

Oppy has kicked off the California cherry season by shipping the first fruit from Katco Packing, the new partnership that brings the Brookside and Katicich brands under the same roof in Stockton.

While the grower-marketer typically begins domestic cherry season in mid-May, Oppy now offers cherries from the beginning of May through to the end of August, harvesting in California, Oregon and British Columbia.

“We are thrilled to bring cherries to our customers earlier than ever,” said Jon Bailey, who leads Oppy’s cherry category.

“Having started on May 2, our volume has been steadily increasing with peak volume from the 15th onward and plenty of fruit for Memorial Day promotions. The quality looks good overall with some blocks in the northern area averaging a size 10-row size.”

Katco added a state-of-the-art Unitec optical sorting machine last month to bring increased accuracy and speed to its packing process.

With more of the Coral variety in this season’s plans, and Bings heavy for the last half of production, the new line will assure consistent size and quality in its bags and clamshells.

Along with this elevated precision, the two brands offer one another a multitude of advantages including production efficiencies and logistical support all while Oppy vertically integrates to contribute marketing and promotional backing.

“Our program is built with partners who have a 100% cherry-focus. Having a team all-in on stone fruit, paired with this top-notch technology, is an equation for the best quality cherries we’ve seen come out of California. We are extremely pleased with the new developments in this category,” said Senior Vice President of Categories and Marketing James Milne.

One of the best ways retailers can support the season is by making consumers aware that cherries have arrived, said Bailey. He suggests positioning the fruit so it is easily seen in stores and headline the news in e-commerce for the influx of online shoppers. Because cherries are not typically on someone’s grocery list, it’s a great time to be creative in reaching consumers who may be taking advantage of the virtual experience, Bailey emphasized.

As summer approaches, so does Oppy’s dozen-season strong Orchard View Cherry program in Oregon. Bailey expects a smooth transition between the two regions.

Oppy also recently expanded its imported stone fruit program from Chile, Argentina and New Zealand, doubling volumes to cater to increasing market demand. With nearly year-round availability, the fresh produce giant's robust cherry offerings now reach May through January.