

Blame warm winter for spike in food prices

By Russ Parsons, Los Angeles Times

The display at the Weiser Family Farms' stand at the Santa Monica farmers market last weekend was sparse, even by early spring standards – potatoes, some green shallots and garlic, a little sprouting broccoli. The lilacs that signal the start of spring for many Southern Californians came and went weeks ago.

But a couple of stalls down, a shopper could find cherries, apricots, and even peaches and nectarines that tasted like midsummer.

That, in a nutshell, is the state of California's nearly \$30-billion produce industry, which accounts for more than half of the fresh fruits and vegetables grown in America.

Fruit has been ripening and ready to pick at almost shockingly early dates. At the same time, some vegetables have been in extremely short supply, resulting in much higher than normal prices. Lettuces are selling at wholesale for twice what they were at this time last year. Cauliflower has doubled just since February.

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