

PACKINGHOUSE NEWSLETTER

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QUALITY AND THE FUTURE OF FLORIDA FRESH FRUIT

Quality and the Consumer

Quality as related to packed citrus has many meanings.

Grade classification
Level of pack
Brilliance of shine
Sweetness of taste
Blemishes and decay
are all components of quality.

Quality is an intangible subject whose definition changes depending on a personal point of view.

Quality means different things to different levels of the marketing chain.

The wholesaler
The retailer
The end consumer

All have different ideas on what constitutes quality.

The end consumers perception of quality has the greatest impact on Florida growers and shippers. The end consumers preception of quality is also the least understood.

Having been involved in the citrus business since the age of 15, I have:

Grown
Packed
Shipped
Exported
Fund raised

and sold citrus in just about every imaginable way.

The past 3 years have seen travels all across the country talking with the end consumer about Florida grapefruit and oranges.

Their ideas on quality are simple and specific.

They want sound fresh fruit.

They want good tasting fruit.

They want fruit with a clean and healthy outside appearance.

Fresh Fruit

The phenomonal increase in the fund raising business since its inception, approximately 1968, is proof enough that the end consumer desires fresh fruit. The major selling point of all fund raising programs is not price, but that the fruit is ultra-fresh. The most often heard compliment from customers is, "We just don't receive fruit that fresh in our town."

I was travelling thru Crestview, Ohio a small town about the size of Yee Haw Junction. All the town is, is a crossroads. We sell two truckloads of citrus in December there. If that's not enough, There is a fellow who drives a semitrailer back and forth from Florida to Crestview. He hauls fresh fruit in bins to a corner gas station. Just as quickly as he unloads, returns to Florida, load up and get back to Crestview, he sells out again. It takes him approximately 1/2 day to sell out.

People desire fresh fruit.

Thoughts about Decay

The end consumer does not understand decay. When fruit decays, it generally includes the growth of green mold. The end consumer associates green mold on fruit with bread mold. They know that it takes a long period of time for bread mold to form, likewise, they think the formation of fruit mold should take an equal amount of time to develop. When told that fruit is ultra-fresh and it arrives showing mold, the end consumer tends to disbelieve the selling organization. The absence of decay is a major component of high quality fresh fruit.

Good Tasting Fruit

One of the major problems that we as packers are often guilty of is that we feel our liability for the fruit ends when the fruit has left our loading docks. Keep in mind, someone eventually eats, or should eat every piece of fruit you ship. A classic example of this is the Japanese Export Business. In 1977 the Japanese market was a market that moved 3 to 5 million cartons of grapefruit. After the freeze of that year and subsequent years, packers shipped fruit that was of marginal quality inside, freeze damaged and dry. It was inspected, sure enough, but shipping an occasional lot of fruit that would not eat well in Japan was common place. It would decay on the trip to Japan, but who worried about the trip?

The packers' liability for the fruit was over once the fruit was loaded at a U. S. port. They didn't care after that. What happened? - The Japanese consumers revolted. Buyers did not buy after consecutive years of losing money. The Japanese trimmed their grapefruit imports way back. A very large customer was almost lost. Why? - because we didn't care about the taste of our product. Fortunately, we have learned from our mistakes and the Japanese market is back on a firm foundation. If we, as an industry, took care to make sure that what we ship is one and the same with what we ourselves would like to eat, we would experience record volumes shipped.

I can ship oranges to an end consumer that just look great, but the inside is a little dry. That same customer will tell me that the oranges weren't very good this year. He'll tell me they were dry, pithy and somewhat sour tasting. He is unhappy, and so you would be too if you spent your good money to buy some fruit that showed some form of deterioration inside.

You are not fooling the end consumer. Fundraising has opened up many new markets for fresh fruit. These markets can be expanded well beyond their present Thanksgiving and Christmas concentration. Taste is a prime consideration to improve the volume moved to the end consumer.

Clean Healthy Appearance

Much literature has been written about the scars, blemishes, and green color that mar the skin of grapefruit and oranges. All of this literature was written in the name of educating the end consumer so that we can ship poorer quality fruit. What is your reaction to produce in the grocery store? You pick out the reddest apples, the cleanest bananas, and the orangest oranges. Generally you pick by appearance. The end consumer is no different. Grapefruit and oranges are purchased by appearance and judged by taste.

Many end consumers put fruit in a basket for center pieces on tables or make fruit an attractive decoration in their kitchen. This aspect of fruit is lost when care is not taken to ship a clean healthy piece of fruit. People like to look at fruit. Scarred, green, and blemished pieces of fruit is an indication of lack of care and says a lot about the pride of the people who shipped that fruit. The end consumer knows this.

The end consumer takes pride in what he buys. He is proud to take home a nice looking piece of fruit and display it. Today's consumer is an aggressive buyer. He likes to buy nice things at a fair price. He is not educated to pay good money for poor merchandise. We as shippers should take this as a cue to ship sound, clean, fresh fruit. The end consumer will buy it and be proud of it.

Keep in Mind

Quality depends on viewpoints. Its not our viewpoint but the end consumers' viewpoint that is really important.

The end consumers idea of quality is: they want sound fresh fruit, they want good tasting fruit, and they want fruit with a clean and healthy appearance. The absence of decay is a major component of high quality fresh fruit. Keep aware of that someone eventually eats every piece of fruit you ship. Also, grapefruit and oranges are purchased by appearance and judged by taste.

Carl S. Fetzer III
M. W. Fruit Company
Vero Beach, Florida

This newsletter was adopted from notes Carl Fetzer III used in his talk at Citrus Packinghouse Day, September 4, 1986. His comments were well received and are presented here for those who missed the program or attended and wanted a copy of his talk. Now that we have put Crestview, Ohio on the citrus map, I hope that it is not flooded with citrus. Thank you to Carl Fetzer III for an excellent talk and newsletter.

Editor

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Lake Alfred, FL 33850

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" 1985-86 Season Annual Report"

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