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New varieties leading winter apple demand

By

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Apples have always been king of the fall produce season, but over the last decade, winter apples have become much more in demand and apple growers have seen business grow substantially.

While there are always staples of the category, one of the reasons for the increased demand can be attributed to the myriad of new varieties entering the market.

Jessica Wells, executive director for Crunch Time Apple Growers, a Lockport, NY-based cooperative of apple growers, noted these are no longer your grandmother's apples.

"Any organization that supports a premium apple variety will tell you that the sheer number of new varieties out there is impacting the category," Wells said "This isn't true just for apples, but across all different types of produce. While this does present competitive challenges, it should be good for the industry as a whole, making apples more appealing to more people as more high-flavor varieties are introduced."

Gabriela D'Arrigo, vice president of marketing for D'Arrigo New York, noted the company partners with various growers offering all the top varieties, covering all bases and being able to offer customers any apple they need.

"In the Northeast, because of the seasonality of things, having those relationships where a grower can call you and ask for help is key to establishing great relationships," D'Arrigo said. "A lot of them don't have their own transportation, or if they do have one guy with a truck that's not refrigerated. They are smaller independent growers, not the large conglomerates you see out of Washington and Oregon."

Kaari Stannard, president and CEO of the Glenmont, NY-based Yes! Apples, noted the company has offered winter apples for some years now and the category has evolved as new varieties come into play.

"A couple of the newer varieties we offer are SnapDragon and EverCrisp," she said. "The newer varieties coming on to the scene will continue to impact the category. We expect to see growth in the popularity of apple varieties like KORU, RubyFrost and SnapDragon, to name a few."

In recent years, the winter apple category has seen many new Eastern-grown apples, which has added excitement to the apple category.

Austin Fowler vice president of sales and marketing for the Wolcott, NY-based Fowler Farms said that this season's winter apple crops are looking exceptional and are high in flavor, and that retailers both large and small are excited about newer varieties. That all points to a promising start for the

apple business in 2022.

“When you actually look at the numbers that the Sweetango has established, when you start seeing 100,000 bushels go to 200,000 bushels, that’s significant,” Fowler said. “SnapDragon is another one that has really taken off. The focus is not necessarily on more SKUs or more new varieties. It’s more like what’s winning out there. What’s proving itself and what’s not.”

Retailers are also doing their part to highlight the multiple varieties, and there’s been an increase in the use of display materials this year.

“As customers return to the stores, they are drawn to appealing graphics and interesting displays,” Wells said. “We have re-designed point-of-purchase materials and displays available, supporting both varieties. Our sales team is fantastic at working with retailers to determine how to best sell to their unique customers, adapt packaging and promotion accordingly.”

Brenda Briggs, vice president of sales and marketing for Rice Fruit Co., based in Gardners, PA, noted a well-stocked display of bulk and bagged apples is the answer for so many shoppers wanting to focus their diet on delicious, healthy choices after the months of holiday indulgence.

“As the holidays fade and the calendar turns to the start of the new year, there is a natural focus on health and rejuvenation,” she said. “Apples are a convenient, nutritious, and delicious snack to enjoy any time of year.”

Companies find that a long-term presence is really the most important factor in increased sales.

Customers who find an apple they love, want to be able to purchase it again and again.

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