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National Mango Board speeds consumer familiarity

By CHRISTINA DIMARTINO

Mangos account for approximately 50 percent of all tropical fruits produced worldwide, and is reportedly the most consumed fruit on earth. The Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimated worldwide production of mangos at more than 23 million tons in 2001. Of those, 12 million tons — more than half — were produced in India. China produced 3 million tons, Pakistan followed with 2.25 million tons, Mexico produced 1.5 million tons and Thailand's crop was 1.35 million tons. The aggregate production of 10 countries is responsible for roughly 80 percent of the world's mango production.

But mangos rank far lower in the list of fruits consumed in the United States as compared to in the world.

"If you were raised in the United States, you had access to grapes, apples, watermelon, strawberries and other fresh fruits," said Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board. "Mangos were unfamiliar to me until I was in my 20s. But people who grew up in mango-producing countries are as familiar with them as Anglo-Americans are with watermelons. The National Mango Board's goal is to accelerate the process of familiarizing American consumers with mangos."

The board has accomplished milestones in a short amount of time. Founded in 2005, it is already experiencing familiar mainstream positions



A mango tree loaded with fruit. (Photo courtesy of the National Mango Board)

with the fruit in terms of collective experience. It conducts a year-round consumer-marketing effort, which includes programs that speak directly to consumers via newspapers, magazines, television and the internet.

"Our relationship with mango spokesperson Ingrid Hoffmann of the Food Network's 'Simply Delicious' continues to garner more media attention and air time for mangos," said Ms. McManus. "Just today [March 16], I received my copy of *Natural Health* magazine with Ingrid on the cover along with a gorgeous mango. Upcoming this summer, we will run our second annual Rising Mango Star video contest, a cooking contest for young chefs."

Ms. McManus said one indication of how successful the National Mango Board's consumer public relations programs are is the fact that they reached consumers over 411 million times in 2008.

"This exposure had an advertising value of over \$12 million dollars, and we accomplished this with an investment of just \$865,000," she added.

The board's strategy is to educate consumers and overcome barriers to purchase, such as selection, ripening, cutting and usage ideas, while keeping mangos top-of-mind through year-round exposure.

"In this way, consumers are primed

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and ready to buy when they walk into their grocery store and see a beautiful mango display," said Ms. McManus. "On the retail side, we offer tons of resources, such as our crop forecast, searchable mango supplier database, mango Marketing Toolkit, point-of-sale materials, Mango Category Development Toolkit (which will be launched soon) best handling practices and much more. We are constantly adding to our list of resources."

Ms. McManus said that a pre-recorded version of the Mango Handling Best Practices Webinar would be posted on the board's web site, www.mango.org, in the coming weeks.

The board also provides consumers with materials that teach them how to select mangos, and tips on cutting, using and handling the fruit. It is using every available — and many newly developed — tools to keep mangos on the radar screen. Ms. McManus said that as a result of the many promotions, mangos are no longer a "hands-off, I-don't-know-what-to-do-with-it" item.

"If we can get the message out to the industry that there is marketing happening all around them, and a lot of materials available at their disposal, suppliers can develop their mango category and retailers can build their businesses tremendously," said Ms. McManus.