



By Mike Knowles

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Fruitbox 68 - Marion Regan, Hugh Lowe Farms



After the recent success of better-tasting berries, could smaller strawberries now fill a new gap in the market?

Smaller strawberries could meet new consumer demand for ultra-convenient, healthy foods, and mimic the kind of success that blueberries have had in recent years as a popular snack item.

That's according to Marion Regan, managing director of Hugh Lowe Farms, a major supplier of strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries based in Kent, south-west England.

As she explains in the latest edition of Fruitnet's conversation series Fruitbox, investment in better-eating and more productive varieties has underpinned the category's commercial success over the past two decades, and helped it become the largest single product group in the UK fresh produce market in terms of sales.

Crucially, she says, good-tasting fruit has been a key ingredient in the remarkable rise of fresh berries over the past couple of decades.

"The specification is smaller, but they are actually very snackable and attractive to children," she observes. "There's more than one way to eat a strawberry."

Hosted by Chris White, Fruitbox now attracts a big audience across the global fruit and vegetable business that tunes in every week to hear exclusive interviews and expert analysis.

"Berries are just a wonderful product," she tells Chris White during a recent visit to the farm. "They tap into the zeitgeist of people who want healthy, convenient, highly snackable fruit. And I think we've done a very good job of putting something better in front of the consumer every single year – in terms of better-eating varieties and fresher fruit."

But for Regan, it's not just about taste. "It's the whole experience of eating a berry," she argues. "For me, what you really want is that quintessential English, balanced strawberry flavour. Not just sweet, but all of those aromatics there as well."

One noticeable consumer trend for berries is that they are now a more common sight at breakfast time.

And having also observed a dramatic spike in interest around home baking – especially during lockdown – Regan says she was keen for her company to offer the market strawberries that required no cutting.



So Hugh Lowe Farms now supplies a product called Mini Berries, a line of smaller strawberries that is more reminiscent of the fruit seen in French pâtisseries.

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