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Crunch Time Apple Growers partners with NFL's Buffalo Bills

By

Keith Loria

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[Crunch Time Apple Growers](#), a cooperative of 152 growers throughout New York state, is a leader in the efforts to grow and market two popular apples, SnapDragon and RubyFrost, which are marketed in bulk and various pack styles.

“Our growers count on us to ensure, one, that their fruit is sold and, two, that it sells at a price that allows them to continue to farm and earn a living — not just break even,” said Jessica Wells, executive director of the Lockport, NY-based entity. “We are fairly new to the scene, with the first trees of each variety planted commercially around 10 years ago.”

Whereas six or seven years ago, Crunch Time Apple Growers was completely focused on creating brand awareness, today it’s focused less on general brand awareness and more on marketing to consumers where the apples are available.

“Our marketing efforts on the wholesale side are focused on expanding the geographic reach of SnapDragon and RubyFrost,” Wells said. “Last season, we produced just over 400,000 bushels of SnapDragon and about 200,000 bushels of RubyFrost to be sold as fresh fruit. We expect those numbers to be up by about 25 percent this season.”

Even with a fantastic marketing plan, a bad product will eventually go away, but that’s not a worry of Crunch Time Apples Growers.

“Both SnapDragon and RubyFrost are fantastic apples in their own right,” Wells said. “SnapDragon is an epic apple, with monster crunch and loads of sweet juice. RubyFrost fits a different niche, with a slightly more tart profile. It is great for recipes and it is a gorgeous apple, making it perfect for charcuterie or to put in a bowl on the counter to grab as a snack.”

Another key to success is good service — both to the retailers and to consumers.

“It takes a carefully curated marketing strategy, meeting potential customers where they are whether that is on social media, in local media or via other approaches,” Wells said.

In general, apple sales volume is steady or slightly down. However, SnapDragon sales volume was up more than 30 percent last season.

“Many of our retail partners are opting to keep SnapDragon apples around from October until they sell out in April or May, which is great for consumers as they can keep buying them again and again,” Wells said. “Consumers can’t resist a juicy, epic apple with a monster crunch.”

Crunch Time Apple Growers expects additional growth with SnapDragon again this season as its

productive acreage continues to increase. RubyFrost production will remain steady.

“Expanding our geographic reach is one opportunity we’re focusing on,” Wells said. “Right now, most consumers on the East Coast can find SnapDragon and/or RubyFrost apples at some point in the season, some consumers in the Midwest and Texas can find them and a few in the West can. There are opportunities to grow volume with our existing retailers, with additional sales at each store and additional stores carrying the varieties.”

Crunch Time Apple Growers recently entered into a multi-year partnership with the Buffalo Bills for SnapDragon to be the official apple of the NFL team.

“A large portion of our apples are grown in ‘Bills Country,’ and though you often don’t see fresh fruit among the sponsors of pro sports team, the SnapDragon brand seemed like a great fit with branding that targets an active and healthy consumer,” Wells said. “We will have several opportunities to activate at Bills games and other events and the apples will be available at various foodservice venues through the stadium as well as other Bills facilities.”

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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