

Consumer Acceptance of Navel Oranges Significantly Improved



A fruit quality maturity standard recommended by Delytics has helped boost the consumer acceptability of New Zealand navel oranges from 67% to 96% in just one season.

The majority of the New Zealand navel orange industry adopted the maturity standard when it came into effect on 1 January 2016. The resulting improved eating quality has been credited by citrus retailers and marketers for boosting repeat purchases, right from the start of each season since the standards were adopted.

The New Zealand citrus industry voted to adopt the maturity standard in 2015 to help ensure navel oranges met minimum consumer acceptability levels prior to being harvested. Twelve months later the results of supermarket monitoring data presented at their 2016 conference revealed a stunning result. In just one season retail sampling showed the percentage of New Zealand navel oranges that met the minimum standard deemed to be liked by consumers had jumped from 16 out of 25 to 24 out of 25.



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The adoption of the voluntary maturity standards by the vast majority of growers and marketers is believed to be the key contributor to the good results, although other factors such as favourable weather and a bumper ‘on-year’ crop also played a part. The maturity standards are now an integral part of the independent clearance process that was designed by Delytics for Citrus New Zealand in 2015.

Citrus New Zealand Chairman, Wayne Hall said, “Our whole driver was to increase the volume of navels that can be sold at a sustainable return by improving their consumer appeal. We want consumers to buy their first navel, enjoy it and then come back and buy more. The feedback we got from retailers was that the fruit was well received and repeat purchases have been very good.



A young consumer enjoying a tasty New Zealand navel.

Delytics has developed a robust clearance process that helps us minimise immature fruit getting into the supply chain. Delytics helped us add the new maturity measurement protocols to the clearance process and we are now putting a much more consistent piece of fruit into the marketplace.”

Citrus marketing companies T & G Global and First Fresh both adopted the Citrus New Zealand maturity standard in 2016 and encouraged their growers to do the same.

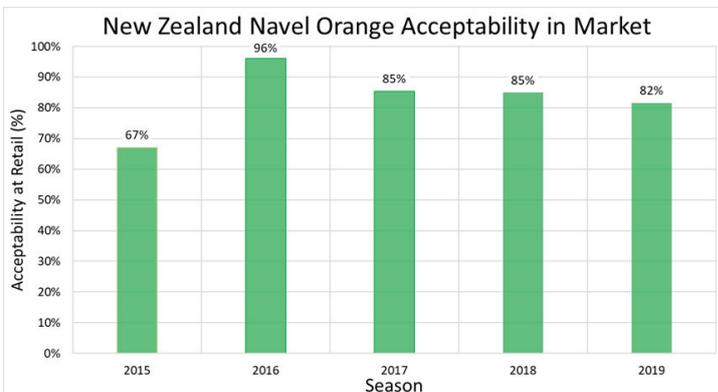
Glen Booth, former T & G Global Commercial Manager for Citrus said, “We were confident that every piece of fruit procured, managed and sold by T & G Global met the quality assurance standard and we’ve enjoyed the



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sales from that. The repeat purchases have definitely been there in regards to the consistent demand. The eating experience of the New Zealand navel oranges secured consistent consumer purchasing right from the outset this season [2016], even though there were other preferred fruit in the marketplace. Introducing the independent clearance process has been a good exercise for the whole industry to demonstrate its commitment to consistent quality and continual improvement. I think we've got the tools we need now to make some very good informed decisions around quality assurance for future seasons."

First Fresh Managing Director, Ian Albers said he viewed the Citrus New Zealand clearance standard as a cornerstone for the New Zealand navel industry, which the industry can build from. He agreed that New Zealand navel oranges sold well in the 2016 season and attributes that to good quality early season fruit.



Retail data shows that the majority of New Zealand navel oranges have been liked by consumers since new minimum maturity standards were adopted in early 2016.

As for the retailers, Countdown Produce Buyer, Chris Langdon stated in 2016, "We are very focused on making sure that the fruit we get early in the season is good quality so our consumers enjoy it and repeat purchase. We don't want the hard work we have done to encourage consumers to support New Zealand fruit undermined by people taking shortcuts with early season fruit. What the navel growers are doing makes our job a lot easier to make sure the fruit we are selling is excellent. The feedback from our team is that the early season navel oranges were pretty robust from the start this year, as far as the taste profile goes."

"In my mind, this sort of quality monitoring should become mandatory across all facets of the fruit industry."

Retail monitoring carried out each season by New Zealand Citrus has shown that the consumer acceptability of navel oranges has remained consistently high since the new minimum standards were adopted in 2016.



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Ian said, "I think the clearance process has taken some of the early fruit out of the market that can be quite disruptive and helped reduce some of the early season angst that can sometimes exist in a marketplace when people are chasing early sales."

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