

Cosmic Crisp finds increasing traction

By Tom Karst

In a year when many Washington apple varieties saw reduced output, the Cosmic Crisp has given buyers bigger volume and promising potential, marketers say.

The U.S. Apple Association reported Dec. 1 inventories of Cosmic Crisp apples in Washington were at 5.4 million 40-pound cartons, up 60% from the same time in 2021.

Cosmic Crisp production was projected at near 9.8 million in 2022, up from 5.2 million cartons in 2021 and several times greater than the 1.9 million fresh cartons produced in 2020, according to the Cosmic Crisp website, published by Yakima, Wash.-based Proprietary Variety Management. Estimates on the website show output in Washington state could grow to 13.9 million cartons in 2023 and 21.7 million cartons by 2026.

Cosmic Crisp apples are grown in Washington through licenses that are authorized by PVM, which is coordinating the commercialization of the variety with Washington apple marketers. Cosmic Crisp apples are finding good support at retail, marketers say.

“Cosmic Crisp has been received by consumers extremely well,” said Catherine Gipe-Stewart, director of marketing for Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, Wash. “We are hearing amazing feedback as we enter the fourth year of sales and the second



Cosmic Crisp apples are finding good support at retail, marketers say. Photo: File

year of year-round volume.”

Cosmic Crisp is the largest growing variety on the market, she said, and the variety was strategically priced to be just under Honeycrisp. That seemed to incite trial well and create repeat purchases, she said.

Loren Foss, organic manager for CMI Orchards, Wenatchee, Wash., said Cosmic Crisp entered the apple scene almost half a decade ago with the backing of a marketing campaign and associated consumer hype.

“In spite of factors like higher-end starting prices for a new apple and young trees, Cosmic Crisp has really begun to gain traction and find its place,” Foss said. “The trees have matured, the prices have had the chance to acclimate, and repeat buyers are now experiencing the best features of the fruit consistently — that it can store exceptionally

well through the summer, and the flavor only seems to improve.”

Foss said the variety is showing an increasing influence on the apple category.

Marcus Hartmann, vice president of Pacificpro Sales LLC, Bellevue, Wash., said Pacificpro has not yet recognized a substantial increase in demand from its wholesale/distribution customers with regard to Cosmic Crisp, though it continues to be a promotable variety.

“While Cosmic Crisp represents a small percentage of Pacificpro’s overall volumes shipped, it remains a highly desirable variety with numerous opportunities to expand the category,” Hartmann said.

Brianna Shales, marketing director for Wenatchee, Wash.-based Stemilt Growers LLC, said consumer reception for Cosmic

Crisp has been positive and will continue to grow as volume expands to year-round availability.

“We expect it to break into the top 10 apples this year and remain a constant once it does,” she said. “Cosmic is migrating from club to core variety and that is the mindset around merchandising that will continue to help raise consumer awareness of the apple. It’s still early to tell what effect it will have on other apple varieties, but we do anticipate some choices to go away as it emerges.”

Yakima, Wash.-based Sage Fruit Co. has seen a steady increase in demand for Cosmic Crisp as volume has grown, said Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing.

“We are confident that by advanced planning with our partners, maintaining a desirable price and being able to provide product late into the season, both retailers and consumers will continue to welcome the Cosmic Crisp,” Sinks said.

Consumers have been willing to try Cosmic Crisp and repeat their purchases, said Don Roper, vice president of sales and marketing for Honeybear Marketing LLC, Elgin, Minn.

“The large media spend on the launch of Cosmic likely was good for the industry as it raised awareness and potentially drove apple sales,” he said. “Now that consumers have had the opportunity to try it, we will see if it’s a must-have or price-based purchase.” **P**

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ers this year, but they will be sold.”

While a big crop and cheaper prices

could bring more consumers to the category, many consumers are loyal to the fruit.

Typically, about 67% to 70% of the Washington crop is sold fresh, with the

balance sold to processors.

Online shopping has introduced new challenges in reaching consumers. While online shopping has declined since the peak of the pandemic, the challenge remains to effectively sell new apple varieties.

“You still have to overcome a significant barrier, and that barrier is the cognitive aspects or the thinking process of how humans decide,” Riggan said.

Retail flexibility

One of the biggest surprises this season is the flexibility buyers have been willing to concede in order to get their orders fulfilled, said Marcus Hartmann, vice president of Pacificpro Sales, Bellevue, Wash.

“Many now show a willingness beyond what we have seen in the past to allow lead time to pack toward orders to adequately cover each client’s individual needs,” he said.

While apple demand remains relatively constant, reduced availability is posing

challenges in fulfilling orders in a timely manner and contributing to increased FOB pricing across the entire manifest, Hartmann said.

“It further necessitates the need to source products from multiple locations across the region, adding complexity to assembling loads and managing the loading process while ensuring quality deliveries to all stakeholders,” he said.

Catherine Gipe-Stewart, director of marketing for Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, Wash., said retailers have been willing to be flexible to take advantage of what this year’s crop has given the industry.

“We still have a good amount of volume for the 2022 crop, but it may be that a different variety or size is more promotable than had been in previous years,” she said.

“This has created an opportunity for emerging varieties such as Cosmic Crisp and Autumn Glory too.” **P**

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