



**Lynnell Brandt, president Property Variety Management, and John Morton NZ Fruit Tree Company, with young plantings of Cosmic Crisp near Hastings, grown using a V-training system.**

## Apple super-brand mooted

By Rose Mannering

**After a lifetime of growing and promoting a multitude of apple varieties, US nurseryman Lynnell Brandt believes it is time to create an apple super-brand.**

He reasons if McDonalds and Starbucks can do it, why can't the same principles be applied to an apple variety? Lynnell, who owns a number of United States nursery companies and heads the Associated International Group of Nurseries, has staked all on the development of new variety, Cosmic Crisp.

After 20 years of research and development, the Washington State industry committed to the new variety on a massive scale. Washington growers ordered 12 million trees for planting in 2017, and the first commercial launch of the variety took place on December 1 last year. Between 350,000 and 400,000 cartons has reached consumer shelves this season.

Lynnell is unphased by the level of risk to which the rapid expansion exposes the industry, believing each sector has done its homework, and knows it is onto a winner. He does have a great pedigree when it comes to apple varieties, with Pink Lady and Honeycrisp part of his offering. The new apple variety, WA38, was bred at Washington State University by Dr Bruce Barrett more than two decades ago, a progeny of a cross between US varieties Enterprise and Honeycrisp.

Lynnell was in New Zealand to meet with the New Zealand company that holds the variety right (WA38 – 2 New Zealand) and is the exclusive propagator here, the New Zealand Fruit Tree Company. "This is a global product; it will be licensed for growing around the world." An initial allocation of 150ha is planted in Hawke's Bay and Central Otago.

By 2026 the projected volume for Cosmic Crisp from the US is projected to be 22 million TCE (tray carton equivalents) using 18 kilogram cartons. "Critical mass will become a factor of potential success." The plantings are expected to replace the current US Red Delicious production of 34 million cartons.

Consumer confusion with multiple apple brand offerings, sometimes up to 40 SKU (stock keeping unit) barcodes in supermarkets, creates confusion.

"This is a new ball game with Cosmic Crisp; we have allocated US\$10.5 million to a five-year promotional programme." With 11.5 million trees coming on stream, a promotional budget equal to the task was also needed.

Washington growers believe they have the right product. The New York Times described the apple as "dramatically dark, richly flavoured and explosively crisp and juicy", making it "the most promising and important apple of the future". With extremely slow ethylene release, Cosmic Crisp can store for up to 12 months.

Launch date created something of a media storm on December 1, and at a mini-store in Seattle, 6,000 people were queuing up outside the door waiting for an opportunity to try the new variety.

Consumers had been enticed for the launch using all marketing avenues – social media, news releases, national television networks. Lynnell says the marketing campaign targeted an "emotional connection" between the brand and the consumer.

"We couldn't do this before because we couldn't afford it." The development budget has enabled the massive launch; the variety is registered to be grown exclusively in Washington State in America, with exclusive rights to grow it for 10 years.

It doesn't stop there. Careful planning went into preparing the fruit for launch date, with fruit from slightly more mature third leaf trees fulfilling the initial December launch, followed up by fruit from younger second leaf trees reaching retail stores in January. Fruit spent time in storage to convert the right amount of starch to sugar to deliver the best eating

experience. "It is all about fulfilling brand promise to the utmost," he says.

Lynnell believes the industry is well ready to move from being in the sales business, to the marketing business. Every aspect has been considered, with licences for process grade fruit allocated to cider companies, pie makers and other end users. "We have large international companies that want to be a part of this; we have created a story that everybody wants to hear."


Lynnell believes Cosmic Crisp, for him personally, is the result of a lifetime's learnings. "I have been in business all my life; I developed and initiated Pink Lady apples; a different set of circumstances are needed for each variety to be successful."

For Cosmic Crisp, the path he has chosen relies on real time information supplied by his family's database company, focused on a collaborative model that put the consumer first. The Washington State collaboration included leading growers, university researchers, marketers, and data providers. The motivation was to avoid previous pitfalls where too much

fragmentation led to failure of new varieties. Extension and research have been going on in the background constantly, assessing storability, thinning regimes, handling and every aspect of the production of the variety.

"The critical mass leads to risk; we have to spread risk out in a managed and co-ordinated way."

Lynnell, wife Marcie and three sons are in the business, which focuses on management of variety intellectual property globally. "I saw a need to now be more communicative with the consumer. As a result we started Proprietary Variety Management (PVM) company five years ago. Opportunities presented themselves; we needed a different model to commercialise apple varieties." PVM has developed a database IDYA – to help manage and co-ordinate commercialisation and management of varieties.

"We need to change our thought processes, to create a sustainable industry. We have attempted to focus on getting there. If we increase the whole apple category we have succeeded." 

## ***AIGN renews relationships: Prevar***

***By Rose Mannering***

**Prevar and the Associated International Group of Nurseries (AIGN) confirmed their ongoing partnership by signing a new agreement to cover the next decade.**

Jim McLean, chairman of the Prevar board and Lynnell Brandt, president and chairman of the AIGN board held a signing ceremony in Havelock North on February 25 to celebrate the extension of the service agreement between the two companies.

Prevar was established to globally commercialise new apple and pear cultivars bred in New Zealand by crown research organisation Plant & Food Research (PFR). Prevar is a joint venture company with three shareholders: Apples and Pears NZ (which was created after pipfruit deregulation in New Zealand in 2001), Plant & Food Research and Apple & Pear Australia. The aim of Prevar

is to assist Australian and New Zealand growers achieve sustainable profits from new varieties.

Jim McLean spoke of the partnership that has developed between the two companies. "Prevar and AIGN have worked together to protect and commercialise a number of new Prevar varieties including Rockit, Dazzle, Smitten, Cherish and Lemonade apples as well as Piqa Boo and Reddy Robin pears".

AIGN is a worldwide organisation linking nurserymen in the major fruit growing areas of the world including Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, South America and North America. AIGN specialises in global management of intellectual property, including the introduction, protection, testing and evaluation of new products in each AIGN region, and developing coordinated marketing plans for tree sales and commercial fruit product launches. The goal is to maximise the return to the owner and stakeholders. This new agreement has a term of 10 years with possibilities for five-year extensions. 