
Cameo is an example of the growing club concept

Variety owners will try to control quality and quantity.

By Geraldine Warner

The way the new apple variety Cameo has been introduced is similar to how most new varieties are likely to be handled in the future.

Cameo is the first variety produced in Washington State that has been packed, promoted, and sold primarily by one entity. Dole Northwest handles about 90% of the Cameo production in Washington State.

"What's interesting about Cameo is one group is promoting it," commented Ken Adams at Willow Drive Nursery, Ephrata, Washington. "And the benefits of that have been interesting because it's given them additional sales of other varieties, and other packers have recognized this."

Nurseries believe that in the future, production of new varieties will be restricted by the owners to a relatively small group of producers who will sell the fruit through one entity. The theory is that if production is limited, the variety will command higher prices.

But Cameo producers are an informal group of orchardists who simply took up the offer when Dole stepped forward and said it would pack and promote the variety.

"It was kind of a growing club, but with no control," Adams said. "Basically, it just happened."

One of the problems when production is not strictly controlled is a lack of uniform quality, Adams said.

"In spite of that, Cameo is still moving ahead gradually. But I think if you could control the growing and the quality, it would go ahead quicker."

Growers pay Dole a promotional fee of 50 cents per box, and returns for Cameo have remained healthy, so far. Dole's focus has been on in-store sampling, which is a relatively expensive type of promotion.

The new system for introducing varieties is based on the same concept, but with control, and with agreements on how many acres will be planted and where, who will do the marketing, who will develop the variety, who will test it, and who will evaluate it.

"To make a variety successful, you have all these parts in the chain that have to happen together--the evaluation of the variety, the production of the variety, packing, and marketing," Adams said.

"All these things have to happen simultaneously to make this happen in a ten-year period."

Breeding programs that have new and unique material need the help of everyone in the chain to launch the variety, but they need to keep control over both quantity and quality, he added.

"There's got to be some incentive for the growers and packers. The only way you can keep the price up is keep the acreage down, promote the variety, and police it."

Adams said such arrangements lead to more orderly growing and marketing.

"Everyone wins if the variety wins," he said.

Pink Lady, a variety from the apple breeding program in Western Australia, would have been a good candidate for such a system, Adams said. It has a distinctive appearance with an attractive pink blush, and a sweet-tart flavor that appeals to European tastes, and it stores well. E.W. Brandt & Sons of Parker, Washington, has the exclusive propagation rights in the United States.

But many trees have already been sold, and it is too late to limit production, Adams said. South Africa is producing large quantities to export to Europe, which could have a detrimental effect on the market there.

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