

Meet Nature's Newest Cherry: Skylar Rae® Debuts as Sweetest Varietal Yet

New, firm, and sweet Skylar Rae® cherries to appear in select grocery stores nationwide mid-June for four short weeks

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WENATCHEE, Wash., June 8, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- For many years, sweet cherries have been commercially classified in two ways at grocery stores – dark sweet and Rainier – but now, a rare new cherry has created cause for a new classification due to its unique attributes and sweet flavor that set it apart from the rest. Debuting in select grocery stores mid-June, the new Skylar Rae® brand Tip Top cultivar cherry was discovered by chance in a family-run Washington State orchard, and is distinguished by its beautiful red and yellow bi-colored skin, firm texture and a flavor profile that makes it "The Sweetest Cherry You'll Ever Eat™."

Grown and marketed exclusively by Stemilt Growers, the Tip Top cherry cultivar, which goes to market under the Skylar Rae® brand, was granted its own varietal classification by the International Federation for Produce Standards and is the first cherry in years to be given its own price look-up (PLU) number. While Skylar Rae® was released in a miniscule volume the last two years to a handful of grocery stores, 2015 marks the first season this unique cherry will be nationally available through select grocery stores. During the cherry's short four week season, from mid-June to mid-July, Stemilt estimates it will ship 20,000 units of Skylar Rae® cherries, with plans to increase production in future years.

"A rarity in nature, Skylar Rae's unique genetics and extremely high natural sugar content set it apart from other cherries - it truly is a treat from nature," said West Mathison, Stemilt president and fifth generation grower. "We are excited to introduce this special cherry to the world, and encourage shoppers to pick up Skylar Rae cherries when they see them this summer because they won't be around for long!"

The parentage of the new cherry is unknown, and was the result of a natural mutation of one tree that was planted from nursery stock. The "mother tree" was propagated upon its discovery and plantings of Tip Top cherries (the cultivar name which comes from the name of the orchard where it was discovered) have moved from a test environment to commercial orchards over the past decade. Today, only the highest quality Tip Top cultivar cherries go to market as Skylar Rae® brand cherries.

Boasting a golden yellow skin with a partial to full orange-red blush, and a firm and nearly colorless flesh, Skylar Rae® cherries contain the highest sugar content of any sweet cherry on the market, measuring in at 23-25 Brix. In comparison, Rainier cherries contain a Brix of 19-23 and Dark Sweet cherries, 17-20. Because of its sweet flavor profile, Skylar Rae® cherries are ideally enjoyed as a pop-in-your-mouth snack, and can also be added to any number of culinary adventures and recipes for an extra sweet kick.

The new cherry is grown exclusively on Stemilt orchards in Washington State – where all cherries naturally flourish in eastern Washington's dry, warm days and cool nights - including the Mathison family and the Toftness family, who first discovered the cherry. In 2005, the Toftness family, who have been farming cherries at Tip Top Orchards for more than a decade, suffered the unimaginable loss of their infant daughter. As the family was healing, they discovered a cherry never before seen on a single tree growing in their orchard. The family felt it was a gift from nature meant to honor their beautiful daughter, Skylar Rae Toftness; and when it came time to trademark a brand name for the fruit, it was a unanimous decision that the cherry should be called, "Skylar Rae."

"While new cherry discoveries in nature are not unheard of, what makes this particular cherry so special is that it was able to be cultivated into a commercially viable varietal, which is a very rare occurrence," continued Mathison. "The fact that the Skylar Rae® cherry also holds a special honor among one of the hard working family farmers we partner with, is, as they say, the cherry on top."

Skylar Rae® cherries are available in two packaging options: a convenient 1.25-pound bag and a smaller 1-pound clamshell carton for \$5.99 – \$6.99, depending on the harvest window. The cherries are available from mid-June to mid-July, in select markets. Stemilt has plans for increased distribution in the future as the crop and demand for the cherry continues to multiply. For more information on the Skylar Rae® cherry, visit www.SkylarRaeCherries.com.

About Stemilt:

Owned and operated by the Mathison family since 1964, Stemilt Growers is one of the world's leading growers, packers and shippers of tree fruit, including wholesome apples, pears, cherries and summer fruits. The company is headquartered in Wenatchee, Wash., where the founding family has lived and farmed since 1893, always striving to deliver the most delicious, high quality fruit possible through environmental stewardship, industry innovations and supply chain control. Today, the company operates orchards throughout the Western U.S. along with four advanced packing facilities, and markets a number of proprietary fruit varieties and pioneering fresh produce products. For more information visit www.Stemilt.com or Follow Stemilt on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest.

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