

## SBALT NEWS

## California Apples: A harvest rich in history and flavor

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SBALT Board Member

The story of apples in California begins in the 18th century when Spanish missionaries first brought apple seeds to the region. Initially considered a niche crop, apple cultivation expanded significantly with the arrival of pioneers during the Gold Rush, leading to the establishment of thriving orchards to meet the demands of the growing population.

Today, approximately 5,518 acres of apples are planted across California, with 352 acres located in San Benito County. Foster Ranch proudly contributes 8 acres to this total.

What sets California apples apart is their distinct flavor, largely due to the fact that they are rarely stored for long periods. Gen-

### San Benito Agricultural



erally, they are picked, packed, and shipped quickly, preserving their freshness and taste. This season is shaping up to be particularly promising, with strong quality in terms of coloring and sizing. Harvest starts in mid-July and continues through November, with the peak season in September.

California apple harvest is estimated to yield between one and two million boxes this season. California is known for specializing in popular varieties such as Gala, Fuji, Granny Smith, and Cripps Pink Ladies. While Washington State has long been renowned for its apples, California is a serious competitor, thanks to its favorable climate.

Katherine Foster of Foster Ranch shares her expertise: "At Foster Ranch, we used to grow Red Delicious, which required testing for brix levels – a measure of sugar content or sweetness – before harvesting. The minimum level was 11. Now we grow varieties like Fujis, Braeburns, Pink Ladies, Jonagold,



Apple trees from Foster Ranch

Galas, and Goldrush. We determine the harvest time through both taste and brix testing. We aim for a brix level of 14-16, which is typical of Fujis. Apples with high sugar content are best enjoyed as fresh as possible. While there are methods to enhance apple color artificially, the best flavor and sweetness come from allowing the fruit to mature

naturally on the tree."

The mission of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust is to conserve lands, like Foster Ranch, which sustain productive agriculture, preserve open space, and maintain the rural character of the County. Learn more at [www.sanbenitolandtrust.org](http://www.sanbenitolandtrust.org). ■

