

Apple Stages: From the Tree to the Grocery Store Backgrounder 2019

What are the stages of an apple after it's picked?

Apples picked in the orchard are carefully (to avoid bruising) placed in harvest bins with a capacity of roughly 20 bushels (each bushel weighs about 42 pounds) that have been placed between the orchard rows to be collected as they are filled. The full bins are transported to the packinghouse where the apples are washed, sized, sorted and packed. The packing process typically occurs the same day the apple is harvested. Packed apples are then moved into refrigerated storage – either short-term conventional refrigeration or controlled atmosphere (CA) if they need to be kept fresh for longer periods of time.

Movement from the orchard to packinghouse to store shelves is dictated by the purchase arrangements between the retailer and the supplier (packer/shipper or marketer). Because profit margins in the apple industry are razor thin, all parts of the supply chain from grower to retailer are very cost conscious. Therefore, the time from orchard to store shelf is usually quite short – measured in days or less. Later in the season, when harvest has been completed, apples from long-term storage are typically shipped to a supermarket the same day after movement out of the storage facility.

Controlling costs and maintaining freshness means that apples move from the packinghouse or storage facility to retail market shelves as quickly as possible – within days or less.

Talking Points

- Apples are picked in the orchard and placed in bins weighed by the bushel (42 pounds).
- Bins of apples are transported to the packinghouse where they are washed, sized, sorted and packed. The packing process typically occurs the same day the apple is harvested.
- Packed apples are then moved into refrigerated storage – either short-term conventional refrigeration or controlled atmosphere (CA) if they need to be kept fresh for longer periods of time.
- Controlling costs and maintaining freshness means that apples move from the packinghouse or storage facility to retail market shelves as quickly as possible – within days or less.