

Title Adapting Californian conditioning technology for Australian nectarines and peaches - a case study.
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Citation Australian postharvest horticulture conference, Brisbane, Australia, 1-3 October, 2003; 194-196

Abstract

Californian peach and nectarine grower/packers have increased sales by conditioning (controlled ripening) fruits to a near eating ripe stage before sending them to retail. The aim of this study was to adapt Californian technology to Australian conditions. The "ripe and ready" commercial component of the project supplied ripened fruits to Woolworths supermarkets in Sydney and Adelaide. The practicalities of running a commercial summer fruit ripening programme were assessed, along with collection of feedback from all sectors of the marketing chain, including customer surveys in supermarkets. Commercial quantities were supplied on demand to ten Woolworths supermarkets over a 4-week period from the end of January 2003. Monitoring the rate of softening of commercial batches of fruits with a penetrometer showed large variation in softening rates within and between batches of fruits. A nondestructive laboratory instrument that measures the acoustic properties of fruits was assessed. Overall, the response to "ripe and ready to eat" fruits from customers and supermarket personnel was positive. Consumer surveys indicated that the recognition of the change of fruit in store was quite low, but for those who had tasted the fruits, the satisfaction level was very high. Pricing strategies and product differentiation differed between the different supermarkets and two states, but initial responses from Woolworths' staff and management indicated that the introduction of Ripe and Ready peaches and nectarines had been successful. The importance of good quality fruit and suitable varieties was highlighted through consumer feedback and quality testing fruit. This project was supported by Horticulture Australia (Project SF02012). This collaborative project was made possible by financial and strong support in kind from Woolworths Ltd., Panda Ranch P/L, the Quality Fruit Marketing Group and the South Australian Fresh Fruit Growers Association.