

FARMER IN THE FIELD



CHERRISH THE CHERRIES

By Bonnie Swank

June 2014

Each year at this time when I confer with Dick on what I might write about his answer is always "CHERRIES". He has a real passion for growing two things, cherries and heirloom tomatoes. Unfortunately cherries can be the "difficult child" not always behaving as we had hoped. Marty Vitale who sold Dick his cherry trees told him "a cherry bud will never tell you what they are going to do". This year the California cherry production seems to be in trouble and surprisingly its' lack of water but the lack of chill hours.

As winter approaches the trees drop their leaves and enter into a dormant state. While dormant it is important the trees experience between 700-800 hours of temperatures below 45 degrees Fahrenheit. They know when to go to sleep and when to wake up but if the weather is too warm they become confused. That is what's happened this year. We spoke with Andy Mariani from Mariani Orchards in Morgan Hill and he told us blossoms should come on fast, drop and leaf out rather quickly, but not this year. Blossoms hung on the trees and they leafed out slowly. Warm weather before a bloom can also kill pollen meaning the bees can do all that work for not. He expects to only get 25% of his normal crop and he knows orchards in Gilroy that have no fruit set at all.

So what does this mean for the local consumer? Fruit is graded on size and quality and unfortunately much of California's fruit will be shipped to other countries willing to pay top dollar for quality fruit. You may be able to find some good fruit but be prepared to pay. Unfortunately I am afraid you are going to find a lot of "seconds" at the farmers markets this year. Seconds may be split doubles but if the fruit tastes good enjoy while you can.