

By National Mango Board (NMB) executive director William Watson



Mangoes are experiencing impressive growth in the U.S. market place. In 2011, mango dollars per store per week rose 11.5% to US\$172 and mango volume (number of mangoes) per store per week rose nearly 10% to 189, compared to 2010 results. Mangoes are still only 0.4% of the produce sales nationwide and too few consumers in the U.S. are convinced they can find a good mango when they go to the grocery store.

42% of non-mango purchasers say they don't buy because they don't know how to pick a ripe mango, while 38% of mango purchasers say they frequently can't find mangoes that are ripe and ready to eat. Almost all consumers who have eaten mangoes like the flavor, standing at 93%. Is there any doubt that overcoming this major barrier to purchase will drive mango sales to even greater heights?

The industry has demonstrated they can efficiently deliver a mango from thousands of miles away and be competitive in the marketplace. Harnessing this same passion, with an unparalleled understanding of what consumers expect in a good mango, I believe will help us minimize barriers to mango purchases for many consumers.

Fruit consumption increases dramatically after ripening "on" or "off" the tree. A marketing advantage some fruits have that mangos do not, is a 'Ready to Eat' program, which is designed to eliminate the obstacle of consumers purchasing fruit short of its perfect ripeness level, thus providing high quality fruit. The use of controlled ripening protocols is being commercially used on fruit that consumers can choose instead of mangoes, instead of avocados, peaches, nectarines, plums and kiwifruit. As an example of success, in the 10 years from 1999 to 2009, avocado consumption more than doubled from 1.9lbs to 4.1lbs per person in the U.S.

To define a high quality eating mango, the development of minimum maturity indices, proper fruit ripening protocols and fruit sensory descriptions to attract and satisfy consumers are critical requirements for the successful establishment and consistency of a Ripe/Ready to Eat Mango program.

Additionally, characteristics that drive consumers to purchase mangos and why, is

something anyone who makes a living in the mango industry needs to understand. The U.S. market continues to be a good market for mango growth however it can be much, much bigger.

Building a Ripe/Ready to Eat mango program is not simple, quick or inexpensive. We need to validate the current mango ripening protocol, measure the quality attributes that define a ripe mango, propose a minimum quality index, validate a dry matter, non-destructive sensor performance for mangoes and determine critical bruising thresholds, using industry and consumer input along the way.

Although some of this information may be available for a few varieties, there is not a complete set of data that addresses these issues for mangos the U.S. consumer sees in their produce department today. It will take patience, perseverance and commitment to build a Ripe/Ready to Eat Mango program that could change mango consumption in the US.

Eliminating mango purchase-barriers for consumers in the US only makes our industry stronger.

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