

Promising new Ontario tender fruit varieties identified

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By Lilian Schaer



Vineland ON – Five new tender fruit varieties currently being tested at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) are showing promise and getting closer to becoming available on the marketplace.

The Tender Fruit Evaluation Committee (TFEC), which started in 2012 and includes growers, tree nurseries, fruit marketers and retailers, has selected two peach and two apricot varieties along with one yellow plum variety as showing the most potential from among approximately 30 selections that are part of a five year new variety development program.

Since 2014, more than 2,000 peach, nectarine, pear, plum and apricot trees have been planted at 18 commercial grower sites across Ontario. The trees come from the University of Guelph and the former Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada breeding programs through license agreements with Vineland.

“We are seeing some interesting varieties. From on-site testing at commercial grower orchards, we have found that they’ve survived the climate, and the fruit quality is good, so we’re looking to advance those in coming years,” explains Michael Kauzlaric, Technology Scout and Grower Outreach at Vineland. “We’ve been planting trees every year since 2014 and we’re hoping to get some more evaluations in 2018 to further cement the idea that these varieties have merit.”

Breeding new tender fruit varieties takes many years and because Niagara Region is in a quarantine zone for a devastating stone fruit viral disease called Plum Pox

Virus, the process to generate virus-free plant material adds an additional four years to the innovation pipeline.

According to Kauzlaric, a new agreement is now in place that lets that plant material "clean-up" process begin at the same time as TFEC is evaluating varieties which is shortening the time to market. Evaluation criteria include climate hardiness, harvest timing to fill marketplace gaps, replacement of older varieties, disease tolerance and/or resistance, colour, texture, flavour and sweetness.

"It can be as fast as eight years to get commercial fruit from testing to retail, which has been reduced from 12 years previously and we hope to shorten it down even further if the virus identification and clean-up process can become more rapid," he says.

It is estimated that commercial quantities of those five promising varieties will be available for growers to plant by 2020. This means the first fruit should be available to consumers by 2023.

Other highlights of the 2017 season included first fruit evaluations of apricots with a better red blush and a harvest window that extends the season and a plum/cherry hybrid from Australia.

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Photo source: Vineland Research & Innovation Centre

<https://www.aginnovationontario.ca/en/promising-new-ontario-tender-fruit-varieties-identified/>