

REPORT

—Apricots



Blushed apricots signal change of direction

STELLENBOSCH—South Africa will in future dramatically expand its stonefruit offering with a range of blushed apricots.

by Fred Meintjes

South African apricots could in future be available to international customers from November through to April following the introduction of the well-known Carmingo range of blushed varieties, which are being fast-tracked into the industry through an agreement between two leading stonefruit exporters.

Fruits Unlimited from Paarl, and the Stellenbosch-based Stargrow Fruit Marketing, are leading a commercialisation programme that includes investment in plantings. These varieties all ripen from January until March in South Africa and fall well outside the country's present marketing window for the fruit.

"At present the country has an eight to ten week packing window with the majority of the shipments arriving and departing before Christmas," says Hennie Prins of Stargrow Fruit Marketing. "We will only start harvesting the Carmingo range of apricots in January and by utilising the entire range of varieties available in the programme and the most appropriate climatic regions, we will ship the last fruit during the second half of March." He says it will extend the season to four months, marking the most significant change to South African apricot production in history.

Industry sources agree that the Carmingo range, which was developed by International Plant Selections (IPS) in France and introduced into South Africa by Stargrow Cultivar Development, is set to dramatically change the general quality and appearance of the country's apricot offer. The fruit has an attractive blush, and the product harvested so far has delivered exceptional eating quality. "This will change the nature of the South African apricot business and the category will enjoy a much longer presence on the retail shelves," says Prins. "The feedback from our

receivers has been very good and we are really excited about this development."

He points out that the Carmingo range has already been widely planted in Europe and North Africa. "Consumers have already been exposed to the fruit from the Northern Hemisphere production areas and this will benefit our marketing programmes in future," he says.

The South African Carmingo apricots will be offered in a marketing window where apricots from New Zealand are presently the only alternative.

According to Hans Muylaert-Gelein from Fruits Unlimited in Paarl, apricots in supermarkets

have always been seen as a niche product, and the new Carmingo range, besides offering a seasonal extension, also has the eating qualities that make it a Ripe 'n Ready top-tier product.

Good size, high natural sweetness and good shelf-life make it a winner for the consumer, and the ability to bear fruit from early in its productive cycle, as well as good tonnage on the tree, make it a winner for growers as well.

The local market will be as important as the export side, and South Africans will be treated to available local apricots throughout the summer months and well into the autumn. 

