


*Created by Greeks, commercialized by New Zealanders and a work-in-progress for Chile, the Megakiwi has the potential to bring consistency to a difficult industry. With a uniform shape, larger size and higher vitamin C content, it ticks all the boxes from a demand standpoint but the supply isn't quite there yet.*

In the lobby of the Marriott Hotel in Santiago, two key players in the variety's industry development discuss the trend of rising preferences for larger fruit. Enza's kiwifruit programme manager Murray Malone is joined by Agricola Viveros Parlier general manager Tomas Huneus, who is trading the variety with Chile's growers. 

Malone expects markets will 'suck up' all the megakiwis Chile can produce, with the onus now on the country's growers to decide how much of the variety they want to take on.

"You have to look at the variety for the opportunity which it represents in Chile in particular. There's currently no other kiwifruit variety that has the characteristics that this variety does," he says.

"In Chile to get a large size Hayward they have to use CPPU (plant growth regulator) and you can see lines on the fruit; almost a ribbing effect - you're looking at an average Chilean Hayward without CPPU probably being 100-115 grams, while the average size of megakiwi Tsechelidis is 170-180 grams.

"Megakiwi is very uniform, you get high class 1 packouts, so what you have is a large size fruit with good health attributes, for which there are many markets now that pay a premium for large size like Mexico, Russia and Indonesia."

He adds Brazil, Canada and the U.S. to the list of key markets where demand for large fruit is also growing, while Huneus highlights growers too are out to boost sizes.

"My experience is that always people ask you for bigger size fruit. That's in apples, in pears, in plums, walnuts, whatever, cherries, the trend is for bigger size," says Huneus.

"In the immediate term it's the evolving, but from here to five years all the markets are going to ask for bigger size kiwifruit."

In Chile there is currently only one orchard growing the variety, in the Curico area, while another is planned in San Fernando. With the Consortium Viveros de Chile (CVChile) representing the variety from a nursery level, growers will have the option whether to market under the Enza name Megakiwi or as Tsechelidis, after founder Christos Tsechelidis.

“We have a very strong kiwifruit committee and they have a lot of respect for Enza, so I think that a little more is going to be exported through Enza than through Tsechelidis, but it’s good to have the two choices.”



Tomas Huneeus with megakiwis in Greece

### **It’s all Greek to me**

Huneeus says Chile’s growers are well-accustomed to traveling to California, Italy or France to inspect new varieties, but Greece hasn’t been on the radar.

“What I would suggest for the Chilean growers is to take a plane, go in October and see the fruit in Greece. In 2008 there were 28 hectares, but now there’s 650 hectares or thereabouts and its growing.

“We have had two growers who have gone there. As soon as they came back they called me and they said, ‘please, I need more plants’. That was last year.

“We have been promoting that a bit but not much because we didn’t have plants prepared, because we didn’t have the material, we had to go through quarantine and everything. Now we are ready to offer the plants but at the same time we were approached by the owners to re-graft orchards here, which is something new for us.”

But not all has been so rosy in Europe where the Tsechelidis kiwifruit was developed, which is also a market where consumers tend to prefer smaller kiwifruit in the count 30 to 33 range.

“There have been some comparisons taken in Europe where they say it doesn’t have a good storage life,” says Malone.

“But in Greece the variety is grown across a wide spectrum of growers. They’ve had two very wet pre-harvest periods, so some growers that don’t have good techniques, whether they’re growing Hayward or Tsechelidis are going to have fruit that has short storage life.

“What we do know, that fruit that is grown with good orchard and canopy management techniques, that’s handles properly post-harvest, will store as well as Hayward, without issue.”

### **Hayward oversupply and an ‘urgent’ need for change**

Murray says Hayward growers around the world are faced with a packout quality dilemma.

“I think for growers of Hayward, every grower in the world is urgently looking for new varieties as that as a commodity for which many are losing money, and they are losing money because firstly the pack outs are not high.

“An export class 1 packout can be anywhere from perhaps 80% down to 50% in some cases this year. There’s some big variation of size, so it’s a marginal economic choice for growers to be in the Hayward business.

“They have to be good growers, good average size, good internal characteristics, dry matter, etcetera, with the fruit - the economic question has to be stacked in favor of growers looking for new varieties to improve their financial position on their orchards, and there’s no doubt with Hayward at the moment, it’s oversupplied.”

But with Europe’s demand for smaller fruit and Japan preferring smaller sizes still in the 33 to 36 count range, Malone says megakiwi growers will not be looking for ‘traditional’ markets in the immediate term.

## **Why Chile?**

Four years ago Enza representatives met with megakiwi developer AgroHara in Greece, which was looking for a commercialization partner with a global marketing network so the two formed a joint venture.

Enza's management then chose to take the product to Chile instead of their home in New Zealand.

“The reason Chile was chosen was because we saw more opportunity to grow it in Chile than New Zealand. In New Zealand Zespri controls the new varieties. We’ve tried to change it but without success.

“In New Zealand everything is controlled by Zespri and growers basically get no choice but to plant their varieties, because if they plant another variety they don’t have the freedom to export. It’s quite a deterrent.

“For a grower in Chile you have to look at the net return per hectare, and because you have basically the same costs in growing the crop, Hayward and Tsechelidis, the fact you get so much more volume from Tsechelidis per hectare means that in proportion your overhead costs are lower.

Malone uses this point of increased volume per hectare to show the megakiwi has a lower carbon footprint than Hayward, while without the use of chemical assistance it's almost 'organic' - a big plus for retailers.

"People are also becoming more health conscious. I've read that Vitamin C from fruit material is absorbed better into your system than in the pill form, so if you can tell people they're going to get a high dose of vitamin C and anti-oxidants naturally from having the megakiwi they're going to take that before popping the pill, or choosing a kiwifruit with half the Vitamin C.

"I think that these sort of initiatives, this continued innovation with new varieties like Tsechelidis coming to market, is exactly what Chilean growers need to embrace to get out of the Hayward commodity trap.

"We're looking forward to our first fruit so we can get it on the boat and get it into market."

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