To Buy or Not to Buy…

Understanding what motivates consumers when choosing horticultural products is the main focus of Vineland's Consumer Insights team. Dr. Amy Bowen, Research Program Leader, Consumer Insights shares with us the group's approach to research.

Q. First, tell us a little about yourself?
"I joined Vineland in 2009 as a member of the Consumer Insights team and became Research Program Leader, Consumer Insights in 2013. I obtained my PhD in biological sciences with a specialization in plant science, oenology and viticulture from Brock University in St. Catharines. My research interests focus on understanding intrinsic (appearance, aroma, taste) and extrinsic (price, packaging) drivers that impact consumer preference and choice for horticultural products."

Q. Please describe your team's approach to research?
"Vineland is fortunate to have researchers with great knowledge in sensory and consumer science. Using an integrated approach, our team works with Vineland's Applied Genomics and Horticultural Production Systems groups. The Consumer Insights team provides information that guides breeding program selection, the introduction of new varieties and the promotion of production practices to ensure sensory and non-sensory attributes match consumer appeal."

Q. What type of panels do you utilize in your research?
"We use two types of panels at Vineland, a trained sensory panel and a consumer panel. The former is comprised of 22 part-time Vineland employees who meet on a weekly basis in our sensory lab. Their job is to rate, describe and differentiate sensory characteristics of products to identify how they are similar or different. The consumer panel consists of a large sample group that rates questions such as "which product do you prefer?". With this panel we gauge consumer response to colour, appearance, taste, texture and aroma. We also look at non-sensory cues including packaging, health claims and price that impact consumers' purchasing decisions. We link information from both panels to understand products consumers like/dislike and identify sensory and non-sensory attributes impacting their choices."