.7 million bushels of U.S.-grown fresh-market apples, an increase of 17% over the past year, were in holdings and had yet to be shipped as of April 1. This year's holdings are being reported as 18% higher than the five-year average, according to the U.S. Apple Association. About 48.1 million bushels of the U.S. total were Washington-grown, with 484,000 bushels of New York apples and 417,000 bushels of Pennsylvania apples, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)

Soybean futures finished mixed April 11, with nearby contracts settling at their highest levels in two weeks on tight supplies and prices for soybean futures with delivery dates after this fall's harvest fell to one-week lows. Traders are bracing for potentially record-setting U.S. soybean production in 2013, with CBOT soybeans for May delivery settling up 9 1/4 cents, or 0.7%, at \$14.02 a bushel. November soybeans finished down 10 3/4 cents, or 0.9%, at \$12.26 3/4, reported *The Wall Street Journal*. [Full Story](#) (WSJ Subscription Required)

Southeastern blueberry production began after escaping weather damage. Grower-shippers report strong supplies for promotions, however, shorter supplies are also keeping early season prices high. Georgia production was slowed by the bad weather, but growers are now ramping up volume expected to peak in May, reported *The Packer Online*. [Full Story](#)