

Go nuts for the holidays; pecan prices lower

By William Pack

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The holidays will have some extra crunch for pecan lovers without the bitter aftertaste of rising prices, thanks to a plentiful crop.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts that the U.S. pecan harvest will hit 308.6 million pounds in 2012, the highest it's been since 387.3 million pecans were harvested in 2007.

The price, which peaked in the summer of 2011 at \$2.43 a pound for pecans off the farm, has fallen since the high prices scared off many buyers worldwide. Global demand for pecans dropped 10 percent in the wake of the price high, said [Daniel Zedan](#), who owns Nature's Finest Foods, a nut brokerage in Wayne, Ill. That this year will see a fruitful supply has helped keep prices in check, too.

Zedan said consumers who paid \$10-\$12 a pound for pecan halves at the store last year should be paying \$8-\$10 for the same pound this holiday season. He believes pecan prices will fall more after the first of the year.

"It will probably be the best nut value for consumers this year," said Zedan.

Texas growers are relieved they have pecans to offer this season after last year's drought ravaged production.

"It should be a good year for growers and a great year for consumers to get some pecans," said [Gary Schmidtke](#), who is expecting good production from his orchards near Pearsall.

The [USDA](#) estimated that Texas produced 32 million pounds of pecans in 2011, down from 70 million pounds in 2010 and 60 million pounds in 2009.

The USDA expects Texas will produce about 55 million pounds of pecans this year — just a little less than the state's average pecan crop but better than some growers thought was possible.

"It fooled everybody this year," said [Rodney Myers](#), a pecan industry consultant and former grower in Brownwood. "It not only survived, it came back with a good crop."

[Cindy Wise](#), executive vice president of the [Texas Pecan Growers Association](#), said while some pecan trees died from drought-induced stress, good winter moisture helped producers this year. Harvests started early, and most growing regions expect solid production, though quality issues associated with the drought remain, officials said.

"It's not the best I've ever had, but it's pretty good," said [Cameron Ocker](#), who grows pecans and raises cattle near Poth.

Georgia normally is the nation's largest pecan-producing state, and Texas has slipped behind New Mexico in recent years as the third-largest pecan producer.

Wise said even an average crop should produce good earnings for growers because prices, while lower than last year, have remained at historically high levels.

Prices started rising after China and other Asian countries began buying up pecans six years ago and have remained strong ever since. Ocker said he'd prefer to sell his pecans locally, but demand from China has been hard to ignore.

"They love pecans and want to get it early," he said.

Chinese buyers have been paying higher prices while domestic processors have stayed on the sidelines waiting for the price to fall, Ocker said. About half of his pecans have been exported, Ocker said, and the number is growing.

"Our market is driven by what the Chinese are paying," said Zedan with Nature's Finest.

wpack@express-news.net