

Mother Nature delays California's strawberry season

By Debbie Arrington, Sacramento Bee

When it comes to this spring's strawberry season, it's better late than never.



In Northern and Central California, the unusual spring weather delayed planting – and picking – by two to four weeks. Despite hail and freezing temperatures, the crop will come through relatively unscathed.

“We won’t even put the plants out until next week,” said Jim Armstrong of Snowy Peaks Farm in Foresthill. “For us up here at 4,000 feet (elevation), we’re a month behind where we’re usually at. ... Even in the Central Valley, they’re two to three weeks behind normal. It’s quite a big deal.”

We Californians are spoiled. With winter and early season crops coming from Ventura County and coastal areas, we can buy state-grown fresh strawberries virtually year round.

Local strawberry season usually lasts April through July – and those berries are a special treat because growers can pick the fragile fruit when it is more ripe.

But this year, Mother Nature put the chill on growers. “We had 4 feet of snow three times this year,” said Armstrong, who has been growing strawberries hydroponically for six years with his wife, Ginger, at their pick-your-own farm.