

Title Consistency - horticulture's perpetual opportunity
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Abstract

ZESPRI gains a premium for its ZESPRI GREEN Kiwifruit and ZESPRI GOLD Kiwifruit, through a strategy of consistently delivering products that are differentiated on the basis of superior quality. Historically, this approach has been based on external attributes such as size and shape, and absence of blemish and physical damage. Over the past three seasons, this has been extended to dry matter for both cultivars and colour and firmness in the case of ZESPRI GOLD. In both cases, the target is to increase product consistency. With ZESPRI GREEN, the Taste ZESPRI Programme has provided a focus for delivering superior tasting fruit to customers and consumers. Based on research demonstrating a strong relationship between consumer perception of eating quality and fruit dry matter levels, the entire supply chain for ZESPRI GREEN has been aligned to produce, segregate, market and deliver high taste product. This, coupled with a ready-to-eat programme, was associated with a 16% growth in sales in Japan in 2002, reversing a number of years of decline. Using a simple metric for characterizing dry matter levels in populations of fruit, an incentive payment for delivering high dry matter product, and a strong technology transfer programme, the Taste ZESPRI Programme is re-inventing the ZESPRI GREEN supply chain as New Zealand kiwifruit growers focus on growing superior tasting fruit. For the new ZESPRI GOLD cultivar, in response to market feedback, maturity clearance criteria have been developed and implemented. These criteria were designed to achieve consistently low levels of green flesh colour and substantially reduce levels of postharvest disorders. By ensuring that fruits are consistently attractive to consumers and are reliably delivered in premium condition, a strong market for an entirely new kiwifruit category has been developed, one that will shortly account for a quarter of all kiwifruit production from New Zealand. In both cultivars, metrics that characterize proportions of fruits in populations that meet benchmark criteria with respect to key attributes have provided the means to manage and minimize variability in product delivered to customers. The development of a conceptual platform that ensures product consistency has formed the basis for a new generation of supply chain management technologies, technologies that have already had a dramatic impact in the continual enhancement of ZESPRI's brand promise.