

Increased acreage of late spring and early summer strawberry production and fair weather should contribute to an earlier start to California's peak season of strawberries.

The acreage associated with production in the peak late spring and early summer increased by 6.4% compared to last year, one of the reasons that the harvest has started to pick up sooner than last year, said Chris Christian, Senior Vice President of the [California Strawberry Commission](#).

"Fair weather has been contributing to some early production especially in Southern California, so we are currently ahead of 2021 and ahead of our three year average," Christian told Fresh Fruit Portal.

In terms of volume, the 2022 harvest is expected to surpass the previous year, and the ramp up into the strawberry peak season should occur in the second half of March. Cool nights have helped build the quality of the plants and adding to their condition, she added.

Consumer demand has remained strong, a trend Christian says has stayed in place since the beginning of the pandemic. Consumers are looking for healthy food, but also foods that are fun and enjoyable and strawberries fit the bill.

According to USDA data compiled by the California Strawberry Commission, prices for conventional strawberries in Santa Maria Valley averaged at US\$7-\$8.50 a tray last week, compared to US\$9-\$12 a year ago during the same week.

In the field, much like most other crops, growers have seen almost every cost item increase, for everything from labor, water, mulch, materials and more.

In general, labor has always been an issue for California growers, so Christian expects that farmers will be able to sort out this issue.

As an organization, the commission has an active automation department which is working with different organizations to be able to utilize more technology solutions.

The commission also recently launched a new campaign called "Love Strawberries", which Christian said aims to build awareness around California strawberries and the industry behind it.