

OLIVER KAY BUYER'S UPDATE

Challenging Times Feb 2023

There's a lot going on in the fruit and veg world, so here's an update from our Lee on what's happening in order to help you plan and adjust your menus over the coming weeks and months.



Let's start with the good news...Yorkshire forced rhubarb is great, and salad will start to improve going forwards now that the light levels are getting better as the super sunshine helps growth.

Now for the not so good news...This time of year is normally challenging for most growers, but this year particularly so.

The empty shelves in supermarkets where fresh produce should sit, and the limits as to how much customers can buy shows how affected the market is across the board.

The droughts of last summer led to poor planting conditions. The mild autumn, and more recently a significant reduction in temperatures (frosts, snow, sunlight) across the UK and Europe has led to major reduction in yields, size and an increase in quality issues across a number of products, with some growers are seeing 30-40% reductions in usable yield.

With the issues, and high production prices on certain lines, farmers are reluctant to put anything in the ground without return, only planting what they know they will sell - so there is no buffer. This forces market price fluctuations and creates availability issues.

The key challenges...

Baby leaf. We have had very limited supply of baby leaf (rocket, spinach) over the last week to ten days. The outlook is that we should start to see a gradual increment in availability over the coming weeks.

Tomatoes. Low sunlight levels mean the fruit can be low colour on arrival into the UK. We are using our expertise to try and ripen the fruit up but it is likely some fruit that will have tinges of green. This is more evident in the cherry / baby varieties rather than larger tomatoes.



Peppers. Due to the low sunlight and temperature we have 2 extremes; very large fruit, and very small fruit. The larger fruit will have a shorter shelf life and likely have flashes of green, the smaller fruit will generally be full colour but yield will be much lower. If size is of importance to you we suggest you opt for singles or cases rather than the 3 pack.

Aubergines. Very limited supply with some skin scarring and will have a shorter in shelf life than normal.

Cucumbers. Very short in supply and will have a shorter shelf life than normal.

British root crops. We are already starting to move into crops that were planned for the next few months. This will mean reduced supply or an increase in imported in the coming months.

Whole head leaf. Cos / baby gem will be short at the end of this week and into next. Iceberg will have a lower head weight.

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