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Crunch Time Apple Growers are hyped for apple harvest

By

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It is a great time to be in the apple business.

Just ask officials at Crunch Time Apple Growers, the Lockport, NY-based cooperative with nearly 140 growers located throughout New York state. “There is a lot of innovation in the apple category right now,” said Jessica Wells, executive director of the cooperative. “Growers and marketers are focused on producing high quality apples with better taste, more juice and lots of crunch, which also look great.”

For example, she noted that the Honeycrisp variety is at the leading edge of this movement and continues to be the leader in the category. “The category is crowded with new varieties trying to be the ‘next Honeycrisp,’” Wells noted. “While this is ultimately a bit confusing for consumers with so many new varieties on the market, it is a good thing for growers and retailers alike. When we offer consumers apples that not only look good, but also taste great, they are sure to purchase more. As an industry, we need to ensure we’re providing exceptional apples for consumers if we want to increase consumption.”

Crunch Time introduced SnapDragon and RubyFrost to the market about 10 years ago. These varieties are grown exclusively by licensed growers and packed and sold by licensed shippers according to strict standards, allowing retailers to be certain about the quality and consistency of the products.

“We are constantly looking for new ways to get apples in front of consumers that will drive them to our retail partners to purchase more,” she noted. One of those promotional activities is Crunch Time’s multi-year partnership with the Buffalo Bills of the National Football League, which has proven to be effective in raising awareness of SnapDragon apples and getting consumers to try them.

In February, company officials attended the South Beach Wine and Food Festival, connecting with a new audience in the growing and diverse south Florida marketplace. The company also partnered with several different brands, including Wrapples and American Kitchen cookware, for social media giveaways and collaborated with a variety of influencers to promote SnapDragon apples.

Wells is excited about the upcoming harvest. “The crop looks great so far and the industry should look for an approximately 20 percent increase in crop volume for SnapDragon as more acreage reaches maturity,” she said. “RubyFrost volume should be steady when compared to last season.”

Wells is not shy about playing up the many benefits of growing apples in the east region of the country and, specifically, New York. “Our soil, combined with our climate of cool nights and hot summer days make already great-tasting apples even better, giving them more flavor and color than apples that are grown in warmer and more arid climates,” she noted. “I think that is ultimately the

key, offer consumers a great apple. We can't keep putting the same mediocre apples out there for consumers and expect to grow the category. Consumers have a more discriminating palate today than they did even just 20 years ago. Now they want flavors and textures that pop and SnapDragon apples have that special combination."

She also said that heading into the 2024 crop year, consumers should be looking for new recipes that utilize fresh SnapDragon apples in healthy recipes that require little-to-no cooking or baking, which is a break from the traditional apple recipes for sweet treats that allows the flavor, juiciness and monster crunch of SnapDragon apples to shine.

Wells also said that there are some new brand partnerships in the works and the cooperative is continuing to work closely with its retailers to promote SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples in a way that works best for their stores.

"We offer retailers a wide range of retailer-specific promotional options, including displays, various packaging options, local advertising, online promotions and in-store promotions and events," she said. "We recommend that retailers contact their sales representative immediately to discuss what will work best for your stores."

SnapDragon is in its third year as the official apple of the Buffalo Bills with the variety promoted at Bills home games and related events. "We are currently solidifying plans with our current retail partners to plan promotions specific to their needs. Our mascot, Snappy the Dragon, could appear at retailers this fall," she added.

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