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By Maura Maxwell

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California prunes in the limelight

The fruit's nutritional clout and versatility as a high-end ingredient is fuelling a resurgence in UK sales



(l-r) Peter Sidwell, Hala El-Shafie, Paul A Young and Esther Ritson-Elliott

The California Prune Board held a celebratory dinner in London's Savini at Criterion restaurant this week to mark the end of its 65th anniversary year and highlight some of the achievements of the past year.

The event was attended by three of the board's brand ambassadors: renowned chocolatier Paul A. Young; chef, author and founder of Simply Good Food TV and newly appointed Health Brand Ambassador, nutritionist Hala El-Shafie, as well as members of the board's European marketing team and trade journalists.

California has worked hard to defend its status as a high-end supplier as the global prune market becomes more competitive. Increasingly the industry is looking to position itself not only as a healthy snack product but also as a high quality ingredient with the help of well-known chefs and nutritionists recruited as brand ambassadors.

This approach, underpinned by an ongoing focus on scientific research to reinforce the health benefits of regular prune consumption, has brought about a resurgence in the UK market which the board hopes will extend to other parts of Europe.

This past year has seen the roll-out of an extensive marketing programme in the UK designed to encourage food professionals and development chefs to recognise California prunes as a tasty and nutritious ingredient that can be used in baked and processed goods as an alternative to sugar and fat.

Young regularly uses California Prune puree in his award-winning chocolates, while the fruit is a frequent recipe inclusion on Sidwell's Simply Good Food TV App, which attracts some 300,000 viewers.

The board also recently entered into partnership with fine dining brand Savini, which took over the running of

the Criterion last year, in a bid to reinforce the premium credentials of California prunes.

The board is currently conducting its largest-ever clinical trial, which is expected to provide further evidence to strengthen the link between prunes and bone health and reinforcing the health benefits of prunes, which are the only dried fresh fruit that has a claim through the European Food Safety Authority (for normal bowel function).

After an unusually light harvest in 2016, production bounced back this year and the total crop is projected to reach 105,000 tonnes of which around half is exported. While Germany leads the way in Europe in terms of sales, the UK sets the pace when it comes to pioneering new trends and innovation.

Commenting on the event, European marketing director Esther Ritson-Elliott said: "We are delighted to be able to celebrate the end of this important year

with so many of our brand ambassadors,

the continuing commitment of California

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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whose valuable input continues to help us educate consumers, the trade and food professionals alike, on the supreme quality of California prunes and their increasing relevance as a versatile healthy and nutritious snack or cooking ingredient, as well as a viable inclusion for the foodservice sector.”

“Our 65th anniversary year demonstrates

prunes leading the category, investing in high profile research to strengthen the health credentials of prunes; identifying new markets with a strong allegiance to premium ingredients and developing long-term partnerships with key opinion formers whose endorsement of our product provides added weight to all marketing communications.”

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