

Industry body the Northwest Cherry Growers has forecast a crop size of 20.5m box equivalents in its first estimate of the season. If realized, it would mark a significant drop from last year's crop of a little over 25m boxes.

The association noted that the first estimate had the most potential for variance from the eventual crop size.

A generally warm January and February gave the crop one of the earliest starts on record. But since then, relatively cool weather has tempered progression, especially during pollination.

"As always, it will take a few weeks to determine how much of this year's crop will remain on the tree," the association said in a release. "These "drops" are natural and taken into account in our subsequent estimates. But that's not all we can tell from the trees, and the news is good."

Warm weather in late winter and early spring got the ball rolling in the early growing areas, while the more northern and higher elevation districts were still seeing lower temperatures.

"So while we expect a strong start to our crop in the last few days of May, we are also expecting one of our largest spreads between early and late districts," Northwest Cherry Growers said.

With many retailers seeing reduced store trips and customers looking for a taste of summer, a strong June start and a longer crop is "about as best as can be hoped for at this stage", it said.

"Historically, this type of separation in degree days across the districts points to a full season where the industry will have 95 plus days of sales to move the crop."