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By Mike Knowles

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## ***Pineapple importer wants us to go topless***

Major European retailer assessing potential cost saving to be made by removing crowns prior to shipping



Cool Fresh International managing director Hugo Vermeulen

**T**ravelling light has always meant paying less for your ticket. But most of the fresh pineapples imported into Europe make their journey carrying excess hand luggage: or, to be more precise, unnecessarily ornate headgear.

Dutch firm Cool Fresh International believes that could be about to change. In fact, with at least one major European supermarket chain running trials on the importer's crownless pineapples, it has taken the bold step of launching a marketing campaign encouraging everyone to 'go topless'.

This naked ambition could result in significant savings. Around half of the wholesale price for a box of pineapples goes towards logistics, compared with only 10-15 per cent for table grapes, according to Hugo Vermeulen, MD of Cool Fresh International.

By his calculations, removing the crowns

allows space for two more pineapples per carton; that's 160 more in each pallet; or an additional 3,200 in every container.

So why haven't the crowns slipped already? "We are the first company that I've seen try to bring this to market," Vermeulen says. "But the industry isn't going to change overnight and it will take several years for a substantial part of the market to switch."

He adds: "Ultimately, it will be growers that call the shots because it all depends on logistics cost. Everyone's been talking about crownless pineapples, but we've taken the step of actually marketing them to consumers."

Nic Jooste, who developed the Let's Go Topless campaign, feels the move adds plenty of value. "Shipping crownless pineapples has a significant effect on our CO<sub>2</sub> footprint and removes a notorious breeding place for fungi," he says.

"But the challenge is not to identify advantages, rather to convince the consumer. Hence our 'in your face' campaign, which is meant to start a public discussion around crownless being eco-friendly."

### **Discounted option**

Niels Rostren is German importer Cobana Fruchtring's pineapple buyer. He believes it could be a while before pineapple crowns are the exception rather than the rule.

"German discounters won't trade this product," he explains. "Some larger retailers or hypermarkets might do trials. Then you have the fresh-cut people, of course, who demand crownless. In the end, the consumer has to accept it but in my opinion it could be the right thing to implement crownless in retail. We would have far fewer problems."

For multinationals like Fresh Del Monte

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and Dole, the market for crownless pineapples remains limited. "We do crownless pines for fresh-cut mostly," says a Dole spokesperson.

Del Monte's crownless offer, meanwhile, amounts to around 200 pallets per week, although the crowns are removed in the UK and the Netherlands, rather than at source.

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