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By Mike Knowles

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Fruitbox – Apple boss ready to spend big



Washington Apple Commission president Todd Fryhover explains how the state's growers are targeting major export growth

Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission, is ready to lead a major marketing push for the United States' largest apple export deal having secured a 50 per cent increase in the group's annual promotional budget from US\$8m to \$12m.

Speaking in the latest edition of Fruitnet's interview series Fruitbox, Fryhover predicts that, during the next 12 months, producers will continue to ramp up production of new varieties and will also keep targeting a number of promising international markets.

The meteoric rise of new variety Cosmic Crisp, the great new hope of apple growers in Washington State, epitomises that ambition. By August 2020, its crop is expected to be in excess of 2m bushels (equal to 36,000 tonnes), and in five years' time that figure should reach 16.4m bushels (approximately 295,200 tonnes).

"It's really an exciting time to be in the industry," he says. "We track ten mainstream varieties here as far as

volumes go and we have a report called the Other Variety Report which breaks down 57 different varieties. Of that, 27 are proprietary varieties. So you can see, we have a tremendous amount of diversification in our industry."

The iconic Red Delicious may still hold the title of flagship product in the Washington apple basket, but as of this season it is no longer the biggest in terms of volume. In fact, its tonnage is down by one-third over the past decade.

"This season, Gala is the number one variety," Fryhover adds. "In 2012, we saw Gala become the number one variety in the US domestic market. But total production has just switched this season."

With that extra promotional funding in place, and assuming things return to normal following the coronavirus crisis, the commission is hoping to do more business in markets like China, Vietnam and Indonesia during the coming year and beyond.

"We have been focused on south-east Asia for the last seven or eight seasons because we feel that's where the disposable income increase is going to happen, and is happening, and where consumers look at apples as an exotic, rather than what we may think of as an everyday item," Fryhover continues.

But there have been big challenges for US apple exporters in the last 18 months as a result of trade disputes between the US and major international partners like Mexico and India.

"Factor in coronavirus and that's a tough marketplace," he admits. "It would be very easy to pull back, but we're not going to do that. We've decided to increase our export promotional support by 50 per cent and concentrate that support in places where we can see value-added markets for the Washington apple growers."

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