

Consumer Acceptance of Navel Oranges Significantly Improved



A new fruit quality maturity standard recommended by Delytics has helped boost the consumer acceptability of New Zealand navel oranges from 62% to 93% in just one season.

The majority of the New Zealand navel orange industry adopted the maturity standard when it came into effect on 1 January 2016. The resulting consistently good eating quality is being credited by citrus retailers and marketers for boosting repeat purchases, right from the start of the season.

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New Zealand Citrus Growers Inc. (NZCGI) voted to adopt the maturity standard in 2015 to help ensure navel oranges meet minimum consumer acceptability levels prior to being harvested. Twelve months later the results of supermarket monitoring data presented at their 2016 conference revealed a stunning result. In just one season the retail sampling showed that the percentage of New Zealand navel oranges that met the minimum standard deemed to be liked by consumers had jumped from 6 in 10 to 13 in 14.

The adoption of the voluntary maturity standards by the vast majority of growers and marketers is believed to be the key contributor to the good results, although other factors such as favourable weather and a bumper ‘on-year’ crop also played a part. The maturity standards are now an integral part of the independent clearance process that was designed by Delytics for NZCGI in 2015.

“Delytics has developed a robust clearance process that helps us minimise immature fruit getting into the supply chain.”

Wayne Hall, Chairperson of the NZCGI Orange and Tangelo Product Group says, “Our whole driver was to increase the volume of navels that can be sold at a sustainable return by improving their consumer appeal. We want consumers to buy their first navel, enjoy it



A young consumer enjoying a tasty New Zealand navel.

and then come back and buy more. The feedback we received from retailers is that the fruit has been well received and repeat purchases have been very good. Delytics has developed a robust clearance process that helps us minimise immature fruit getting into the supply chain. Delytics helped us add the new maturity measurement protocols to the clearance process this season and we are now putting a much more consistent piece of fruit into the marketplace.”

Citrus marketing companies T & G Global and First Fresh both adopted the NZCGI maturity standard this season and encouraged their growers to do the same.

“The feedback we received from retailers is that the fruit has been well received and repeat purchases have been very good.”

T & G Global Commercial Manager for Citrus, Glen Booth says, “We were confident that every piece of

fruit procured, managed and sold by T & G Global met the quality assurance standard this season and we've enjoyed the sales from that. The repeat purchases have definitely been there in regards to the consistent demand. The eating experience of the New Zealand navels secured consistent consumer purchasing right from the outset this season, even though there were other preferred fruit in the marketplace.

Glen adds, "Introducing the independent clearance process has been a good exercise for the whole industry to demonstrate its commitment to consistent quality and continual improvement. I think we've got the tools we need now to make some very good informed decisions around quality assurance for future seasons."

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First Fresh Managing Director, Ian Albers views the NZCGI clearance standard as a cornerstone for the New Zealand navel industry, which the industry can build from. He agrees that New Zealand navels sold well in the 2016 season and attributes that to good quality early season fruit.

Ian says, "I think the clearance process has taken some of the early fruit out of the market that can be quite disruptive and helped reduce some of the early season



Great tasting early season fruit boosts repeat purchases.

angst that can sometimes exist in a marketplace when people are chasing early sales."

As for the retailers, Countdown Produce Buyer, Chris Langdon says, "We are very focused on making sure that the fruit we get early in the season is good quality so our consumers enjoy it and repeat purchase. We don't want the hard work we have done to encourage consumers to support New Zealand fruit undermined by people taking shortcuts with early season fruit. What the navel growers are doing makes our job a lot easier to make sure the fruit we are selling is excellent. The feedback from our team is that the early season navels were pretty robust from the start this year, as far as the taste profile goes."

"In my mind, this sort of quality monitoring should become mandatory across all facets of the fruit industry."

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