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## Australia's attempt to grow the 'King of Fruit'



Successful growth and storage trials of highly sought after muskmelon encourages growers and exporters to expand in North Queensland

The state department of agriculture and fisheries in Queensland, Australia has joined forces with industry groups, including fruit and vegetable marketer VF+, to grow muskmelon in greenhouses, with the goal to export the fruit to Asia.

Muskmelons are of high value across Asia, and specifically in Japan. Commonly referred to as the 'King of Fruit', the price can exceed US\$90 and for that reason, are often given as gifts.

Queensland's agricultural minister, Mark Furner, said the potential to grow premium fruit in the state was evident.

"Queensland is the food bowl of Australia and I want to see more of our wonderful produce making its way onto dinner plates all around the world," said Furner.

"As part of this project, we've been talking to retailers in Japan, Singapore

and Hong Kong about what consumers are looking for in premium fruit such as melons."

"My department is now developing innovative protected cropping systems for the tropics and sub-tropics so that farmers are able to produce the high-quality fruit that Asian customers are looking for."

Trial crops of the muskmelon are currently being grown in greenhouses in Ayr and Gumlu, just south of Townsville, Australia.

VF+ product development officer, Mike Evans, told the Townsville Bulletin they've looked to Japan for inspiration.

"Japan is a world leader in growing melons in glasshouses and we wanted to replicate the method in North Queensland in greenhouses, and then export the fruit by ship from Townsville," Evans explained.

Negotiations are underway to expand the growing locations across the state. Global shipping line ANL supported trials that looked at how the fruit responded when stored in refrigerated containers, simulating transit times from Townsville to Asia. The trial was deemed successful.

VF+ is aiming to take a small quantity of the fruit to the Foodex Japan exhibition in March 2020.

Evans said its goal in the early commercial stages was to export between one and eight pallets a week out of Townsville and into the markets of Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.

This trial is one of 15 agri-food projects funded under the Queensland state government's 'Growing Queensland Food Exports' programme.