

# ECONOMIC & POLICY UPDATE

VOLUME 22, ISSUE 5

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## A Quick Look at Kentucky's Favorite Summertime Small Fruit: Strawberries

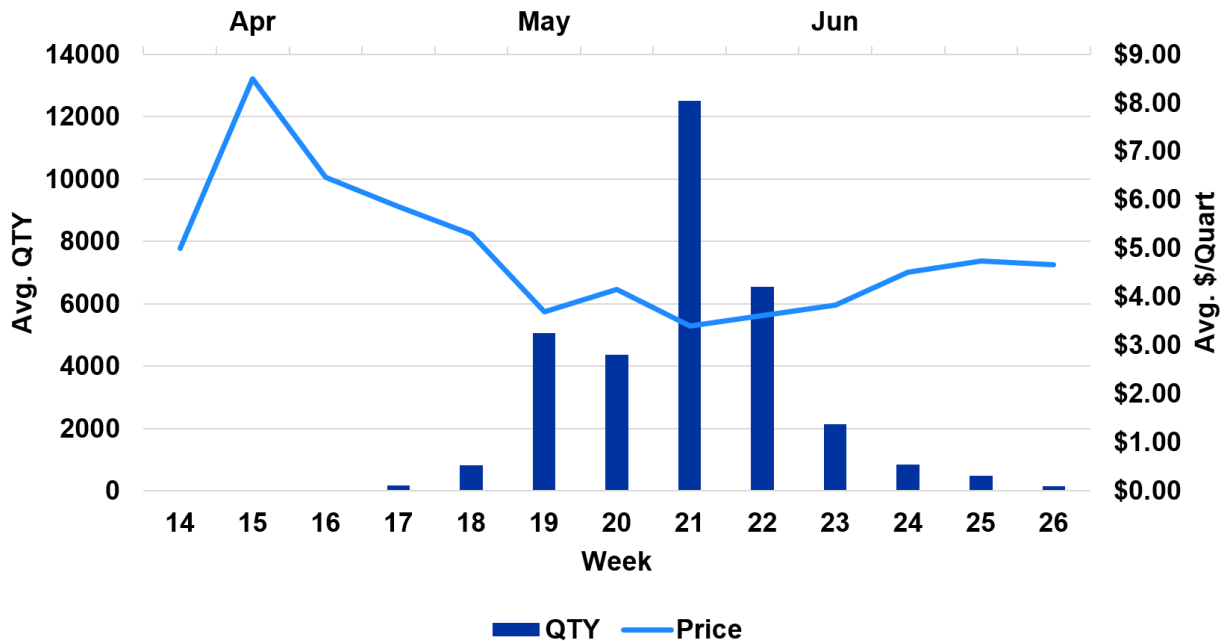
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*Published: May 31st, 2022*

Summertime is upon us, and strawberries are filling the refrigerators of many homes in Kentucky. Strawberries, along with blueberries and blackberries, are staple crops in the small fruits business. While small fruits can be labor intensive, they can also be very rewarding. Local, fresh strawberries can be found pre-packaged at your community farmers market or picked by consumers right on the farm. Many small fruit operations offer a “U-pick” system where the consumer can pick their own strawberries to take home with them. This model allows families and individuals to have the experience of being on a farm, without all the maintenance or responsibility of owning one.

The featured graph shows the 2019-2021 average quantity of quarts sold per week during the season, along with the average price per quart of strawberries at the Fairview Produce Auction in western Kentucky. Over the three years, 98,853 quarts were sold through the Fairview Produce Auction during the season. We can see a \$8.50/quart premium price given for early-season strawberries [mid-April (week 15)], while the market becomes saturated by late-May. However, saturation does not deter consumers from purchasing strawberries. Many homemakers take advantage of season’s end, lower-priced strawberries to jar jams, sauces, and preserves. Even as we are putting this article together, strawberries are still a major item for consumers at the Farmer’s Market, grocery store, and on the farm via “U-pick” or pre-picked. On a large scale, per capita consumption of strawberries across the United States in recent years has either increased or sustained the previous year’s usage. For 2020, per capita fresh and freezing usage of strawberries was 8.13 lbs. (USDA ERS, 2021).

**Figure 1: 2019-2021 Average Quantity and Price of Strawberries at the Fairview Produce Auction**



With higher consumption rates, comes the potential for increases in prices. Through communication with local farms, we observed an increase in the price of strawberries in their on-farm markets compared to 2021. This means strawberries sold through produce auctions, on-farm via pre-picked or “U-pick”, and farmer’s markets have each experienced an increase in the price per gallon and price per pound. On-Farm markets have been subject to upwards of five-dollar per gallon increases, while the produce auctions have had three- and four-dollar increases. We can attribute some of the price increase to the increased price of inputs; however, it can also be attributed to the consumer’s willingness to pay more for local strawberries. In the Packer’s Fresh Trends 2021 [survey](#), respondents said they were eating more fresh fruits that they were last year, with strawberries having a 58% positive change since 2019 (Top 20 Fruits and Vegetables Sold in the U.S.). The increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with a consumer’s interest in knowing where their food is coming from or even the interest in picking it themselves, allows Kentucky growers to capture those higher profit margins we are currently seeing.

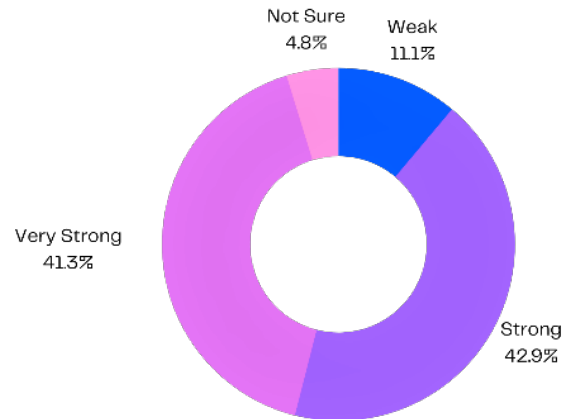
**Table 1: 2022 On-farm Strawberry Prices per Quart, Recorded via Contact with Kentucky Growers**

<b>On-Farm Strawberry Prices/Quart for 2022</b>		
	<b>U-Pick (\$/QT)</b>	<b>Pre-Picked (\$/QT)</b>
<b>Farm 1</b>	\$6	Farm only offers U-pick
<b>Farm 2</b>	\$7.24	\$5.35
<b>Farm 3</b>	Farm does not offer U-pick	\$5
<b>Farm 4</b>	Farm does not offer U-pick	\$12
<b>Farm 5</b>	Farm does not offer U-pick	\$6
<b>Farm 6</b>	Farm does not offer U-pick	\$5.50
<b>Farm 7</b>	\$4.50	\$5

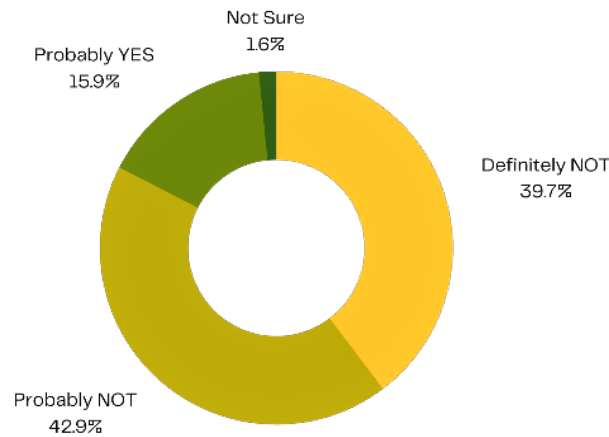
The featured table displays the on-farm strawberry prices for “U-pick” and pre-picked. Each line represents a farm in Kentucky and the amount they are charging for “U-pick” and pre-picked strawberries. Farm names have been removed for privacy. Growers of other small fruits, such as blackberries and blueberries, could infer that the market price and consumption for other small fruits will be reflected similarly. Consumers are interested in buying local food, buying the experience of picking their food themselves, and buying healthier food items. We can see, through a farmers market manager and vendor survey, that there is a strong demand for local small fruit products at the market (Graph 1) and that there is probably not even enough product to supply that demand (Graph 2). The interest consumers have for small fruit is clear here. Kentucky small fruit producer can lean into this knowledge when thinking about their “U-pick” or pre-picked operation.

## Figure 2: Farmer's Market Manager and Key Vendor Survey Results

**Graph 1.** How would you describe the strength of demand for local small fruit products at your market? (n=63)



**Graph 2:** Do you currently have enough small fruit products available at your market to meet the demand of customers? (n=63)



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### Recommended Citation Format:

Columbia, S. and K. Fortney. "[A Quick Look at Kentucky's Favorite Summertime Small Fruit: Strawberries](#)." *Economic and Policy Update* (22):5, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Kentucky, May 31st, 2022.

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