

Central Otago cherries
from Cromwell



Weather tests Central growers

Story and photo by Dianne King

Central Otago fruitgrowers are feeling the effects of the same testing weather which hit fellow growers in Hawke's Bay, Timaru and Nelson.

Frosts and hail were experienced throughout November.

Poor pollination during the critical period for apricots cut crop sizes throughout the district and volumes are described as patchy to average.

A shortage in apricot crop volumes generally results in larger fruit which leads to good market returns.

Summerfruit growers had a long run of continuous frosts for 18 nights out of 20, and frost alerts for both summerfruit and pipfruit continued through mid-November as temperatures dropped to freezing after blasts of southerly weather.

Pipfruit New Zealand Otago director Stephen Darling, of Ettrick, said while there had been a very changeable spring, growers were looking forward to warmer weather for fruit development.

"We're nervous about the weather conditions."

Central Otago Fruitgrowers Association chairman Jeremy Hiscock, an Earnsclough orchardist, said apricot crops were hampered by poor weather for pollination, and crop volume estimates range from 30% to 70%, depending on the various areas within the wider district.

"We had some hail in Earnsclough but it was along with rain shower, so I don't think any damage would affect the crops."

Cherry crops are "buoyant" across all districts after the best pollination "we've had in a very long time".

Isolated hail storms damaged fruit varieties on orchards and vineyards, particularly in the Cromwell area.

At this stage, the hailstorm effects are not considered as bad as in the other fruitgrowing areas.

Early varieties of cherries were being harvested by late November even though some growers judged the crop as being about two weeks later than previous years.

The season's prospects were a topic of conversation among about 40 of Central's fruitgrowers and families at a barbecue get-together recently.

"We have to manage with what we have," Jeremy says. 