



Courtesy of SweeTango

The SweeTango club variety of apples is sold out for 2016. Producers anticipate continued growth for the apple in the years ahead.

SweeTango club apples halfway to 800,000-box goal

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Online

<http://www.sweetango.com> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/sweetango>.

SweeTango apples finished its sales this fall at 402,000, 40-pound boxes, up slightly from 380,000 sold in 2015.

The variety averaged 54 pounds per store in weekly sales in U.S. stores tracked by Nielsen Company between Aug. 7 and Oct. 29, up from 43.6 during the same time frame in 2015, said Cristie Mather, spokeswoman for Next Big Thing, a grower cooperative based in Lake City, Minn., that has the commercial rights.

That was its peak sales period and it was the 10th best selling apple in volume in those weeks, falling just behind Pink Lady and Jazz, Mather said.

SweeTango was second best when compared only with other club varieties and it was sold out at the end of November, she said.

Pricing averaged \$2.33 per pound and per store sales averaged \$233 a week.

The apple is grown by up to 47 growers in Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington, New York and Nova Scotia.

In July, Next Big Thing estimated this fall's crop would at 450,000 boxes. Hail in the Midwest and some cracking

at harvest decreased the volume, Mather said.

SweeTango is expected to double in volume within several years, she said.

It is one of many club varieties — meaning production is limited to certain growers — that's small in volume. Washington's leading open varieties are Red Delicious estimated at 39.2 million boxes from the 2016 crop and Gala at 32 million.

A robust marketing program of refreshed packaging designs, digital coupons, in-store demos and social media raised awareness, Mather said. A new tagline, "Free the Crunch," was introduced.

A series of short-form animated videos promoted the loud crunch and sweet-tangy flavor of SweeTango, collectively receiving 42,000 views on YouTube and Facebook over 90 days, she said.

"It's the loud crunch followed by the yum," she said.

SweeTango was bred from Honeycrisp and Zestar at the University of Minnesota and was introduced to consumers in 2009.

Quinoa researchers to continue work on crop

Field trials narrow hunt for varieties suited for region

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

A new USDA grant will help researchers answer key questions for Northwest farmers about quinoa.

Washington State University quinoa breeder Kevin Murphy expects a four-year, \$2 million grant from the agency's Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative to be available shortly.

Quinoa is a "pseudo-cereal" related to amaranth, spinach and beets with a seed that is an edible.

The grant is for organic practices, but research efforts also cover conventionally grown quinoa, Murphy said.

The proposal includes researchers in Maryland, Minnesota and Nevada, who will subcontract to test quinoa varieties in different environments, Murphy said. Maryland and Minnesota are wetter in the summer, the better to find varieties resistant to pre-harvest sprouting.

WSU is leading the project. Brigham Young University and Utah State University will continue their involve-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Washington State University breeder Kevin Murphy at a trial of quinoa varieties June 22, 2016, near Pullman, Wash. A \$2 million USDA grant will help researchers learn more about the crop and varieties that can be produced in the Pacific Northwest, Murphy says.

ment.

Under the grant, Kate Painter, a University of Idaho Extension educator, will examine quinoa prices in the market, what yields farmers can expect — the range is 1,200 to 1,400 pounds per acre on the Palouse — and what they might net per acre. Prices have been volatile.

The grant allows researchers to target heat and drought tolerance, weeds, insect pests and processing and end uses.

"Where we're at now is just being able to focus on the

major problems," he said.

Fewer than 1,000 acres of quinoa were planted in Washington last year. Roughly 1,000 acres were grown in California last year.

Most farmers are planting 10 to 20 acres on an experimental basis, Murphy said.

Pacific Northwest farmers are well-positioned to raise quinoa because of the region's dry summers, which are also cooler than elsewhere in the nation, Murphy said.

The variety Jessie, available in the PNW, is free of sa-

ponin, a soap-like covering on the outer seed that needs to be removed. Other saponin-free lines will take a little longer to get to market, Murphy said.

A processing facility to remove saponin operating in Yuba City, Calif. Other facilities are expected, he said.

Murphy will narrow down national trials to 20 to 25 advanced breeding lines, testing against check varieties for the next two years before releasing four to six WSU varieties for different locations and environments.

JUICI apples show big potential, company says

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — A large Washington tree fruit company is planning a fast ramp-up of its new JUICI apple that it says received "rave reviews" at a global trade gathering a couple of months ago.

Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers, of Wenatchee, has high hopes for JUICI, a cross between Honeycrisp and Braeburn that it developed over the last 10 years with Willow Drive Nursery of Ephrata. Oneonta has North American growing, packing and marketing rights.

To round out its new offerings for the next several years, Oneonta has been more slowly launching KORU and New Zealand Honeycrisp, both New Zealand varieties, over the past three years.

Thousands of people sampled and gave JUICI high marks at the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit trade show in Orlando, Fla., in October, said Bruce Turner, Oneonta's national marketing representative.

In mid-December, Oneonta finished its first six weeks of commercial sales of less than 20,000, 40-pound boxes



Courtesy of Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers

JUICI apples at fall harvest. Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers of Wenatchee, Wash., has just completed the new apple's first commercial sales season.

es of JUICI with several key retailers in parts of the country identified by taste demographics. People in certain regions, based on previous data, are known to have a preference for sweet or tart apples.

"JUICI offers a wonderful balance of sweet and tart with amazing crunch and juiciness," Turner said.

"Because of its Honeycrisp parentage, the apple respirates slowly and has incredible shelf life," said Scott Marboe, Oneonta marketing director.

JUICI comes off the tree in

excess of 18 to 20 pounds per square inch, making it a dense apple that holds its crunch at room temperature, Marboe said. Gala is typically 14 psi, Turner said.

JUICI has been planted in Chelan, Quincy and Yakima and planting will be heavy over the next several years to bring it to 500,000 boxes of fruit by 2022, Turner said.

"We felt strongly enough that we knew we had to create a significant amount to carve out market share," he said.

Competition is keen for new, high-quality varieties kept at relatively low volumes

to maintain good grower returns.

KORU, a cross between Fuji and Braeburn, is a super sweet apple, close to 18 brix (sugar content) compared with 14 for Gala, Turner said.

"It's like eating candy," he said.

KORU is managed in North America by Oneonta, Borton Fruit in Yakima and New York Apple Sales in Glenmont, N.Y. It will be at more than 1,000 acres and 1 million boxes of apples by 2020 in domestic and import, Turner said.

New Zealand Honeycrisp will probably top out at 500,000 boxes and is meant to fill in for the lack of domestic Honeycrisp before fall harvest, he said.

"We grow it on the south island in Canterbury Plains. It's more like Michigan or Minnesota in latitude and we get incredible deep red color. Deeper than Honeycrisp in Washington state," Turner said. "For retailers wanting Honeycrisp after end of domestic crop, it's superior to what is coming out of Chile."

Oneonta sells about 15 million boxes of apples and pears annually with 1.3 million boxes of organic apples and about 2 million boxes of cherries.

USDA approves assessment increase for Almond Board

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — The Almond Board of California has received the USDA's approval to raise its handler assessments from 3 cents to 4 cents per pound over the next three years.

The move will enable the board to continue with research initiatives to make almond farming more environmentally friendly as well as funding stepped-up marketing efforts overseas, officials said.

The increase will be limited to three years because it is expected that almond produc-

tion will increase significantly during that period, providing more funding at the previous rate of 3 cents per pound.

Unlike some other marketing orders, the Almond Board does not need to go to a referendum to boost the assessment, spokeswoman Linda Romander said in an email. The USDA approved the increase after it was discussed in several public meetings and underwent two Agricultural Marketing Service public notice and comment periods, spokeswoman Carissa Sauer said.

"The idea is to give us a shot in the arm with some additional funding," Almond Board president and chief executive officer Richard Waycott said when announcing the increase. "We need to invest now by keeping demand ahead of supply."

The board wants to increase global demand before an anticipated 25 percent increase in production by 2020, officials said in a news release.

In addition to marketing, more assessment income will help the board deal with such concerns as a changing water supply, air quality issues related to harvest and pesticides, and honey bee health, the board said.

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