

In this 'In Charts' series of mini-articles, Colin Fain of data visualization tool [Agronometrics](#) illustrates how the U.S. market is evolving. In each series, he will look at a different fruit commodity, focusing on a different origin or topic in each installment to see what factors are driving change.

As U.S. politicians lock horns over funding for the border wall, the government has partially shut down, stopping most non-essential services. While in the past this has included those provided by the USDA market news service - where we get our market data from - things have changed this year.

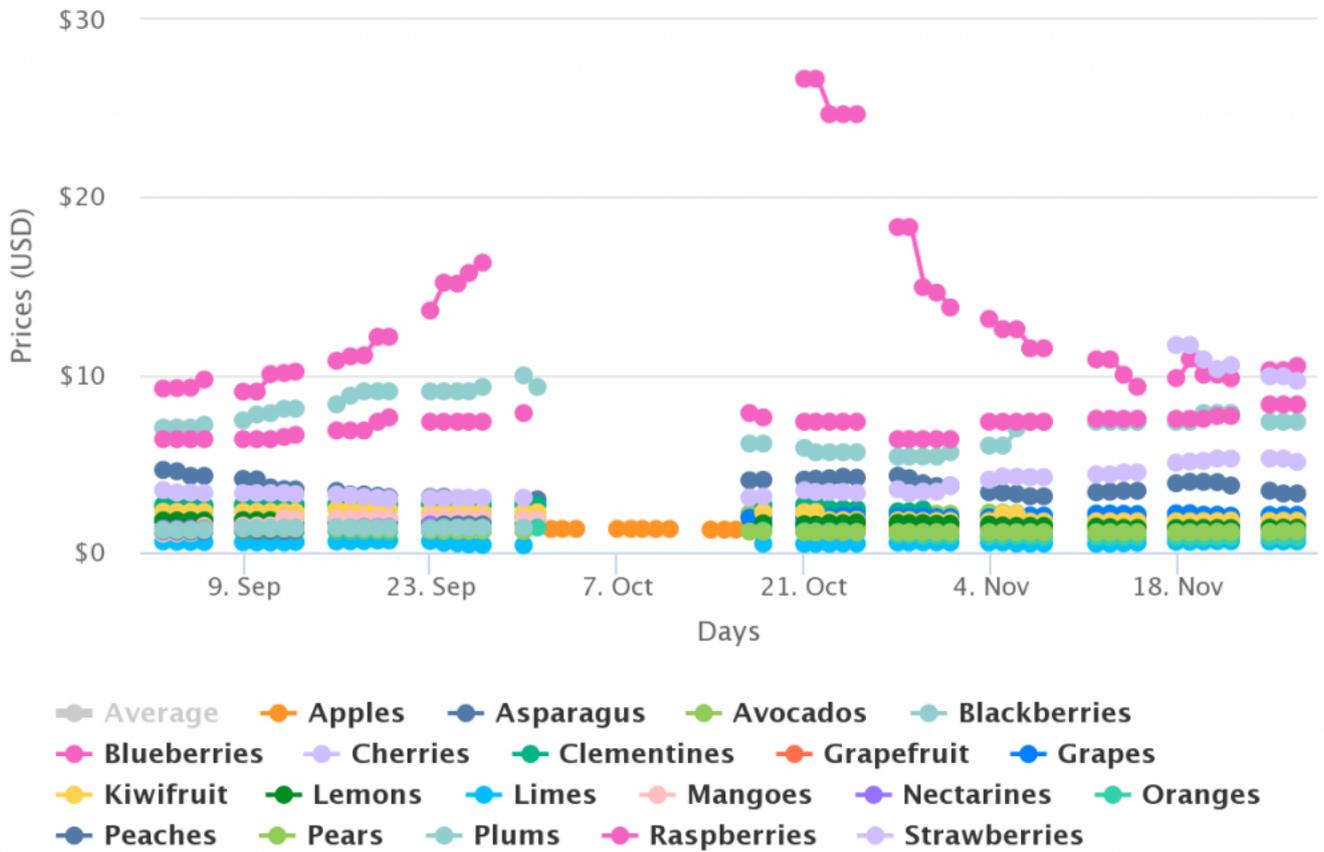
In this article, I will briefly look at why the government shuts down at all - which must be mind-boggling for anybody not from the U.S.... and quite frankly for most of us from the U.S. as well - and also see what will happen to our precious market data as a consequence.

So why would any government set itself up to hold as hostage the services it provides to its citizenship to its politicians' partisan goals? It seems like an unnecessarily frustrating situation that few other countries in the world seem to face. The reason is the separations of power written into the U.S. Constitution, where both Congress and the president must agree on a budget before the government can spend money. As such, if there is any disagreement between the two branches of government, non-essential public services will shut down. Typically the government is funded for an entire fiscal year, starting on October 1st through September 30th. If it is difficult to make an agreement for whatever reason, the government can be partially funded, essentially kicking the can down the road to fight over the budgets in another couple of months when the money runs out again, as is the case now.

The U.S. Government has shut down 10 times since 1980, with most of the shutdowns lasting a day, or a weekend before the powers that be came to a compromise that was acceptable to all sides. The longest shutdowns so far have been 27 days in 1996 during the Clinton administration and 16 days in 2013 during the Obama administration. The dataset we work with is set up to 2010, so we can take a look at what happened in 2013 to get a better idea of what happens during a shutdown.

As can be observed in the chart below, there is a clear 16-day gap in the data starting on the 2nd and lasting until the 17th. Because the data is collected by market reporters who survey on a daily basis, if they don't work the information is simply lost. This can be particularly frustrating when prices have large movements, as was the case with blueberries in October of 2013. The one exception for whatever reason was apples.

US Daily Shipping Point Prices Sep, Oct, Nov 2013 (USD per KG)

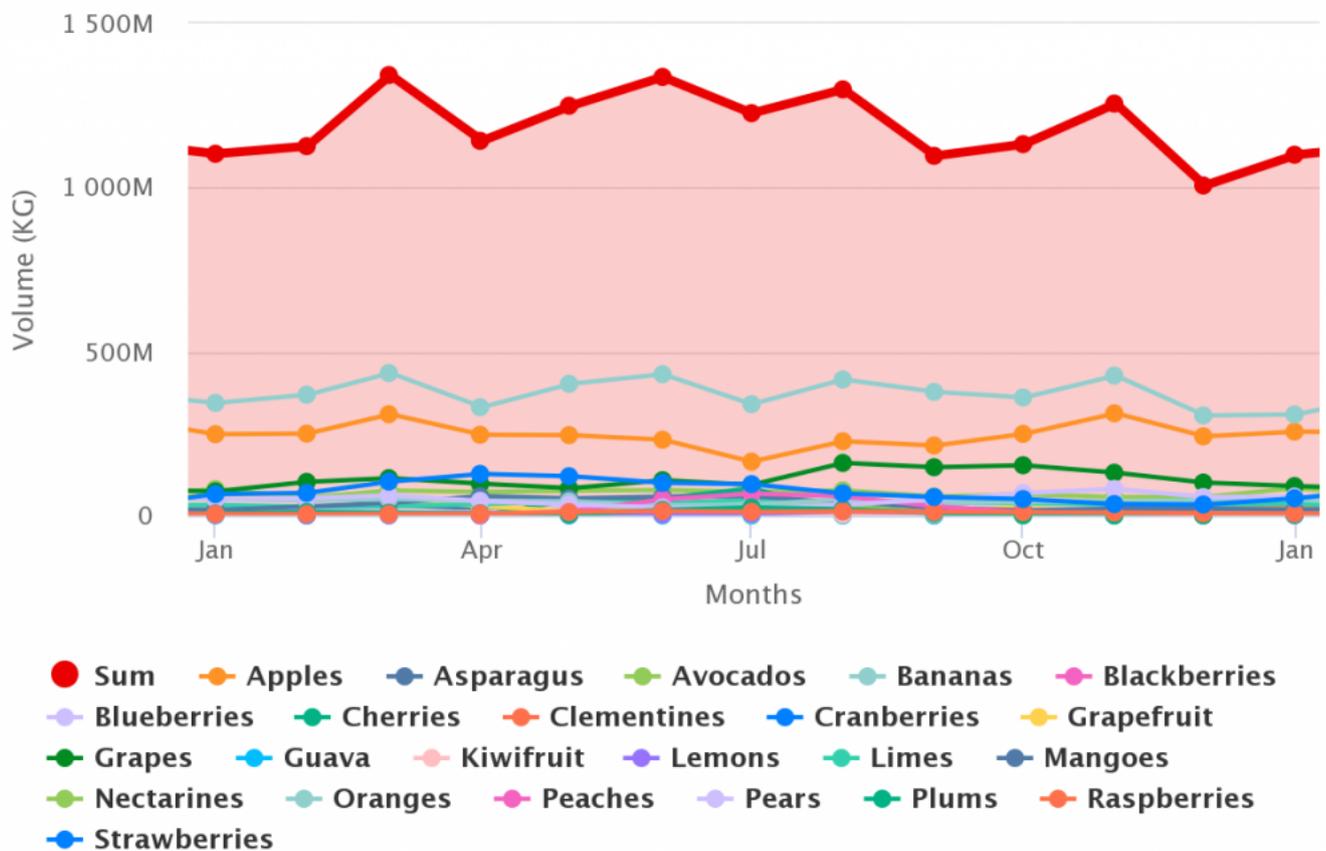


(Source: USDA Market News via [Agronometrics](#))

[Agronometrics users can view this chart with live updates [here](#)]

In volumes, however, the story is completely different. Looking at the reports from 2013 we can see that they didn't skip a beat. The reason for this is because the data is collected by the department of homeland security, grower associations and other public and private entities which continue to work when the shutdown happens and or maintain historic records that can be updated afterward.

US Movements by Commodity 2013 (KG)



(Source: USDA Market News via [Agronometrics](#))

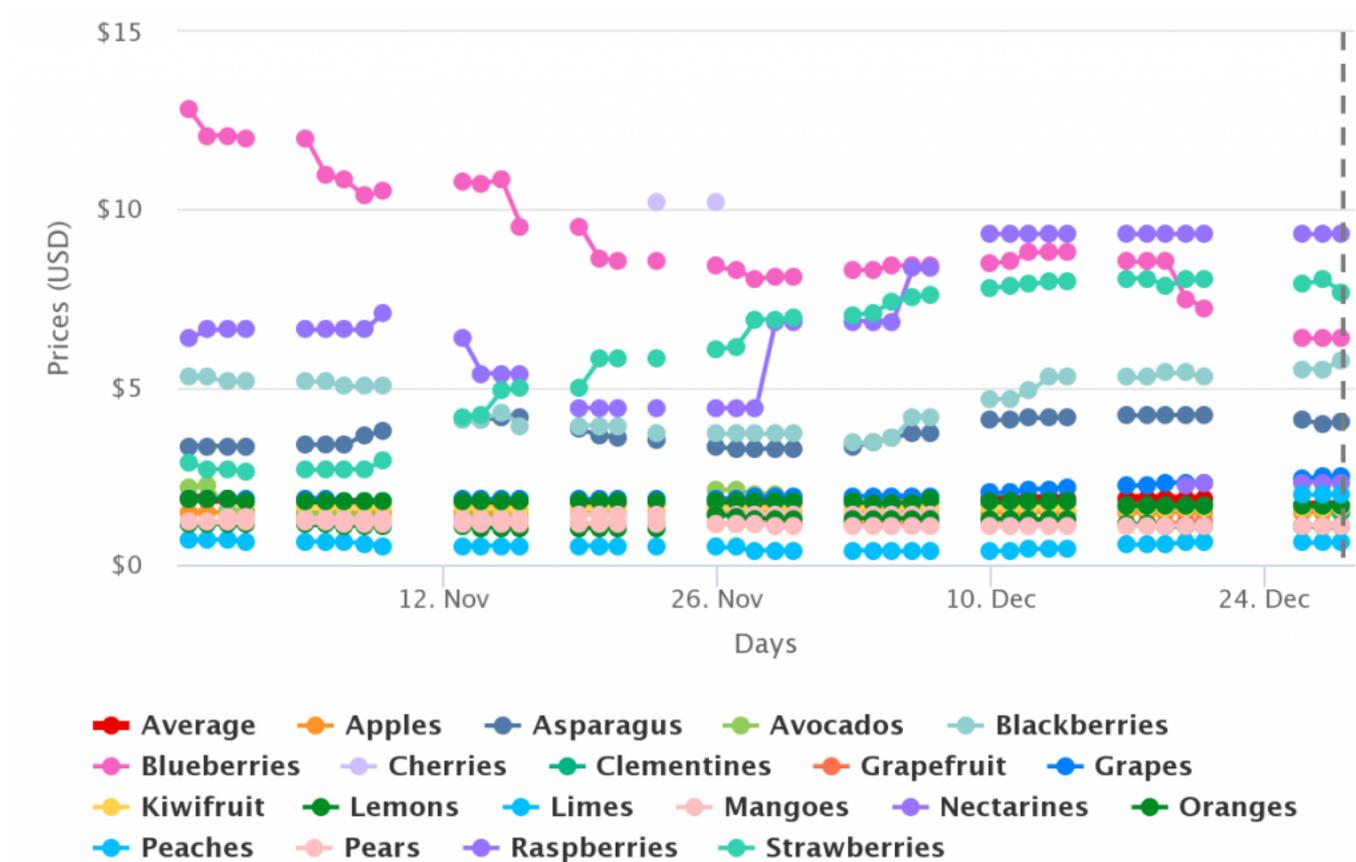
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So looking at the situation as it stands today, things are actually completely different. Right after Christmas On the 26th, the USDA published shipping point prices as per usual which actually caught me by surprise. Digging a bit deeper, I found that the unit that is in charge of creating the market reports, Market News, was excepted from the shutdown in the latest [Lapse in Appropriations Contingency Plan](#) for the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. To be excepted the functions must fall under the following conditions:

- They are necessary to perform activities expressly authorized by law;
- They are necessary to perform activities necessarily implied by law;
- They are necessary to the discharge of the President's constitutional duties and powers;
- They are necessary to protect life and property.

The reasoning given was that “The Market News program is an excepted activity based on the criticality of the market news reports to the overall agricultural industry”. So I am very happy to report that we will continue to publish our market prices and volumes as per usual.

US Daily Shipping Point Prices (USD per KG)



(Source: USDA Market News via [Agronometrics](#))

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**On Jan. 2 we were contacted by the USDA who wanted to clarify that Market News services have been unaffected by the current U.S. Government Shutdown. This first line of this article has now be modified to emphasize this point.*

In our ‘In Charts’ series, we work to tell some of the stories that are moving the industry.

Feel free to take a look at the other articles by [clicking here](#).

Agronometrics is a data visualization tool built to help the industry make sense of the huge amounts of data that you depend on. We strive to help farmers, shippers, buyers, sellers, movers and shakers get an objective point of view on the markets to help them make informed strategic decisions. If you found the information and the charts from this article useful, feel free to visit us at www.agronometrics.com where you can easily recreate these same graphs, or explore the other 23 fruits we currently track, creating your own reports automatically updated with the latest data daily.

To welcome professionals to the service we want to offer a 10% discount off your first month or year with the following coupon code: FRUIT

The code will only be good till the 16th of January 2019, so visit us today.

*To view historics click on this icon in the table. In the historics report you can change viewing to reflect seasons that cross New Years.