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By Maura
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Samba swings into supermarkets

HLB's new papaya variety is already available in Europe and is now set to launch in the UK



Exotics specialist HLB Specialties has launched a new papaya variety to bring cheer to consumers during their winter confinement.

Samba, a proprietary variety developed by some of the company's growers in Brazil, is slightly larger than a Golden papaya, with a darker flesh, higher Brix and longer shelf-life.

Lorenz Hartmann de Barros, CEO of the group's German import arm HLB Tropical Food, describes Samba as "the Golden papaya's hot, sexy cousin". He says it is already proving popular with consumers on the Continent and is now all set to launch in the UK via a major retailer.

"Samba combines all the best characteristics of a normal papaya, delivering fantastic flavour and a great aftertaste," he tells Fruitnet.

According to Hartmann de Barros, retail demand for papayas and other exotics has grown as consumers seek out tasty treats to brighten up their daily lives during lockdown.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, we saw a shift towards basic products with a longer shelf-life as people adopted a bunker mentality in what they thought was a temporary situation. But people no longer want to live their lives on hold," he says.

"In the absence of travel we provide the next best thing – a bit of tropical sunshine on a plate."

All of HLB's papayas are imported by air, guaranteeing that they reach the consumer in optimum condition. This has made the start to 2021 particularly challenging in light of the UK ban on flights from South America and the more recent decision by the Dutch government to block flights from Brazil.

Fortunately, Hartmann de Barros says the company has built up extensive contacts within the airline and logistics sector in the 30 years it has been operating and is able to call on alternative routes, so that the product can still get through to customers.

"We always joke that we're more of a logistics specialist than a fruit company," he laughs, adding: "a good supplier differentiates themselves from an average one by knowing what to do when things get complicated".

And there's no doubt that HLB, like all other fruit and vegetable suppliers, faces a tough outlook, not just in terms of logistics, but also the market situation. Around half of the company's sales go through the wholesale channel, which has effectively shut down during lockdown.

Hartmann de Barros remains optimistic,

however. "There are always new retail

"We work closely with our retail partners

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opportunities, especially now that consumers are looking to treat themselves at home, and I am proud to be able to offer consumers healthy, nutritious and delicious products during this challenging time," he says.

to put on promotions wherever we can, and the extra volume diverted from the wholesale channel is helping us to deliver that."

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