



## FRESH HUB - 08 July 2020 – Fresh Produce Survey

**Welcome to the July 08<sup>th</sup> Fresh Hub Newsletter.**

In this edition we examine the theme of Fresh Produce Survey with a spotlight on what is freshness and quality and how this translates for the consumers experience.

### **Freshness, Quality or What?**

The concept of Freshness is one of the most debated and most misunderstood concepts within the produce industry. Does 'fresh' mean the apple has just been plucked from the tree? Does 'fresh' mean the kiwifruit has just been released from its Controlled Atmosphere storage facility where it had been slumbering for three months before taking its turn on the market shelf? Does 'fresh' mean the sweet potato or kumara has just been dug or it was just taken from its storage pit where it had been placed 6 weeks ago to await further processing?

We have a strange relationship with 'fresh'. Walking through an orchard and taking a few cherries off a tree for immediate consumption - that is fresh. Or is it? What about if the cherries off the tree are already past their prime on the day I am walking past picking them? Are they still 'fresh'? Or what about apples which have been treated with a chemical compound that extends shelf life to around a year or more, depending upon variety?

We may not give much thought to the freshness concept on a day to day basis, but it does influence the consumer mindset and does influence shopping behaviour at a greater level than we might realise.

One of [The AgriChain Centre](#)'s young fruit scientists came to this conclusion in a paper she wrote a few years ago for a presentation at an [International Society for Horticultural Science](#) conference.

*"Due to the perishable nature of fruit, time is always a constraint throughout the chain. The underlying function of the value chain is to get fresh fruit to the consumer in a good quality state, so that they want to buy it.*

*The consumer associates time with the concept of 'freshness'. Historically time and freshness were directly correlated but now, due to advances in post-harvest technology, the natural ageing process can be interfered with to give the appearance of freshness, even after long storage periods. Now 'freshness' is more related to quality than time and can be maintained by using effective post-harvest management. [Post-harvest management](#) is all about avoiding the inevitable - ageing of the product."*

So if our colleague is correct in her statement that freshness these days is quality rather than time related - and I, for one, believe that she is indeed correct - where does that leave our common industry definitions of the term 'fresh'?

One of the services offered by The AgriChain Centre is Mystery Shopping, where our team purchases produce at retail, just like an average shopper would, to provide a detailed report & analysis on the product purchased back to growers. That is one effective way for working on quality and freshness related matters once the produce has gone beyond the farm gate.



If you would like to discuss this topic more, email Hans at [hmaurer@agrchain-centre.com](mailto:hmaurer@agrchain-centre.com), or phone 0800 247 424.

*Dr Hans Maurer*

## **Utilising the Benefits of Mystery Shopping**

Consumer purchasing behaviours are constantly changing and evolving. This means growers, marketers, retailers and grower product groups need to frequently adjust to satisfy this demand. Quality of perishable products will start to reduce from the moment the product is harvested and by the time it reaches the consumer it might no longer be acceptable. Knowing the quality at harvest and packing is important, however monitoring of the product should ideally be extended to the point of sale, which ultimately is what the consumer sees.

Mystery Shopping is a tool used by product groups, growers, packhouses, and retailers to understand the consumer experience. Mystery shoppers will mimic typical consumer behaviours, to observe the impact of changes in the supply chain, from grower to retail. Through mystery shopping it is possible to gain information and data related to the overall quality of the product, maturity/ripeness, shelf-life, price, traceability, retail behaviours and residue/microbial testing. Collected data can then be used to identify issues along the supply chain, so improvement can be initiated.

The AgriChain Centre is in an ideal position to undertake these mystery shopping programmes, based on our independence and extensive fresh produce experience. Our national team can undertake your mystery shopping requirements in both North and South Island locations and across various retail channels (supermarkets, independent stores, farmers markets and roadside stalls). At the conclusion of each mystery shopping round, we develop a summary report, outlining the key learnings based on the data analysed.

Each programme can be tailor made to your needs, depending on the information that is of greatest interest.

Some organisations have been utilising our mystery shopping services for years. Our mystery shopping programmes typically evolve over time, based on improved understanding of the various issues critical to individual clients. Our mystery shopping programmes have the ability to lead to improvements in food safety related practices, eating quality and growing/harvest/packing behaviours. A better understanding of the issues related to traceability and labelling can also occur.

We believe that a Mystery Shopping programme may help your organisation or product group, please contact Max Ciccioni to discuss your requirements, on 027 4451 309 or [mciccioni@agrchain-centre.com](mailto:mciccioni@agrchain-centre.com)



## Relevant Links for Information on Monitoring Quality Through Mystery Shopping

- Further publications from the International Society for Horticultural Science [can be accessed here](#).
- In fresh-food retailing, quality often matters more than price, according to a European shopper survey revealed to specific ways grocers can win in fresh fruits and vegetables. [The full article can be found here](#).
- In 2017, Italian and Cyprian researchers undertook a review entitled "Towards a new definition of quality for fresh fruits and vegetables". [The full article can be found here](#).
- The well known US industry publication Produce Business publishes an annual very extensive mystery shopping report [which can be found here](#).
- This article in the UK newspaper the Guardian explores mystery shopping from a wider FMCG perspective. It looks like there is an entire career structure built around the concept. [The full article can be found here](#).