



Ontario growers researching possibility of new table grape variety Jupiter grape has extended harvest window

April 9, 2018

By Rebecca D Dumais

Ontario could soon be seeing a new table grape variety with availability extending into Canada's Thanksgiving holiday, something growers feel is much needed. Currently the market is held by the province's main Sovereign Coronation variety, developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in British Columbia, which is a semi-seedless blue grape with a six to eight week harvest window in late summer and early fall.

Six varieties planted for testing

In 2014, six imported table grape vines were planted, prompted by industry interest in finding new grapes from around the world and bringing them to Ontario and seeing how well they fair in the local climate. The Jupiter grape, which was developed by the University of Arkansas, had a good fruiting year in 2017, according to Michael Kauzlaric, Technology Scout and Grower Outreach at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland). Last fall growers and retailers were invited to an open house to taste six grape varieties and observe the bunches on the vines. They all saw potential for the Jupiter grape commercially and more than 75 percent of the attendees felt positive of its color, flavor, sweet taste, size and shape. "This grape has some interesting eating qualities and it has decent storage life," says Kauzlaric. It's seedless and not a slip skin grape that has a different harvest window than the Coronation. "Those are top criteria that caught growers' attention and helped move it ahead to the next phase." It's that seedless, crunchy texture grape that the Ontario/Canada industry is after.



Jupiter grape

Testing for Ontario's cold climate; commercial availability in 2021

Since 2014 Kauzlaric says all of the vines survived the winters. "We wanted to see if the varieties were adaptable to our cold climate, how easy they are to cultivate with similar growing system growers are using now, and seeing what the quality of fruit is like." In 2019 it is hopeful that Vineland will be working on planting additional varieties in its test block including three green grape and two red grape varieties. Kauzlaric hopes that Jupiter will be on the shelves of stores by 2021 and even in 2020 some fruit could start to show up in small batches at farmer's markets.

Harvest window extends past Coronation variety

Jupiter's harvest window falls after the Coronation, which is beneficial for several reasons. "If growers have a different harvesting window the fruit will store better into the fall which could increase their marketing window. It's a bit later than Coronation but still within comfortable climatic conditions in order for it to ripen correctly," says Kauzlaric. Vines performed well during cold climate testing in a Tenney Environmental Test Chamber that was undertaken by Jim Willwerth from the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute at Brock University. Having a later table grape for Ontarians means they'll be able to enjoy local fruit during Canadian Thanksgiving, which occurs in October. "Having a Thanksgiving grape is good economic value for growers. So far, preliminary research results lend themselves to that."



Targeting Canadian Thanksgiving important for consumption

Targeting products towards the holiday seem to be getting more and more important. "Retailers are always in search of new products that are local." It also means less imports required. Kauzlaric doesn't expect it would ever get to export levels since the local appetite will be so strong between Toronto and Montreal. "That's where retailers are really supportive of new grape varieties because they want to see some local production into the fall in order to keep the local appetite alive."

More import varieties to be tested

More varieties have been imported and hopefully get planted this or next spring. More in the pipeline with different size of berries, bunch sizes, colors – trying to keep up with what’s on grocery stores now. Even though the Canadian marketplace for table grapes is small, there’s still an opportunity for high value product and good economic returns for grower. Once the Jupiter grape is available commercially it will likely be branded with a new name. Early consumer research indicated the marketplace was not sold on calling it Jupiter for Ontario’s market.

Consumers’ eating habits are changing and Kauzlaric says the industry’s trying to keep up with changing demographics. “I think Ontario needs some new grape varieties and different colors. There is a lot of push for green seedless grapes – retailers seem to be quite interested in local green seedless.”

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<http://www.freshplaza.com/article/192423/Ontario-growers-researching-possibility-of-new-table-grape-variety>