

## FARMER IN THE FIELD



# CALIFORNIA CHERRIES

By Bonnie Swank

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This month I want to revisit and celebrate the California cherry. The first article I wrote was on cherries in 2008 and I only touched the tip of the iceberg. Nothing screams summer like crisp, juicy, sweet, red Bing cherries. California's cherry season starts in the Arvin-Bakersfield area in late April-early May working its way up the San Joaquin Valley and ending in June in San Benito County. California's nutritious soil, abundant sunshine and mild temperatures all contribute to producing exquisite fruit. Rainiers are another varietal favorite standing out from the crowd with its unique golden and pink blushed skin. The cherry is firm, the flesh is clear, the juice is colorless and the flavor is sweet and delicate.

To extend our cherry season at Swank Farms we grow six different varieties of cherries. They don't all ripen at the same time allowing our farmers markets customers to enjoy fresh picked cherries for up to six weeks. Cherries are a delicate and sometimes unpredictable crop. Did the trees get enough chill hours? Did the bees do a good job pollinating the orchard? Are the trees producing a lot of cherries, a lot of small cherries? A very light crop means large fruit making picking more like an Easter egg hunt than a harvest. Maybe the farmer has a beautiful crop of ripe cherries and that dreaded rain shower passes over causing the fruit to crack. Are we crazy? Maybe, but it's worth it when it all comes together.

**Cherry Tips:**

- Cherries should be firm and crisp. Soft cherries may be a result of cold storage or being picked in hot weather.
- Sample the different varieties, vendors encourage it.
- California is known for their **sweet** cherries not the tart pie cherries found back east.
- Enjoy the season while it is here and don't be tempted by fruit that has been shipped into the state, you will be disappointed.