

Texan company Lone Star Citrus' Winter Sweetz brand combined with consumer education around flavor and preparation has helped raise the profile of a traditional "baby boomer" fruit.

During the Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Fresh Summit event in New Orleans recently, marketing director April Flowers said the brand was launched a few years ago to stem the tide of grapefruit trending out of the top 20 fruit items in the United States.

"We sat down and had a heart-to-heart with ourselves and said we've kind of been depending on baby boomers for a long time to carry this category. It's time that we take this to the younger generation," Flowers said.

"We needed to re-introduce grapefruit as something new. So we worked with Lisa Cork (of Fresh Produce Marketing) and she was fantastic."



Lone Star Citrus marketing director April Flowers.

Four months of research uncovered the fact consumers were fairly confused about grapefruit.

"They don't don't understand why you pick up a grapefruit in summer and it's got a bit more of that sour flavor profile that we all think of, and yet if you pick it up in the wintertime it's sweeter - it still has that zing but it's a bit mellower," Flowers said.

"You have four points of origin in the United States - Florida, Texas, Arizona, California. Within each of those places you have three different colors of grapefruit and so many varieties beyond that, so you're asking the consumer to know a lot about one item in a very long shopping list."

The idea behind Winter Sweetz was "memorable" simple branding by drawing attention to the winter seasonality and the taste.

"We came back with Fresh Insights into the top 20, but our goal for the long-term, along with that short-term, is to move up further and further," Flowers said.

"A big portion of that is teaching people how to segment and prepare grapefruit," she said.

"When we think of that bitter taste, it's because there are natural oils in the pith and the peel, but if you take the flesh out of the pith and the peel it's so much tastier - you're almost completely eliminating that bitterness and getting that bright, aromatic flavor."

The marketing executive also highlighted the fruit's health benefits and versatility in the kitchen.

"This is a very low-calorie, low glycemic index fruit. There's lots of lycopene and Vitamin C. Half a grapefruit gives you a 100% of your Vitamin C - you can't ask for anything better than that.

"So how are we leveraging it? We're really trying to tap into some of these health-conscious crowds - we've found people in their late 20s and 30s would like to eat healthy, although unfortunately people tend to think healthy is boring.

"But this is an exciting flavor to add into something that might be somewhat bland, so we're doing a lot of work trying to get as much as those recipes out there."

She said Lone Star currently produced around two million cartons of grapefruit a year, representing 30% of the Texan supply, and the plan was to continue growing.

"We have grown every year since our inception 10 years ago - we have some of our own groves but we also serve independent growers; we are very adamant about supporting independent growers," she said.

"We have to keep them in the game because they're the people who know everything about this crop.

"We're constantly gathering new orchards, new acreage, we are growing our own acreage. We plan to be in this business for a very long time."

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