

Will SweeTango become the new apple of our eye?

By GORDON DELANEY Valley Bureau

Apple aficionados will have a new variety of fruit to taste this weekend at the Maritime Fall Fair.

The apple, being sold under the name SweeTango, will make its debut Sunday at the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association booth.

A cross between Honeycrisp and Zestar varieties, SweeTango is being touted by marketers as having both a "satisfying crunch and complex flavour promising a superior apple-eating experience."

They say it combines a sweet and tart taste with hints of fall spices.

After more than a decade in development, the first limited crop of SweeTango is being harvested this year and expected to be on sale next year to consumers.

The same apple developers who released the popular Honeycrisp variety developed SweeTango.

Honeycrisp is a consumer and grower favourite in Nova Scotia, with many growers in the Annapolis Valley replacing old varieties with the new in their orchards.

Because of its higher price, farmers can earn more off the Honeycrisp variety.

The new apple will be grown and marketed by Next Big Thing, a growers' co-operative that is a partnership of family-owned orchards in North America, including Scotian Gold Co-operative in Coldbrook.

"It can take 30 years and 10,000 attempts to find a great-tasting apple," David Bedford, a University of Minnesota apple breeder, said in a news release Thursday.

"Consumers who have tried the SweeTango apple in focus groups are telling us we've found something special with this new apple, specifically citing its complex flavour," said Mr. Bedford, who was a key contributor in the development of SweeTango, Honeycrisp and Zestar.

The name SweeTango was chosen to reflect the flavour combination. Growers and marketers hope the distinctive crispness and complex flavours will make it a consumer favourite.

Harvested early in the growing season, SweeTango is a managed apple variety, meaning only select, licensed growers can produce it.

"As a member of Next Big Thing, Scotian Gold Co-operative is excited to start sharing SweeTango apples with the Atlantic Canada market," Dave Parrish, vice-president of Scotian Gold, said in the news release.

"SweeTango is unlike anything most people have ever tasted and we look forward to making it available for retail sale in 2010."

Scotian Gold Co-operative, established in 1957, is a producer-owned tree fruit co-operative that operates on a 14-hectare property.

It's owned by 30 farmer members and stores and packs 40 to 50 per cent of the apple production in Nova Scotia. It markets apples throughout Atlantic Canada, and exports to the United States, the United Kingdom and other parts of Canada.

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