

A 'Cheeky'® pear to bridge the gap!

'Cheeky'®, a new blushed pear cultivar, may be the answer to maintaining a continual supply of South African export bi-colour pears, says Experico's Dr Ian Crouch.

Rosemarie' and 'Flamingo' historically establish the South African bi-colour pear export market in week 8, followed by 'Forelle' from week 20. A typical consumer doesn't differentiate between the various cultivars and buys the fruit on its aesthetic blushed appeal and taste characteristics.

The late arrival of South African 'Forelle' is the result of a mandatory 12 week cold requirement to enable the fruit to ripen without becoming mealy. The last few years have seen a marked decrease in the volumes of 'Rosemarie' and 'Flamingo' as producers replace these orchards with new, more profitable varieties with a more prominent red blush.

At the same time, 'Forelle' production has continued to increase. The drop in 'Rosemarie' and 'Flamingo' volumes, linked to the delay in 'Forelle' availability in the market, invariably results in a break in South African bi-colour pear supply. Studies have focused on ways in which to maintain the supply, either by extending the storability of early blushed varieties, or by reducing the cold requirement of 'Forelle'.

Although new technologies are available to extend the storage of 'Rosemarie' and 'Flamingo', reduced volumes imply that available fruit are sold before this becomes a requirement. The successful launch of a new innovative programme resulted in an early marketed 'Forelle' pear. This fruit is sold as "Crisp and Sweet" as opposed to a juicy ripe fruit, and so is selective to markets with a preference for firmer pears.

A new blushed cultivar, 'Cheeky'®, with a striking red on a yellow peel background colour when fully ripe, large fruit size and a timeous harvest window, offers a perfect solution in bridging the gap in bi-colour pears. 'Cheeky'®, in contrast to many other blush pears, has the ability to develop a uniform and even blush, even during times when conditions are not ideal. According to Culdevco 'Cheeky'® is also well-accepted on all EU markets and during the 2015/16 season received a premium price in Europe when compared with bi-coloured and other pears produced in South Africa.

Postharvest management of bi-colour pears is not without challenges, including astringency (under certain conditions and when harvested at wrong maturities), and at times internal breakdown. It is therefore important to pay strict attention to recommended harvest and storage protocols. 'Cheeky'® is ideally harvested at optimum fruit firmness between 6.5 and 7.5 kg and should be sold within eight weeks of harvest.

As volumes increase, 'Cheeky'® will be a great addition as a juicy blushed pear after the last 'Rosemarie' is sold and before the onset of the standard released 'Forelle'.



'Cheeky'®, a new addition to the South African pear cultivar portfolio, was bred and developed by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). It is marketed and commercialised by Culdevco (Pty) Limited. COURTESY OF CULDEVCO (PTY) LTD.



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