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By Mike Knowles

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Apofruit invests in club varieties

Pink Lady apples, Zespri Gold kiwifruit, and Fred pears among products set to play bigger part in Italian group's portfolio



Pictured left to right: Mirco Zanelli, commercial director of Apofruit Italy; Mirco Zanotti, president of Apofruit Italy; Mario Tamanti, director of projects and financing, Apofruit Italy; and Ernesto Fornari, chief executive officer of Apofruit Group

Italian fresh produce cooperative Apofruit is placing innovative, trademarked fruit varieties at the core of a major expansion project, as it seeks to defend the value of its members' production and continue to compete with other suppliers on the international market.

Speaking at a virtual press conference broadcast from Cesena in Emilia-Romagna, the company's recently appointed chief executive Ernesto Fornari said he expected a greater volume of new, licensed products – including Pink Lady apples, Zespri Gold kiwifruit, Fred pears, and Fall Creek blueberries – to boost returns in the coming years.

As part of its new, five-year development plan for 2021-2025, Apofruit is providing members throughout Italy with exclusive access to a large number of protected, trademarked varieties.

These include: Pink Lady, Candine and

Joya apples; kiwifruit varieties Zespri Gold (of which 1,000ha are already planted), Divo (green), and HFR18 (red); Fred pears; Lanelate and Fukumoto oranges; Tango late clementines; and the Sun World portfolio of seedless table grapes.

As for its summer fruit offer, Apofruit plans to invest in covered production of cherries, late apricots (harvested from the end of June onwards), Ondine-branded flat white nectarines and Maxim-branded oriental persimmons.

Development in berries will focus on Sabrosa and Rossetta strawberries, Fall Creek's range of blueberry varieties, and Adelita raspberries.

"This is the biggest varietal transformation ever undertaken in Italy," Fornari declared. "I believe that, at present, innovation has to be driven by upgrading our offer to the very highest standards, to ensure that producers receive a fair return and to overcome the competition on the global markets."

By introducing so many new products and making them available to its member growers, Apofruit plans to engineer a 20 per cent expansion in overall production area by 2025, Fornari added.

"The added value of our very high-end product assortment will bring major benefits to all members," he said. "Apofruit's strategies will focus more and more strongly on the three central pillars of our offering: brand policy, organic fruit and high-quality integrated production, and the innovative varieties at our disposal will be located firmly within these three pillars."

He concluded: "I believe that our project is of immense significance for our industry, capable of changing not only the character of our offering but also the image of Italian fruit on the global markets."

Apofruit Sales Manager Mirco Zanelli said it was important that growers were

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fully behind the plan. "These projects of ours require not only careful planning, which is already underway, but also support for growers on the part of Apofruit, using forms of funding such as the public-sector CMO and RDP to develop both varietal innovation and investments in crop protection and quality upgrading."

A concerted marketing effort

was also important, Zanelli noted. "On the market, we will be pursuing an aggressive sales policy aware of consumers' demands in terms of eco-sustainability, also with regard to packaging. At a time when the European agri-food sector is mobilising to offer real responses to the new Farm to Fork guidelines, Apofruit combines past experience with a future vision to give its members and the Italian industry as a whole the solutions it needs to grow."

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