

## "As expected, it will be a good strawberry year"

Despite last year's drought, the strawberry plants are doing well throughout Germany. While the foil tunnel harvest in southern and central Germany has already begun, the harvest will begin in the east and north, a little later, at the end of April or beginning of May. According to current estimates, the majority of strawberry plants have survived the winter well. Even the cold, frosty April nights seem to have had no major negative effects. However, the storms in March and April caused damage and led to additional work for the growers.

"After last year's difficult year of production, which was dominated by extreme weather, high yields, poor prices and shortage of harvest workers, strawberry growers are looking forward to this season. Everything currently points at a good strawberry year with more than enough aromatic fruits," said Simon Schumacher, CEO of the Association of Southern German Asparagus and Strawberry Growers.

Wann beginnt die Erdbeersaison 2019?

Region	Im Tunnelanbau	Im Freilandanbau
Norddeutschland	Anfang Mai (KW 18)	4. Maiwoche (KW 22)
Ostdeutschland	Anfang Mai (KW 18)	Ende Mai (KW 22)
Mitteldeutschland	Ende April (KW 18)	4. Maiwoche (KW 21)
Südwestdeutschland	Mitte/Ende April (KW 17)	2. Maiwoche (KW 19)

Warm and bright days in February provided an early development start of the strawberry plants, which was then slowed down by the cold phases in March again.

"The plants survived the winter excellently. Since there was already plenty of light in February, the generative development of strawberry plants already begun at that time. Many of the flowers are large and this indicates big fruits. Now, after Easter, the strawberry season in southern Germany will begin," explains Christof Steegmüller, strawberry cultivation consultant in Baden-Württemberg and the Palatinate.



Katrin Hetebrügge, a strawberry cultivation consultant in Hesse: "The harvest in the tunnels in southern Hesse has begun. Fruit size looks good. Growing crop yields are expected in late April, early May. The planting conditions were very difficult because of last year's drought, not being optimal for the growing phases of the plants. Here, we will have to wait and see if it will affect the harvest."

Even though the strawberry numbers give cause for optimism, the challenges remain: to get enough harvest workers and to get a fair price for the fruits, that will cover the rising production costs and enable new investments.

### **German strawberries compete with imported goods**

"We would be pleased if German trade quickly switched to the available German goods," says Ludger Linnemannstöns, strawberry cultivation consultant from North Rhine-Westphalia.

According to Agrarmarkt Informations-Gesellschaft (AMI), strawberries from Spain persistently stayed on the shelves of food retailing last year, even though German goods were already available for several weeks. Many growers were only able to sell their fruits through direct marketing and wholesalers. Overall, according to AMI, Germany imported 5 percent fewer strawberries last year than in 2017 (2018: around 103,000 tons). The degree of self-sufficiency, the share of German strawberries in the total market supply, is now 60.8 percent and thus 2.1 percentage points higher than in 2017.

### **Protected cultivation increases**

According to the Federal Statistical Office, the share of protected cultivation in total strawberry cultivation increased by 21.4 percent in 2018, and now accounts for 12 percent of the strawberry acreage in the yield. The yield in protected cultivation is 60 percent higher than in the field. According to Agrarmarkt Informations-Gesellschaft (AMI), the trend towards protected strawberry cultivation will continue in 2019. In addition to crop protection against heavy rain, hail and frost, the focus is increasingly on ensuring the quality of strawberries and achieving even better qualities.



### Review of the 2018 season

According to the Federal Statistical Office, the strawberry harvest in Germany in 2018 was 141,693 tonnes, 4.7 percent higher than in the previous year. At the same time, the number of farms cultivating strawberries has dropped by 6.8 percent to 2,101 farms. The acreage is also slightly declining, with around 1 percent. According to the AMI, the extreme weather conditions such as multiple cases of heavy rain, hail, heat and extreme drought have driven up the already rising production costs from year to year. Added to this were challenges such as shortages of harvest workers and competition from imports.

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