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By Gerry Kelman

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Israeli breeders identify new trends



Sugardrop tomatoes (Photo: Tesco)

New opportunities are apparently emerging for new product development in the tomato and melon categories

Back in April, I was in Tel Aviv for the latest edition of Agritech, one of the leading exhibition events in the field of agricultural technology and R&D.

Notable among the various companies showing off recent advances in product development was TomaTech, a privately owned Israeli breeder of tomato varieties.

Founded about ten years ago, the firm has made great strides in recent years by addressing the needs of all links in the supply chain – from farmers to suppliers to retailers and on to consumers – to create innovative products in all tomato segments, from standards to specialities.

Its focus in terms of marketing is on three primary markets – western Europe, North America and, more recently, Turkey – each of which is a major producer, consumer and exporter.

Crucially, TomaTech has identified three new segments of the tomato category in which it has identified requirements that are as yet unfulfilled. Those requirements are:

Cluster (tomato on the vine)

Breeding efforts are being made to meet demand for a large cluster tomato (around 190-220g) with broad resistance to disease, good yield and long shelf-life. In this segment, TomaTech is also transferring its knowledge and expertise in creating colourful and flavoursome specialities, working to enrich flavour and offer alternative colours in small and medium-sized clusters. One example is the super-sweet mini plum **Sugar Drop** sold by Tesco.

Medley

In the US, a successful new segment is emerging that could be of benefit to all links in the chain. Medley packs consist of a mix of super-sweet mini cherries in a range of various colours, flavours and

shapes. These are delivered in a convenient range of packs both for home use and on-the-go snacking. This mix allows the grower to mix and match according to availability, while the retailer gets a low-risk trial of new varieties; consumers also benefit from a wider choice and the opportunity to try new varieties at a lower cost.

Heirloom

This segment is being revitalised in Europe. Inspired by consumers looking for old-fashioned tomato flavours, and buyers looking for new and interesting varieties, TomaTech is developing heirloom and Raf varieties containing many volatile components that give a rich, full and balanced flavour reminiscent of the good old days. Best served with olive oil and sea salt to fully develop their flavour, these varieties are worthy of the attention of all tomato lovers.

Elsewhere at Agritech, I noted that the

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

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breeding activities of another privately owned Israeli breeder Origene Seeds, are focused entirely on cucurbits.

The company breeds watermelons of all types, as well as a broad range of melon varieties – Cantaloupe, Charantais, Galia, Yellow Canary and Ananas - and cucumbers, squash and pumpkin.

With the customer in mind, Origene recently developed a variety of watermelon – seedless and round with a striped skin – that can be produced in a range of sizes, from 1.5kg through to 9kg.

Allowing for variation in terms of size means the offer can be adapted

to consumer preferences, depending on whether they are a single consumer or a large family.

Origene is also active in developing resistance to leaf diseases for its varieties, the aim being to help the environment by reducing the use of plant protection chemicals.

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