

OLIVER KAY



CROP REPORT

Spring 2024

As we all start to notice the longer days, it gives us all that sense of optimism for summer. In general, this year's sentiment for the coming season feel much more positive than that of last year. The UK is seeing the rate of inflation slowing and some of the farming inputs starting to reduce.

Find out what to choose or lose from your menus over the coming spring months as Lee Callon, our expert buyer with over 20 years' experience of fresh produce, gives you the lowdown on what's happening in the world of fresh produce.

Our dedicated team continue to source the best quality products from our long-term supply partners, and should you have any questions, please contact our team who will be happy to help.

Orders can be placed over the phone during working hours, or online via our website or app – 24 hours a day – 7 days a week to suit your needs!

As always, we thank you for your continued support in choosing us as your fresh produce supplier.



Contact our team 01204 385463
or order online at www.oliverkayproduce.co.uk or via the Oliver Kay app

GROWING CONDITIONS

Overall, growing conditions in the Mediterranean and North Africa have been reasonably stable. Some crops have been affected by overcast conditions, slowing production temporarily but it appears to be back on track. There are still ongoing growing issues with plant viruses, particularly impacting tomatoes and peppers, but extra grading has ensured no supply issues.

Despite the farmers' strike in France - fuelled by concerns over falling prices and increasing costs -our growers remained dedicated to ensuring supply by adjusting their transportation schedules to include night driving and avoiding busy roads. As a consequence inbound supply has been lumpy but supply to our customers has been unaffected, albeit some mixed maturity of fruit has been seen as a consequence.

Closer to home here in the UK, it's fair to say that this winter has been one of the wettest in recent memory, with many regions never fully drying out from the rainy autumn. The primary challenge has been the damage caused by fields becoming waterlogged and subsequently freezing, affecting Brassicas in particular.

Shipping - The ongoing disruption in the Red Sea is expected to continue, and a combination of factors at the start of the year, including the notorious summer South Easter Wind and Atlantic storms caused further delays to cargos passing through Cape Town, throwing planned arrivals into disarray.

Planting - Many areas of the UK are still too wet to start preparations. Planting season normally starts late February into early March so weather conditions over the next few weeks are very important. Our greenhouse crops for summer are now fully planted, including cucumber from early April moving into tomato, then peppers and aubergine by the end of May.

CHALLENGES & LOOKING AHEAD

Challenges

- **Potatoes** - The UK has struggled with root crops, particularly potatoes, due to challenging weather conditions in the past year. Farmers had to leave a significant amount of potatoes in the ground due to poor harvesting conditions, resulting in a 30% decrease in the potato crop for 2023 compared to 2017, which is expected to be the lowest UK production on record. To meet demand, we are importing Mediterranean crops from mid to late April through until July. Unfortunately with importing comes the associated costs which will generate a significant increase on what is traditionally a low cost product. Looking forward there are concerns already on the seed potato for the 2024 harvest as the current crop used for seeding has similar quality issues which will affect the yield forecast.
- **Tomato and peppers** have had some challenges due to supply disruption, this should now stabilise as tensions in France ease.
- **Avocado** Israeli is now in supply however we are seeing some stone shadow, this doesn't affect the quality of the flesh but doesn't look as appealing when the stone is removed. Extra destructive test are in place.
- **South Africa** has had loading issues due to Atlantic weather, we hope to be through the worst of delays which has primarily affected grape at this time of year.
- Longer terms issues arise from UK growers turning away from traditional crops which are higher risk and more labour intensive. The labour market continues to be a challenge and therefore growers are moving into crops more suited to mechanised harvesting and lower risk, crops such as sugar beets and cereals.

Finished

- **Brussel Sprouts** have finished.
- **Spring green** in most areas were finished off by the frosts and waterlogging.
- UK conditions are reducing availability of **kales** and bringing **Savoy cabbage** to an early finish.
- **Asia apples** are coming to an end due to shipping issues.

Looking Ahead

- New season **Egyptian red onion** planned by mid-May.
- New season **tomatoes** planned for May.
- **Jersey Royals & English asparagus** will be available from late April, we will stop all import of asparagus to take advantage of the fantastic UK crop.
- **Peach** and **nectarine** will start in May.
- New season **spring green** will hopefully be ready late March/April.
- **UK leaf** due to start mid-May if planting goes to plan.



WHAT'S IN SEASON

At Oliver Kay, we work with trusted growers sourcing the very best seasonal produce from our range of local and international suppliers. The below guide will advise on product availability over the spring months, but due to the nature of fresh produce there are many external factors that impact supply. Please check availability with our team or by using the online ordering before listing a product on your menu.

KEY: UK SEASONAL BEST

VEGETABLES

Broccoli (Spain & UK) - Spanish supply will take us through until UK starts in summer. Wet ground is the concern for planting and we will plant in 3 locations as we did last year - east of Scotland, top of Lincolnshire and just below Peterborough. This geographic spread is required to maintain UK supply through summer and there are no supply issues expected.

Cabbage (UK) - UK is good quality and size, there have been no issues with stored crop and contingency supply from Spain is not expected this year. UK crop is expected mid-June, no issues expected.

Carrot (UK - Spain & Israel for 4-6 weeks) - Currently the ground conditions are very wet. Crop lifted in Scotland is showing harvesting challenges due to waterlogging. Frost damage has been minimised this year as growers manage to store crops over winter to prevent the same issues as winter 2022/23. Bruising due to mud stick is being seen but grading is removing this issue.

The plan is to import during the gap 4-6 weeks between overwintered crop and new season from Spain & Israel. New season crop is being drilled currently and is expected to be ready in mid-June. Good weather in April and May will ensure that there are no delays to this starting.

Cauliflower (UK & France) - Heads are a good size and French & UK supply will continue through winter and spring until UK is available mid-June.


Onion (UK & Egypt) - Availability this year is still reduced but we are in a much better position than this time last year. We plan to import Egyptian reds in-between old crop and new crop.

The new season brings concerns as the overwintered sets for brown and red onions are currently in wet ground, posing a potential issue for July.


Planting is due to start at the end of February for the main crop in September. We're hoping for dry weather to allow access to the fields, to give growers more confidence to commit to volumes.

Parsnip (UK) - Similar to carrots, parsnips typically run approximately three weeks later. Parsnips are harder than carrots and less vulnerable to frost damage with no anticipated issues.

Potatoes (UK & Med) - Owing to the potato issues explained previously, we have taken the decision to import new season Mediterranean crop from Cyprus, Egypt, Italy and France. We expect to take our first deliveries in mid-to-late April through until July.

 **Rhubarb (UK)** - Looking forward to UK harvest – no reported issues.

Savoy Cabbage (UK – Spain & Portugal) - UK is coming to a premature end due to poor conditions, our plan for Spanish and Portuguese supply will be pulled forward and will take us through into new season UK for summer. Good head sizes and quality - looking very good.

 **Spring Cabbage & Kale (Spanish)** - Spring cabbage will start again in March providing we don't get any more Beast from the East surprises. Kale will be Lancashire and although we currently have reduced availability, we should have enough supply to see us through the season.

Swede (UK) - Overwintered crop remains good, heavy rains in the east of Scotland have caused some harvesting delays.



DID YOU KNOW?.....

For seasonal recipe ideas from our development chefs, along with customer dish ideas and provide inspiration on how to use the latest seasonal produce, [click here](#).



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FRUIT

Apple (Europe & Southern Hemisphere) - European supply will take us through until late April/early May, when we move into the Southern Hemispheres as usual. Fruit will be from a combination of origins – starting with Chilean moving into Brazilian and South African for the summer. There are no expected issues with availability.

Avocado (Israeli) - Current supply is Israeli and will be supplied for the next 6-8 weeks. Supply this season started late and availability reduced due to domestic issues. We are seeing some stone shadow which is a small amount of discoloration where the stone is removed, this does not affect the quality of the flesh. Extra destructive test are in place to ensure this is minimised. Backup supply for this period is from Spain and Morocco. Both Peru and South Africa will start loading at the end of March, for arrivals late April/May, crop reports are good. No supply issues foreseen.

Banana (Caribbean) - No known issues and historically the Caribbean is stable outside of hurricane season (June to end of November) but with the changing weather growers are nervous - we are at the mercy of Mother nature.

Blackberries (Mexico) - Erendira variety supply and quality has been good.

Blueberries (Chile) - Chilean Blue Ribbon variety has excellent flavour.

Grapes (Green South African) - Thomson no quality issues supply now ok.
Indian supply soon to be on the water but shipping cost have rocket due to vessels now having to go via the Cape of Good Hope, concerns over quality due to extra shipping time.

Grapes Red (South African) - Crimson finally arrived and quality currently good but shortages expected due to expected late start of Egyptian and shipping cost due to lack of vessel now traveling through Egypt.

Orange (Egypt) - Egypt will be the main supply of orange until July, followed by South African supply to take us into winter. There are no supply or quality issues expected.

Pears (South African) - From April we will change from Dutch and Belgium Conference pear to South African William and Packham, this is much earlier than planned as European fruit hasn't stored particularly well over winter due to poor growing conditions in 2023. Our seasonal pear line will also move to southern hemisphere supply earlier than planned, these varieties will include Packham, William, Sempre, Vermont, Rosemarie, Flamingo & Forelle.

Raspberries (Spain) - Spanish Noelia good quality.

Strawberries (UK & Mediterranean) - The previous overcast weather has affected Fortuna variety from Spain so we are currently supplying Egyptian Sensation.
Spanish Calinda supply will be available next and is planned to take us through until UK summer crop starts, conditions in the Mediterranean are now good and no issues expected.
UK growers are still challenged by the availability of labour and the additional cost associated the shortages. UK supply should start in June and be in full supply for Wimbledon.

Tomato (France, Spain & Morocco) - For the past few years we have seen shortages around February and March due to export restriction from Morocco and overcast weather. This year contingency supplies from the Canaries and Egypt have been put in place to ensure security of supply. There are still some growing challenges due to plant virus but this is being managed well and overall supply and quality is good.

EXOTICS

Asparagus Large (Peru & Mexico) - Peruvian and Mexican supply until UK starts late April - quality is very good supply is now much improved.

Baby Corn (India & Thailand) - Supply is now Indian and Thailand in equal quantities with quality good.

Beans (Morocco) - Currently Moroccan with Egyptian as backup, with no major quality issues to report.

Butternut (Portugal) - Portuguese coming to an end and will be replaced by South African around May time. Quality is good.

Chillies (Spain & Morocco) - Spanish supply with Moroccan alongside, quality is very good.

Figs (Brazil) - Brazil supply to take us through until summer.

Garlic & Ginger (Brazil, Spain & China) - Availability of Brazilian ginger good, garlic mainly Spanish with Chinese as a backup.

Limes (Brazil) - Mainly Brazilian, Mexican contingency not expected.

Mango (Brazil & Peru) - Brazilian Palma are good with Peruvian as a backup, quality good.

Shallots (France) - French Banana shallots quality is very good, no problems expected.

Sugar Snaps & Mangetout (Egypt & Kenya) - Egyptian supply will take us through until April, moving to Kenyan before Peru start in May, quality good.

Sweet Potatoes (Egypt) - Main supply Egyptian Beauregard through until end April/May followed by Honduran. Quality is very good.



FIND OUT

what produce is in season locally and overseas all year round to help choose produce when it is available and at its best *here*.

Lee's Top Picks

- Jersey Royals
- Asparagus
- Spring greens
- Summer leaf

HERE TO HELP

The team at Oliver Kay are here to support you every step of the way, with insights and tips to maximise your menu.

SEASONAL MENU INSPIRATION:

Poached Cod, Haricot Bean & Spring Broth

Here's a seasonal recipe idea.

Find this recipe and many more on our website oliverkayproduce.co.uk

Ingredients:

- 4 portions Cod
- 1 courgette peeled into ribbons
- 1 corn on the cob
- 100g sugar snap peas julienne
- 100g fresh peas
- 300g parsley leaves
- 100g sunflower oil
- 300g baked beans
- 500g fish stock
- extra virgin olive oil
- 4 large wild garlic leaves finely chopped
- lemon juice
- Salt

Method:

-Make the parsley oil by putting the leaves and 300g sunflower oil in to a Thermomix and setting at 80c for 8 mins, strain and cool, alternatively, heat the oil and parsley gently, then blitz well and pass.

-Deskin the fish & lay the skin between 2 pieces of parchment in between two baking sheets, bake at 180c for 6-10 minutes until crisp.

-Place the cod in a vac pac pouch with a little olive oil & lemon zest, seal and cook in a water bath at 46c for 45 minutes. Or poach in a hot fish stock not simmering for 10-15 minutes until just starting to flake.

-Grill the corn on the cob until charred slightly, cut them off with a knife.

-Drain the tomato sauce from the baked beans and use in a burger dressing, wash the beans well.

-Bring the fish stock to the boil and add the peas, sugar snaps, and cook for 2 mins then add the courgette ribbons, add the corn, parsley oil, wild garlic leaves, lemon juice & washed beans, correct seasoning, and serve with the poached fish and crisp skin.



Poached Cod, Haricot Bean & Spring Broth

DID YOU KNOW?....

Our commitment is not just to deliver the finest fruits and vegetables, but also to guide chefs through the journey of flavours and textures that result in extraordinary dishes.

Click here to view our blog where we share insightful tips for fresh food pairings.



For enquiries or more information about any of the products mentioned in the Crop Report, or to place an order, please contact our team who will be happy to help:

Call the office on 01204 38546

or order online at oliverkayproduce.co.uk
or via the Oliver Kay app

