

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: October 11, 2023

Report Number: NL2023-0008

Report Name: More Pears and Less Apples Expected in the Netherlands

Country: Netherlands

Post: The Hague

Report Category: Agriculture in the News, Fresh Deciduous Fruit, Special Certification - Organic/Kosher/Halal

Prepared By: Marcel Pinckaers

Approved By: Laura Geller

Report Highlights:

Dutch apple production is expected to be down by 12 percent while the pear harvest will increase by an estimated three percent. Unfavorable growing conditions in the beginning of the growing season resulted in lower yields for apples. The harvested acreage of apples is forecasted to drop to 5,550 hectares mainly due to disappointing profitability. The harvested pear acreage nearly totals 10,000 hectares and has been stable for the past four years. The most popular apple and pear varieties grown in the Netherlands are Elstar and Conference, respectively. At the same time there is a growing interest in producing club varieties. Organic production of apples (three percent) and pears (one percent) remains rather low. Dutch consumers have developed a preference for locally produced varieties. Dutch apples are almost all sold on the internal EU market while Dutch pears, along with the Belgian Conference variety, dominate EU pear exports. The leading pear export markets are Belarus and the UK.

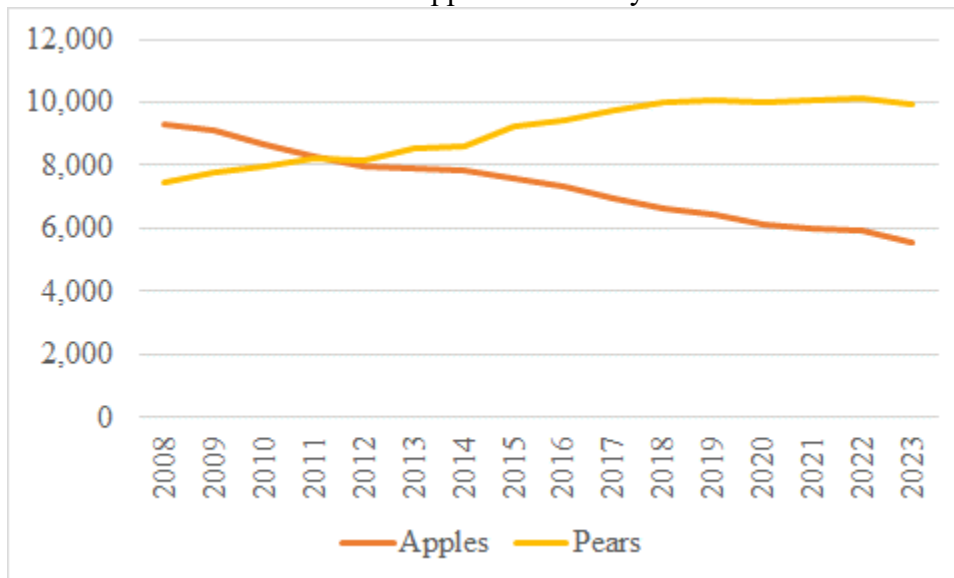
Introduction

The low-stem trees as we know them today from the fruit plantations were introduced en masse into the Netherlands after the Second World War. The advantages of these low trees are that they have relatively few leaves and a lot of fruit per tree. Furthermore, the height makes picking relatively easy. Nowadays you only see low-stemmed trees in fruit orchards in the Netherlands. The acreage of apples and pears took off in the 1970s and 1980s when growing apples and pears became a profitable crop. Locally and internationally, there was great demand for Dutch apples and pears. In the past two decades, the profitability of growing fresh deciduous fruit, and in particular apples, has been disappointing due to an increase in competition coming from Central and Eastern European Countries. Former export markets have become more self-sufficient.

Acreage

The harvested acreage of apples in the Netherlands is forecasted to drop to an estimated 5,550 hectares (ha), and six percent lower compared to last year. Twenty-five years ago, apple acreage was at almost 15,000 ha, but has decreased due to increased costs, lack of labor, and the loss of export markets. This trend is expected to continue due to several reasons. According to the Dutch Fresh Produce Center: “Former exports markets have over the years become more self-sufficient, there is an increase in competition from Central and Eastern European Countries, the profitability of growing apples in the Netherlands has been disappointing, business succession within companies is increasingly becoming difficult, and owners of orchards that are up for replanting are increasingly struggling to decide whether to replant.”

Chart 1. Dutch Area Harvested Apple and Pear by Year in Hectare



Source: [Central Bureau of Statistics](#)

The trend for the harvested acreage of pears has been quite different. While the pear acreage was only 6,000 hectares 25 years ago, in 2012 it surpassed apple acreage. Last year the acreage totaled more than 10,000 hectares. This year, the harvested acreage of pears is forecasted to slightly decrease to 9,920 hectares.

Production

Dutch apple production is forecast to be around 207,000 Metric Tons (MT), a 12 percent drop compared to last year. In addition to a lower area harvested as shown in Chart 1, the decrease can also be attributed to a lower yield per hectare which is the direct result of suboptimal conditions in the beginning of the growing season and an increase in damage from apple blossom weevil due to stricter pesticide use regulations by the Dutch government.

With a share of 40 percent, *Elstar* is by far the most widely grown apple in the Netherlands. This year, a harvest of 82,000 MT of *Elstar* is expected, eight percent lower than last year. For the second variety in the Netherlands, *Jonagold* (including *Jonagored*), 50,000 MT are expected, followed by *Kanzi* (18,000 MT) and *Rode Boskoop* (10,000 MT).

Dutch pear production is forecasted to be around 341,000 MT, up by three percent compared to last year and down by six percent compared to the average production of last three years. There are reports that some pear growers are dealing with poorer harvests because of the pear bud weevil, a brown-grey beetle about five millimeters long.

The *Conference* variety, which accounts for more than three-quarters of the Dutch pear harvest, is estimated at 263,000 MT, or two percent lower than in 2022. *Doyenné du Comice* and *Beurré Alexander Lucas* follow at a distance as the most commonly grown pear varieties, with 22,000 MT and 20,000 MT being calculated.

There continues to be a growing interest to start producing club varieties such as *Xenia*, *QTee*, *Migo*, and *Sweet Sensation*. The harvest of *Xenia* (13,000 MT) and *Migo* (8,000 MT) is expected to be again larger than a year ago, as there continues to be increased demand by consumers.

Production of organic apples and pears has been rather low. About three percent of apples and one percent of pears produced in the Netherlands are organic and there are no indications that these percentages might change in the near future.

Table 1. Dutch Commercial Appel and Pear Production by Year in MT

	2021	2022	2023
Total Apples	243	235	207
- <i>Elstar</i>	102	89	82
- <i>Jonagold</i>	51	56	50
- <i>Kanzi</i>	18	18	18
- <i>Rode Boskoop</i>	13	14	10
- <i>Junami</i>	8	7	6
- <i>Golden Delicious</i>	7	7	6
- <i>Wellant</i>	6	7	6
-Other	38	38	30
Total Pears	340	351	341
- <i>Conference</i>	263	269	263
- <i>Doyenné du Comice</i>	20	24	22

- <i>Beurré Alexander Lucas</i>	22	23	20
- <i>Xenia</i>	12	11	13
- <i>Migo</i>	5	7	8
- <i>Sweet Sensation</i>	5	8	5
-Other	13	10	10

Source: Dutch Fresh Produce Center

Growing Season

Due to the high number of cold and wet days early in the year, the growing season did not have a good start. Flowering was suboptimal as it started late and lasted longer than normal. As a direct result, fruit setting was not abundant, affecting this year’s apple yield. After flowering, the growing season improved, despite the large number of very wet days. There were no heatwaves or droughts, nor are there any reports of damaged apples due to hail or frost. Fruit thinning was hardly needed due to the abundant physiological drop this year. Dutch apples are expected to be crunchy and pears have its unique bronze color and a good taste. The storing quality of this year’s harvest is expected to be good.

Apple Blossom Weevil

An increasing number of apple growers in the Netherlands are dealing with poor harvests because of the [apple blossom weevil](#), a small beetle about six millimeters long. In the spring, these beetles infest apple trees, and its reproduction process involves pricking the blossom and laying eggs in some of the flowers. Pesticides to combat the beetle are available on the market but are no longer allowed for use by fruit growers in the Netherlands. It has been reported that other EU member states still allow the use of these pesticides. Pesticides to combat the pear bud weevil are available on the market and can still be used by fruit growers in the Netherlands. The legal usage of pesticides in the Netherlands is regulated by the [Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority](#) (NVWA) and the [Dutch Board for the Authorization of Plant Protection Products and Biocides](#) (Ctgb).

Consumption

An estimated 90-95 percent of all apples produced in the Netherlands, end up on the local fresh consumer market. These varieties are also the most eaten apples in the Netherlands. The most eaten apple grown outside the Netherlands, is *Pink Lady*. The *Conference* pear is the popular pear among the Dutch. The [Dutch Fruit Growers Association](#) (NFO Fruit) stressed the advantages of eating Dutch fruit, including apples and pears, “By buying Dutch fruit you make an environmentally conscious choice for buying fruit from nearby and therefor few food miles; so sustainable, tasty, and healthy from our own soil. Orchards in addition contribute to an attractive landscape and the biodiversity in the Netherlands.”

Pear consumption is under pressure as affluent consumers seem to be slowly moving away from eating more traditional fruit, like pears, and are developing an appetite for more exotic and luxurious fruit like berries, pineapple, mango, and melon. Food distributors are responding to this by offering one-person fruit salads that conveniently can be used at home or on-the-go. For many other consumers throughout the EU, it is the higher costs of living over the last year and a half that is forcing them to make different food choices. Lower priced, often private labeled, and further processed food seems to be gaining market share at the expense of healthy and nutritious food options, including fresh fruit.

Picture 1. Fruit Salads offered by Dutch Retailers



Source: <https://www.ah.nl/producten/aardappel-groente-fruit/fruitsalade>

Whereas apples are mainly sold on the domestic market, Dutch pears are not only produced for the European Union (EU) market but also for markets outside the EU. In Marketing Year (MY) 2022/23, 17 percent of Dutch pears ended up being exported to Belarus, Kazakhstan, and other countries that have proximity to Russia, as well as the UK, Norway, and China.

Pear Outlook

Over the past five years, pear cultivation in Italy, and to a lesser extent Spain and Portugal, is under pressure because of uncertain climatic conditions associated with frost, droughts, heatwaves, and hailstorms. Pear production in the Netherlands does not seem to be affected and Conference pears have demonstrated to be a product secure variety which fares well in the Dutch climate.

Post Comment

The overall trend for pear and apple consumption continues to go down, while regulations on inputs and inflation increase the costs for producers. This is squeezing the farmers ability to profit. Some aging farmers have decided to forego the sizeable investment in replanting trees every 15 years, while others are switching from apples to pears for more profitability.

Attachments:

No Attachments.