


Discovered by chance by the Chimenti family in Chile's Region Metropolitana, the Pink Globe grape variety offers a new alternative for growers looking to differentiate from their peers. The industry is hopeful the new grape will take off from its origins of natural genetic mutation, with sights on the lucrative yet demanding Chinese market. 

Alfredo Chimenti Agri and his son Alfredo Chimenti Silva spoke to www.freshfruitportal.com about the characteristics of the grape, the challenges of a long production road and the opportunities of domestic and global markets.

From his office decked with packaging labels and world maps, Chimenti Agri talks about why the variety should be able to capture the taste buds of Chinese consumers, and the decision to start commercial production with the goal of conquering the Asian tiger.


Eight years ago, Chimenti senior was perusing his Red Globe vineyard of 200,000 or more bunches, when a bunch on vine number 46 in row 3 caught his attention for its bright pink uniform color.

Without cutting it he took a paper cap to protect and define the grape and attached a label with the message "Do not touch".

He watched the months go by from March through to the first few days of June, but when his farm experienced strong frosts he decided to cut the vine, leaving it on the dining table for his family to try. Everyone, especially his grandchildren, loved it.

"There was a bud that mutated and produced a shoot and this shoot produced roots. The vine then bore 27 bunches of dark violet and one which was pink," he remembers.

In the following season the same vine produced another bud, which subsequently bore more pink grapes. The following year he continued to cultivate the vine and obtained more bunches of pink grapes, which convinced him the variety could be important.

 After monitoring the cultivar for three seasons, Chimenti Agri arranged to meet the Chilean Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG), where he was told about the standards that needed to be met to register a new table grape variety.

"At the beginning SAG had doubts and thought a virus had caused the pink color, but after two years we managed to show through various generations of the variety that the distinct color was not caused by a virus, but through a mutation."

His son explains that it was difficult to find the genetic differences of Red Globe. A year ago

the country's Agricultural Innovation Foundation (FIA) and Universidad de Católica studied the variety for two months, and found the the grape had its own identity and clear differences from Red Globe. Now the Chimenti family have the variety registered and protected as a distinct cultivar with SAG.

Grape characteristics

In general they thought it was similar to Red Globe, but Pink had several fundamental differences. It was a variety that didn't need too much technical management.

"If you could produce Red Globe well then you would be an excellent grower of Pink. There was nothing new which needed to be invented," says Chimenti senior.

As well as the pink color, the pulp is absolutely white and the seeds are smaller and less astringent. In comparison to Red Globe it has smooth skin and on average has three to four more degrees brix more sugar, reaching between 18 to 20 degrees when harvested.

During ripening the Pink Globe first achieves its sugar content and then its color. Chimenti junior says it produces around 4,000 boxes of 8.2kg per hectare, with the percentage of fruit which can be exported to China exceeding 90%.

"You should realize that there are clear parameters and norms in terms of quality condition and packing for exporting to the Chinese market which is below our benchmark," he adds.



"On the part of the producer we have an evaluation in terms of the soil and climate because we already know the variety can adjust very well to different types of land. It can adapt to different climates from III (Atacama) region to the VI (O'Higgins) region."

The Chinese test

Thinking that China will be the principal market for the fruit, they have already sent several samples over there to see how the grape copes with traveling.

They stored the fruit for 30 days in Chile, they packed it for the trip and the boxes were opened 70 days later in the Guangzhou market in southern China.

"The grapes weren't dehydrated, discolored, rotten nor splitting from their skin. In general, nothing happened which worried us or made us nervous about the condition of the fruit," says Chimenti junior.

He says this showed the work the family had done in terms of quality and finding out the Chinese tastes was very important. Chimenti senior is upbeat about how Pink Globes would likely meet the Chinese requirements for well-formed bunches with grapes of consistent size, color and sweetness.

"We are sure that the Chinese will recognize a product like this," adds his son.

The next stage

Now that the grape has been formally recognized in Chile it is ready for an international market.

"The UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) standard is a regulatory framework that allows you to be less nervous," says Chimenti junior.

Alongside this they have started registering the grape in other producing countries including Peru, the U.S., Egypt, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The aim is to offer constant supply throughout the year.


"The important thing is to get a virus-free plant and once we have this we can export samples and have all the necessary tests which different countries require.

"We are extremely important to the U.S. in their off-season. We need to see how the grape behaves in this country and, if it keeps its characteristics then we can export from the U.S. to China.

The Chimenti family hope to develop a business model, giving them greater control with a limited number of hectares for cultivation.

"Chile exports about 28 million boxes of Red Globe to the world, of which 8 million go to Asia. In general terms we consider Pink could obtain a 20% market share - in other words, we are talking of about 6 million cases. "

They believe Chile could grow between 1,000-1,500 hectares of the variety, but they say they must be careful not to step on the toes of the competitiveness of other varieties.

"We must find the balance between the market and what will eventually be produced, without affecting the business of producers who don't grow Pink Globe", he stresses. 

Currently there are seven generations of the variety on 12 acres of the Chimenti family's

farm. They also have some plants in experimental centers from Copiapó to San Fernando, both on the coast and in the foothills, to see the crop performance in different climates, soils and patterns.

Together with ASOEX (Chilean Exporters Association) they are working on a project funded by the FIA to validate, among other things, the international registration, genetic identification, virus cleaning and business model.

Over the next year they will be making important decisions, especially about validating the merits of the variety and finalizing the business model to present a solid project to the fruit industry by 2013.

www.freshfruitportal.com