

Title Preferences in pear appearance and response to novelty among Australian and New Zealand consumers
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Abstract

New product development (NPD) in the fruit industry needs to consider consumer preference for appearance as well as taste. The current study extends from earlier studies on preferences for flavour of pears by focusing specifically on the importance of appearance for consumer purchase decisions. A choice-based conjoint study assessed Australian and New Zealand consumer preference for appearance in pears differing in shape, colour and russet. Twenty-seven images were created using software so that a standard pear could occur in different colours (green, yellow, and red), shapes (round, elongate-concave, and intermediate-straight), and with different levels of blush (none, slight, full coverage). When asked to indicate their most preferred fruit, preference was greatest for green and yellow colours with intermediate-straight or elongate-concave shapes. Red colours and round shapes were rarely chosen as 'most preferred'. Russet had comparatively little impact. Analysis of choices suggested consumers were responding in terms of familiarity with existing pears. However, when consumers were asked to indicate their least preferred pear using the same procedure, yellow colour was less preferred to green. In all other respects, results were consistent with the 'most preferred' procedure. The greater ability of the 'least preferred' data to differentiate between colours suggests that simply asking consumers what they like may provide misleading or incomplete information. Such a hypothesis finds support in the finding that when asked to choose their most preferred red pear (from a choice of four red skinned pears), only 15% of the consumers chose the option 'none'. In addition, 44% of consumers were prepared to pay 50 cents or more to take home a novel red skinned pear despite its poor flavour. Thus, red and round images may represent a yet untapped product opportunity for a differentiated product. However, the value of having an appearance that taps into strong pre-existing consumer expectations should not be underestimated. Green and yellow pears with intermediate-straight and elongate-concave shapes may provide important cues on extensions of existing products.