Marketing

The CCA Cherimoya Handbook

Table of Contents

Introduction

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Crop yields are stated as estimates of the gross harvest weight in pounds at the roadside. A more realistic yield figure is the net weight of the crop graded by size and quality determined by the market demand and/or grading standards. There may be an addition reduction in weight due to moisture loss after harvest and continues to occur throughout the time required for the fruit to reach a retail point of sale.

The number of planted nonbearing and bearing acres is difficult to determine as there is no agency that collects and publishes this information.

The information for yields of mature plantings and those that are in various stages of maturity are the best estimates available and assumes that a moderate amount of horticultural and management skills are being utilized. Any given site may achieve lower or higher yields depending on the management skills, suitability of the site to optimum tree growth, flowering, and pollination. All of these factors will of course be at the mercy of the climatic conditions that are variable. The selection of cultivar(s) planted and the natural growth cycle of the cherimoya are other variables that should be considered.

Projecting Industry Supply and Demand

by Claude Sweet

Crop Reporting

The volume of cherimoya sold at wholesale terminal markets doesn't reflect the percentage of the total harvest that is sold through alternative marketing efforts of growers.

Data must be obtained from growers who sold directly to foreign buyers, domestic chain stores, and other direct marketing endeavors.

Industry yields based on total volume marketed and divided by the total number of bearing acres is not representative of yields that a new grower might expect.

Estimating Yields

Using a representative sample of a grove with average care, it is possible to develop an industry average per acre production for trees of various ages.

Adjustments must be made when applying the industry yields to a specific site because of tree spacings and cultural care below and above the standard use for the industry calculation.

Value of Crop

The total revenues of cherimoya doesn't represent the income that any individual grower might except to receive.

The harvest season for Carpinteria and northern San Diego county are different for Hass avocados and the pattern is also exhibited in all cultivars of cherimoya grown.

There are variations in prices that occur throughout the marketing season for different sizes and grades of fruit. Growers may also experience price variation depending on the day of the week when delivering fruit to a wholesale terminal market.

Weather can play an important part in the volume and quality of fruit in any given year. Extremes in temperature, low humidity, and winds can adversely affect fruit set, cause fruit drop, result in sunburn and split skin, etc.

Frost damage may cause immediate damage to a crop and have residual effects on the ability of trees to produce until the tree is able to regrown and produce fruit bearing wood.

Expansion of Market Demand

There is an annual increase in population due to births and legal/illegal immigration that exceeds the number of deaths and losses from people who leave the country permanently.

The impact of deaths and people leaving the country are felt immediately. While young children may be introduced to

Industry Projected Supply of Cherimoya — based upon estimated planted acreage and yields factored by tree age

Tree Age	Base Yr.	Yr. 1	Yr. 2	Yr. 3	Yr. 4	Yr. 5	Yr. 6	Yr. 7	Yr. 8	% of Mature Yield	Lbs./ Acre by Tree Age
13 >	16	34	54	76	96	116	136	154	170	100.00%	5,058
12	18	20	22	20	20	20	18	16	14	95.00%	4,805
11	20	22	20	20	20	18	16	14	12	90.00%	4,552
10	22	20	20	20	18	16	14	12	10	85.00%	4,299
9	20	20	20	18	16	14	12	10	5	70.00%	3,540
8	20	20	18	16	14	12	10	5	5	55.00%	2,782
7	20	18	16	14	12	10	5	5	5	40.00%	2,023
6	18	16	14	12	10	5	5	5	5	20.00%	1,012
5	16	14	12	10	5	5	5	5	5	10.00%	506
4	14	12	10	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.00%	253
3	12	10	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	2.50%	126
2	10	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	0.00%	0
1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	0.00%	0
total	211	216	221	226	231	236	241	246	251		

The numbers representing planted acres, tree age, tree age at maturity, and yields acccording to tree age used in the above chart are to illustrate one way to calculate the Cherimoya industry's volumn of fruit marketed. Opinions differ as to the figures to use.

the taste of cherimoya, they don't consume any appreciable volume of fruit until they are much older.

Culinary tastes all along the Pacific coast have been influenced by our nearby neighbors in Mexico and Central American as well as the immigrants from all of the Pacific Rim nations. Naturally these groups of people seek to prepare familiar dishes.

When possible, immigrants with farming experience have undertaken to grow produce in California's multiple climate zones that is familiar and commonly used in their cuisine. Temperate plant species have proven adaptable, but those with more tropical requirements must either be imported or substitutes found.

The length of the marketing season can change from year to year depending on weather conditions. With the efforts to import Chilean cherimoya moving forward, there is a possibility that there may be an overlap at the end of the California harvest and the start of the Chilean imports.

The volume of cherimoya fruit being delivered each week is relatively small compared to avocados or bananas. Scheduling supplies to match market demand is very important to maintaining price stability.

The potential to have a large increase in production is always possible, especially when one or more years of reduced harvests have resulted from adverse weather conditions.

Pooling grower resources can fund a generic promotion to educate customers and expand market share to stimulate demand to absorb large increases in weekly/annual volume that glut the market and disrupt prices.

This table demonstrates how calculations are performed. It doesn't attempt to represent actual market demand or supply figures for any specific period of time. An increase in supply In year 2, without an increase in demand, results in prices dropping to absorb the increase supply of cherimoya. A weather problem that reduces supply would cause market prices to increase.

	Base Yr.	Yr. 1	Yr. 2	Yr. 3	Yr. 4	Yr. 5
Estimated Market Demand (lbs.)	**224,000**	224,000	248,640	248,640	273,504	330,940
Projected market expansion		**1.00%**	**0.00%**	**0.00%**	**1.00%**	**1.00%**
Total market expansion		11.00%	0.00%	10.00%	21.00%	21.00%
Volumn of market expansion		24,640	0	24,864	57,436	69,497
Expanded Market (Demand)		248,640	248,640	273,504	330,940	400,437
Shipments (Supply in Lbs.)	225,342	306,978	370,791	437,480	511,979	589,113
Current demand (lbs.)		-58,338	-122,151	-163,976	-181,040	-188,675
% change in vol. delivered from previous yr.		36.23%	20.79%	17.99%	17.03%	15.07%
change in vol. delivered from previous yr.		81,636	63,813	66,689	74,500	77,133
Shipments (Industry Estimates)		306,978	370,791	437,480	511,979	589,113
Annual Supply surplus (Lbs.)		58,338	122,151	163,976	181,040	188,675
Length of Marketing Season (wks)	**28**	**28**	**28**	**28**	**28**	**28**
Seasonal Market Adjustments (wks)	**0**	**1**	**-1**	**3**	**2**	**-1**
Adjusted Marketing Season (wks)	28	29	27	31	30	27
Weekly Supply surplus (Lbs.)		2,084	4,363	5,856	6,466	6,738
Weekly Supply surplus (Trays)		208	436	586	647	674
Difference prior yr's /current yr. supply		81,636	63,813	66,689	74,500	77,133
Initial Asking Price	**$2.50**	$2.50	$1.70	$3.10	$2.45	$1.70
Inflation rate	0.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
Initial asking price		$2.58	$1.75	$3.19	$2.52	$1.75
Price adjustment	**$0.00**	**($0.80)**	**$1.40**	**($0.65)**	**($0.75)**	**($1.00)**
Adjusted price	$2.50	$1.70	$3.10	$2.45	$1.70	$0.70

Calculating Market Prices

Determining Prices

The average industry market price for any given year and the price a grower actually received for their daily harvests may have little or no relationship.

One problem is the difficulty in collecting complete data that represents all of the fruit harvested and sold. Growers typically are very tight lipped about how much they sell and the price they received.

The most frequent reason cherimoya growers and packers give for not providing daily or weekly reports is—"that publishing this information would provide buyers with a competitive advantage."

They claim that even information that is published of the previous weeks inventory assists buyers to estimate the amount of fruit held in cold storage. This information can then be used to pressure brokers to discount prices since any broker with a high inventory would have to lower prices to move fruit rather than risk it spoiling.

It is true that any grower who harvests more fruit than they have confirmed orders is more at risk with the fruit in storage as compared to being held on the tree during the early part of the season. However, as the crop approaches maturity, the range of options available to the grower becomes reduced.

Hand Pollination of flowers allow growers to control the amount of fruit that will mature throughout their marketing season.

Cherimoya data is especially difficult to extract. Industry data is actually a compilation of estimates from several sources. Since no marketing order or commission has been created to assess a promotional fee from packers, no mechanism has been established that will provided accurate figures at the end of each year's marketing season.

Each individual grower is concerned with the volume of fruit sold each day of the marketing season since prices can vary widely on a weekly basis. The length of each season can vary each year due to climatic conditions affecting fruit maturity.

Daily Variations In Shipments

The volume of fruit direct marketed at a roadside stand is usually greater Friday through Sunday compared to Monday through Thursday's sales, especially in the spring and fall when children are in school.

A stand that is near an attraction that will benefit from vacation traffic will have higher sales compared to a location that depends entirely on local residents.

Produce that can be eaten raw is more likely to be sold to vacationers who are staying in hotels/motels because they lack cooking facilities. Vacationers who are traveling in motor homes or camping are not limited in the types of produce the might purchase at roadside stands.

Retail food stores generally advertise their sales items in Wednesday evening and Thursday morning local newspapers. Holidays that occur during the week may cause the sales period to be extended.

Orders placed with wholesale distributors are timed to arrive the day before and on the first day of the sales period. Supplemental deliveries are arranged to insure that sufficient stock is on hand for the weekend and the restock after the weekend.

Obviously a grower who is filling orders requiring only one days delivery time has a different harvest, packing, shipping schedule from a grower who is arranging deliveries to Midwest and East coast cities.

Price quotations obtained from wholesale terminal markets can be skewed by growers "dumping" unsold quantities of fruit into the marketplace on Friday when it is least likely to be able to absorb it.

Brokers don't want to hold produce in their cooler over the weekend since its shelf life shortens.

There generally is a price differential between No. 1 and No. 2 grades unless a strong demand exists which tends to cause buyers to become less discriminating about quality.

A buyer may ask for a discount for sizes not meeting their criteria. Institutional buyers may pay be willing to pay a premium for larger sizes of the best quality.

Packing Containers

Cherimoya fruit is packed in single layer flats that have padded liners which separate and cushion the fruit from bruising during shipping. Most cherimoya packers also use a 1/16 inch thick styrofoam sleeve that is slipped over each fruit to provide additional protection.

Direct marketing "field run" fruit is by definition "ungraded." Selective harvesting is allowable. The grower doesn't have to strip pick their grove. It is clearly illegal to grade the fruit and sell fruit that could otherwise not be sold through traditional wholesale distribution channels.

Marketing Opportunities

Projected Verses Actual Data

A Revenue and Expense (R&E) Statement is a summary of economic activity for a specific year. The R&E data in a proforma study is a collection of projections based on a specific set of assumptions.

The R&E Statement in a projection must reflect all of the parcel's positive and negative aspects of topography, climate, and access to potential markets.

In an R&E Statement, income projections are listed first by convention. Expenses are listed second, and the profit/loss balance third. The majority of the funds to prune, fertilize, pollinate, and irrigate the crop will occur in one year, with irrigation, frost control, and harvesting expenses incurring in the following year.

Separate Marketing Expenses

The R&E Statement should differentiate between production and marketing expenses. Some growers perform marketing tasks rather than contracting for these services.

It is important to keep these expenses separate to allow the exact profit obtained from growing the crop and any generated from marketing activities.

Itemize Revenues

Revenues should be reported according to the grades of fruit harvested from each block of trees and categorized by the type of marketing outlets.

Gross revenues should be adjusted to provide a net roadside value. Deductions include any industry assessment and all sales expenses (commissions, transportation costs, grading, sorting, packing, pallets, and cold storage costs).

Cost Accounting

A cost accounting system should be used to calculate total production inputs by specific blocks of trees. Harvesting expenses should be tracked separately. The value of the crop can be estimated prior to harvest and a potential profit projected.

To convert the potential crop value into actual cash, a grower expends funds to harvest the crop with the expectation of recapturing all of the production and harvesting expenses when the crop is sold.

The packer will front the costs of grading, packing, and cold storage if they also market the crop. Packing expenses and sales commission are deducted from the sales price of the crop and the balance forwarded to the grower.

Selling on consignment is not recommended.

A firm FOB price guarantees the price for fruit arriving undamaged at the final designation. Be sure your broker has an authorized agent at the designation who can inspect and verify any damaged fruit claims.

Unethical buyers have been known to claim the shipment is damaged and threaten to reject the fruit unless the sales price is discount.

Reducing Packing Expenses

Using an existing packing facility to grade, pack, and store cherimoya fruit may be possible depending on the versatility of the equipment used to handle the primary crop.

In a multipurpose packing facility, the volume of cherimoya fruit can potentially conflict with the need to pack the primary crop, and may present major obstacles to packing cherimoyas.

Selecting A Marketing Plan

A variety of options are available to growers who wish to use traditional wholesale channels to market their fruit. Options include:

- Local packing facilities that provide marketing services
- Cooperative marketing organizations — i.e. Blue Anchor
- Independent brokers — i.e. Frieda's of Frieda's Finest of Los Angeles.

Grading, packing, and cold storage costs should be itemized. A flat or a variable fee per tray may be negotiated as a sales commission. The sales commission should provide incentive to obtain the best price for growers.

Growers may opt to use one or more direct marketing options to sell all or part of their crop.

- Roadside stands
- Farmers markets
- Mail order
- Subscriptions
- U-Pick
- Direct to restaurants

Each form of direct marketing requires specific equipment and personnel to accomplish. There is a specific volume of business that results in an efficient, economical operation.

Profit or Loss?

Under ideal circumstances a reasonable profit is realized from the net revenues obtained from selling the crop.

Once the roadside value of the crop has been established, harvesting and production costs are deducted to determine if the project has earned a profit or incurred a loss.

Direct Marketing Options

Analyzing Marketing Options

A permanent crop produces no harvestable crop during the formative years after establishment. The harvest increases each year as the plant increases in size. Yields stabilize at maturity. The total per acre yields vary according to the plant density.

The amount harvested each day is extremely important when the crop is highly perishable. Crops that can be held in cold storage provide more flexibility in marketing.

Even if the per acre volume is small, the accumulated harvest from a large planting may be sizable. Growers should estimate the start, duration, and end of each crop's harvest season. A weekly calendar of projected harvest totals should be prepared as part of the economic analysis.

Projecting direct marketing revenues requires a realistic roadside value to be established. Direct marketing prices will differ from those used in a traditional economic analysis based on wholesale distribution.

Using one price to estimate crop value fails to consider the variation in quality/grades and sizes. The timing of the sale, beginning, peak, or end of marketing season will impact wholesale prices buyers are willing to pay for specific volume of product.

The use of industry averages is misleading since a specific grower's crop can vary widely from the average due to natural causes and grower expertise.

Alternative Market Outlets

Growers can chose to take a more active part in marketing their crop rather than delegate this function to a packer/produce broker. A variety of direct marketing options are available to growers that serve as viable alternatives to the traditional wholesale distribution system.

It is possible to sell all or part of a crop using one or more of the following outlets.

- Roadside stands
- U-Pick
- Farmers markets
- Wholesale to local restaurants
- Mail order
- Subscription

A roadside stand and U-Pick require the customer to farm. Selling to local restaurants via mail order requires delivery direct to the customer. A stand at a Farmers Market and Subscription Sales involve delivery to a specific central site on specific days and times.

Each direct marketing option has specific expenses and management requirements that will determine their success or failure. The prices received for a crop unit will vary according to the option used.

Compare the net profit after expenses are deducted for each option.

Direct marketing regulations allow the grower to be exempt from maturity and grading standards that may exist when marketing through traditional wholesale channels.

Key direct marketing sales topics include:

- locally grown
- farm fresh, picked and sold within 24 hours
- field ripe to taste better
- special flavorful cultivars
- no harmful pesticides applied
- grown totally organically

Selling small quantities to consumers satisfies their demand, but does the sales volume earn an acceptable level of "profit" for the grower?

Growers must consider the daily, weekly, and monthly sales volume that must be achieved to make each direct marketing option financially viable.

Attracting Customers

A public relations campaign is less expensive than an advertising program, requires extensive preparations, and years to achieve the desired results. It is important to achieve name recognition of cherimoya and to establish a farm brand name with the retail public.

Because it is very expensive to advertise to attract customers, growers must carefully consider taking the time and expending the effort/money to analyze the target area that will generate the most consumer awareness per dollar spent. Results should be measured in results per dollar spent.

Advertising can take various forms —

- Radio spots
- TV spots
- Newspaper ads
- Direct mail
- Billboards
- Bus ads
- Logos on business vehicles
- Signs at business site
- Point-of-Sale promotional literature

The goal of advertising is:

- Educate and inform
- Differentiate from competition
- Persuade to take action or invoke a sales response

The grower must collect the customer's name and address when a sale is made so the information can be maintained in a customer database.

A direct mailing to a targeted audience is the most cost effective way to convey information about a business's activities. It avoids wasting money conveying your message to those who have no interest in your product.

Off Farm Sales

Reducing Financial Risks

Growers speculate that they can plant a specific number of acres of a crop, achieve a commercial yield of high quality merchandisable crop, and find a willing buyer who exchanges sufficient cash to result in a reasonable profit for the grower.

There are normal and unusual agricultural risks associated with every step of the production process. Growers who lack the personal financial resources to fund their operational expenses must establish a line of credit or secure a production loan that is repaid in full after the sale of the crop.

Land and major investments such as buildings, well, roads, etc. are usually funded by long term loans secured by the land and its improvements.

Some crops have a futures market that allows a grower to hedge their financial risks by pre-selling a portion of their crop for a specific price. In the event of a crop failure, the grower must purchase enough of the commodity to fill the delivery of the futures contract when it comes due.

Crop insurance is available for growers of some crops that provides protection against crop failure from drought, hail, flood, and other natural events.

Specialty crops, such as cherimoya, lack the protection of a futures market and crop insurance to reduce the effect of catastrophic crop damage/failure.

Subscription Marketing

A grower should cultivate repeat customers and always maintain a database of customer names and addresses to mail promotional materials.

In subscription marketing, the grower actually offers a fixed price contract to delivery a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, and even cut flowers.

The customer can "subscribe" or purchase packages that vary by the number of weeks and the quantity of fresh produce they receive.

Growers allow customers the flexibility of deferring delivery for two or three weeks while they are on vacation. The exact quantity of each item depends on seasonal availability.

Subscribers are usually asked to indicate their preference for different types and cultivars from a list of crops being planted that year. This information is very helpful to the grower of annual crops of vegetable and flowers plan the cultivars, size of each block, and schedule their estimated harvest dates.

Neither the grower or subscribers benefit if someone is provided with 'Bays' if they prefer the 'White' cultivar.

Subscription Benefits

Both growers and subscribers benefit from the subscription "shares" or contacts. Growers generate a positive cash flow that helps to cover production expenses by pre-selling a specific portion of their crop.

Subscribers receive high quality farm fresh produce at a reduced price ranging between wholesale and retail. Some subscriber contracts require participants to take part in various weekly harvesting and distribution tasks.

Growers may opt for one or two deliveries to subscribers per week. Growers need to "cluster" deliveries so that subscribers gather at a designated distribution point — i.e. a church or a subscribers home. A delivery route would consist of a route with mini-distribution points that minimize the travel time of a round trip.

Farmers Market Sales

Some growers sell an individual or primary crop at a stand in a Farmers Market. However, many growers with stands that generate the most total daily revenue usually offer a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, and sometimes cut flowers.

A selection of processed products such as dried fruits or flowers usually helps to attract a diverse cliental who purchase small quantities of each item, but whose total dollar value per sale achieves or exceeds target expectations.

A "primary item", such as cherimoya, attracts customers and may be the principle reason they make the decision to actually stop at a specific stand.

Once a customer stops to look, the display must be attractive and prices clearly marked for the customer to make a decision to make a purchase.

Customers who are forced to wait for an extended period of time may decide to move on to another stand. They may not return if they find the items they want at another stand.

Growers might consider separating the duties of cashier and sales clerk so that customers who clearly know what they want can put their items in a basket and go directly to the cashier.

Customers who have questions will frequently ask the same questions. Growers can save themselves a lot of time providing repetitive answers by developing a brochure that can be handled to customers.

On Farm Sales

Having special bags imprinted with the farm logo is a method of advertising the business. Ideally a schedule of seasonal items should appear on the shopping bag.

Truck Gardening

The grower who offers a wide variety of fresh crops generally produces more total sales revenues.

Besides the selection available on any given sales day, the length of the harvest season is an important variable in the profit/loss equation of a space at a farmers market.

Growers of a crop that uniformly matures over a short period of time have different marketing problems compared to a crop that matures over an extended period of several weeks or months.

Growers of annual crops may be able to stagger the harvest of their crop by staggering their planting dates. Marketing dates of some greenhouse crops can be manipulated by controlling temperatures, day length, or by applying growth regulating chemicals.

While it would be nice to have each crop available throughout the marketing season, the variation of crops can actually be promoted as an asset provided the grower actually has a clearly visible availability list.

Estimates of when each crop will be available can be a simple list for each month, color coded to indicate start, peak, and ending harvest dates. Pre-lettered names can be inserted into slots or attached by hangers or clips.

With E-Mail available on Internet and FAX modems and machines being so popular, growers can accept advance orders that are packaged and picked up the grower's stand at a Farmers Market. Discounts can be provided to regular customers who order in advance.

U-Picking

Cherimoya growers are unlikely to find that U-Picking is a viable option. The difficulty of determining what is a mature/ripe cherimoya fruit is a major obstacle to allowing people into a grove to U-Pick fruit from a cherimoya tree.

There is a serious personal injury liability that is associated with the use of picking ladders. Preventing adults and children from climbing into and falling out of trees is a problem even when a grower posts signs expressly forbidding such activities. Lawyers describe such a condition as an "attractive nuisance."

U-Pickers may pick a fruit that is immature and discard the fruit. The result is a lost sale to someone else if the fruit had been allowed to mature.

Any crop that is mature, ripe, and edible when harvested poses the problem of U-Pickers consuming quantities of the crop while they are supposed to be putting their harvesting into the picking container to be weighed for sale.

U-Pickers of fruit trees may inflict damage to next year's crop by breaking branches and pulling off fruiting spurs. Such potential plant damage must be calculated and deducted from projected revenues.

Roadside Market Sales

A roadside stand selling a single crop like cherimoya is possible, but most successful single crop stands usually offer a variety of value added/processed products — fresh juice and cider, homemade jams, jellies, spiced fruit, fruit butter, pies, etc.

Important factors to consider when developing an on farm direct marketing plan include:

- Size of nearest population center
- Demographics of nearest population center
- Distance/travel time from nearest population center
- Controlled roadway access to and from farm
- Normal daily traffic volume

Growers can join together to cooperatively promote a regional "Farm Trails" route that identifies farmers who have roadside stands and/or U-Pick operations.

A map is developed and signs are posted that clearly identify the route. The map includes the availability of seasonal crops by grower. Each participating grower's address and phone number is provided to simplify potential customers contacting growers.

A "Farm Trails" program encourages a family outing that includes a day in the country, the visit to one or more local farms, the ability to picnic, and the opportunity to buy fresh product and home crafted products.

Encouraging family outings to local farms need not be exclusively a fall activity although in many areas a trip to an apple orchard as the weather turns cooler seems to be associated a drive in the country to see the fall colors of hardwood forests.

A visit to a farm pumpkin patch to select a Halloween pumpkin or to a tree farm to select a Christmas tree can become a family tradition that provides a grower with opportunities to sell a variety of value added or crafted gift items in addition to fresh produce items.

Farmers should market "country atmosphere" and "ambiance" in addition to just selling goods. "How To Crafting Classes" may also be a revenue generator.

Value Added Products

When It Can't Be Sold As Fresh

Many fresh produce items are extremely perishable and require a grower to carefully "groom" their display shelves to remove items that must be used immediately and price them at a discount.

Rather than discount an item, some growers prefer to remove items with limited shelf life and use them to produce a valued added product.

To avoid a loss from items that would spoil if not sold, the grower is required to expend additional time, effort, and money to produce a processed or value added product.

The inventory of valued added stock represents a capital investment that might be better used to fund needed farm capital improvements.

Freezing Preserves Quality

Freezing fruit or vegetables requires a special flash freezer that quickly lowers internal temperatures below that of the home freezer.

Besides the investment of the special freezing equipment, there is the cost of storing the frozen product, and expense to transport the frozen items in a special truck.

While freezing my produce the highest quality product, the margin of profit after costs are deducted from a future sale may not justify the risk.

Drying Preserves Fresh Items

Air dried fruit and vegetables can be treated with sulfur dioxide assists in preventing spoilage and helps to prevent tissue oxidation (browning).

Freeze drying cut flowers, herbs, and vegetables offer growers a potential way to convert unsold fresh items into a form that can be held for extended periods of time in storage.

Freeze drying equipment is expensive to purchase unless an established demand for such products exists.

Juicing

Juicing fruits and vegetables is an excellent means of converting fresh produce into fresh or processed juice products.

There are various technical questions that must be solved when juicing specific types of produce. Filtration of the juice to remove sediment may be necessary. Fresh and/or processed juices may turn an unpleasant color or develop an off flavor after being held in storage.

It is doubtful that growers will want to can their surplus fruits and vegetables due to the

On Farm Processing

While many a farmer's wife makes delicious food items in her kitchen, items offered for sale fall under the heading of commercial food preparation.

Many a farmer has encountered a maze of "red tape" to construct a dedicated building equipped with commercial food preparation equipment and cold storage facilities.

There are various health and food regulations, building permits, business licenses, and zoning ordinances that will need to be in compliance in order to process food products on a farm.

A Look at California Tropics

by Peter Nichols
California Tropics

Moving the Fruit -

"Fruit of the Gods." "Deliciousness itself." "The queen of tropical fruit." Expressions such as these have been associated with the cherimoya, but due to the fragile nature of the fruit and the expensive real estate where it is grown, it is unlikely that it will become a mainstream item.

Overcoming the difficulties of production is only part way to getting the fruit to the consumer. Even with a high quality fruit with no blemishes and properly stored,there is a need for promotion and education of the consumer. Information on the nutritional value and different recipes for the fruit are also important.

Consumers need to know not only that it is good to eat, but how to eat it.

For some of the ethnic market and travelers who have tasted cherimoya in foreign lands, it is not necessary to justify paying $4 or 5 for a piece of fruit.

For the bulk of consumers, however, it is necessary to explain why the fruit is so expensive - that it is hand-pollinated, select-picked on a weekly basis, and that extreme care is required getting it from the field to the market.

To this end, Cal Tropics has developed various educational and promotional materials to help alert consumers to how the fruit is best eaten.

This has been done with stickering on the fruit, as well as with brochures that are given out at the point of sale. Simple little messages are provided, such as, that the cherimoya should be ripened at room temperature, not in the fridge; that black skin indicates chill damage; and that the fruit should be eaten when slightly soft.

Promotional and educational activities have not stopped at the grocery store. Restaurants and chefs have been approached with tastings and various ways the fruit can be presented to diners.

The fruit has also been highlighted in food sections of major magazines and newspapers, after contacting editors and writers with promotional ideas for the fruit. The fruit has also been the star on several television food programs.

New sales avenues are always being explored. Currently Japan Airlines has a cherimoya in-flight sales program. The fruit has been promoted as a "Remy Martin" symbol of prestige and quality, and passengers purchase the fruit as gifts for friends and family. The fruit is also marketed by way of mail order through the Harry and David firm.

With all the effort that has been put into educating consumers about cherimoya, an important goal at Cal Tropics is not overlooked-get the fruit to the consumer in good condition.

In selecting a broker, make sure that person is familiar with subtropical fruits and their requirements, and more specifically with cherimoya.

Any amount of clever marketing can be totally undone by poor fruit that has been stored and shipped with bananas.

References

Additional marketing Information can be obtained from the following resources:

Sell What You Sow! The Grower's Guide to Successful Produce Marketing. Eric Gibson. 1993. New World Publishing. 304 pp.

Backyard Market Gardening: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Selling What You Grow. Andy Lee. 1993. New World Publishing. 352 pp.

From Kitchen To Market: Selling Your Gourtmet Food Specialty. Stephen F. Hall. 1992. New World Publishing. 190 pp.