

# Mexican Mangos — Choosing Beyond Color

*As American consumers learn more about the many mango varieties available, color may matter less and less.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**As we enter Mexican mango season this year, American consumers are just beginning to realize all that each variety has to offer.**

Mexican mango shipments to the United States are poised to begin in February, will peak in March and April and taper off in September. A majority of the mangos consumed in the United States (64 percent, according to the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board) come from Mexico, which grows five of the six major commercially available varieties: Tommy/Atkins, Kent, Keitt, Haden and Ataulfo. (The Francine variety is available only from Haiti.)

Tommy/Atkins, which have a large amount of red blush on the skin, are the most widely available and most popular mangos in the United States. In addition to their popularity among consumers, retailers prefer them because of their long shelf life. As a result, many consumers are unfamiliar with green- and yellow-skinned mangos. "Consumers associate the red coloring of a mango with being ripe," says Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB).



Ataulfo mangos are a growing segment of the mango category.

"They think that red means quality. They just don't know," she says. "We're trying to let consumers know these green- and yellow-skinned varieties can be really fantastic."

"The average American consumer buys more with their eyes, and they associate red with 'good,'" adds Larry Nienkerk, NMB chairman and partner and general manager for Burlingame, CA-based Splendid Products LLC. "But the truth is, you can't judge a mango by its color."

The NMB has seen much success since it began working for the industry in 2006 to help educate consumers, retailers and foodservice professionals and drive increased purchases of mangos. "We are seeing these efforts gain traction," says McManus. "Mango consumption in the United States has quadrupled since 1990 to an estimated 2.2 pounds per person per year in 2008. Although data is not yet available for 2009, we believe the recent economic downturn will have slowed the demand growth, but not reversed the trend." She adds, "The growing Hispanic and Asian populations in the United States are helping to drive mango demand. In addition, U.S. consumers are becoming more adventurous in their eating choices and ethnic foods are increasingly popular."

Much of the NMB's efforts are directed toward consumer publications. "In 2009, our consumer media messages reached consumers over 409 million times," details McManus. "If we tried to purchase all of the space and time as advertising, it would have cost over \$22 million to do so," notes McManus. "That's 104 times more than what we actually invested to get the coverage."

"For our first four years, we've been focused on the mango basics — how to cut, select, ripen and store them, along with recipe ideas," McManus continues. "In the past year, editors started asking for more in-depth information, such as varieties and levels of ripeness." So this year, the board is shifting its goal from general education about mangos to teaching Americans about specific mango varieties.

As a direct result of this feedback, the board developed Virtual Test Kitchen, a program designed to provide in-depth education to editors and writers at national magazines, top newspapers and Web sites about mango varieties and how to use mangos at different levels of ripeness.

In addition, mangos will be featured on a full-page, full-color newspaper article to be published in the food sections of major daily newspapers across the country during the spring and summer months. Ingrid Hoffmann from Food Network's television show *Simply Delicious* will also share some of her favorite summertime mango recipes for a segment to appear on cable television on the Home and Health Report and on the ITV network of cable news station Web sites throughout the summer. The segment will include a recipe demonstration, as well as education about the selection, ripening and curing of mangos. "Based on similar programs in the past, we expect this video to be viewed approximately 28 million times," predicts McManus.

The NMB aims to reach consumers at the retail level as well. "As always, we will be working with retailers across the country to set up effective promotions for mangos," McManus reminds. "Our promotional funds are limited, so we try to be very fair by matching the allocation of funds to the volume of the crop. As a result, we will aim to spend 39 percent of our retail funds in the second quarter and 26 percent of our funds in the third quarter. We will spend roughly \$260,000 to set up retail promotions during these two periods, which will impact the Mexican mango season."

Retailers can expect to see some changes in the information the board provides for their use as well. "Just as we are taking our consumer education to the next level in the media, we felt it was time to get more specific in how we talk to shoppers about mangos in retail stores," says McManus. "New POS will be available to educate shoppers about yellow- and green-skinned mangos. These were developed in response to retailers who report that when the mangos aren't red, their sales drop off. Each message will be available in an 11- by 7-inch header card or a 5- by 3-inch tear pad with a recipe on the back."

#### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

It may be months from now before any of the NMB's efforts begin to have a real impact on consumer buying habits, and some retailers are wary of carrying mangos other than Tommy/Atkins.

Publix Super Markets Inc., based in Lakeland, FL, offers its consumers

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— Wendy McManus  
National Mango Board

Tommy/Atkins, Haden, Kent and Keitt mangos. "The most popular mango we sell is the Tommy," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. "While the Mango Board is doing a good job of promoting the yellow- and green-skinned mangos, the effort is fairly recent. It will take some time for consumers to change their buying habits," she predicts.

But before the NMB's campaign has kicked into gear, a few consumers are already beginning to learn for themselves that every mango variety has something to offer. While Tommy/Atkins are large and fragrant with firm, juicy flesh, Kents are green-skinned and very juicy with a sweet, rich flavor. Yellow-skinned Ataulfos have a full, very sweet flavor, a velvety texture that lacks the fibers found in other mangos and a thin pit. "Even though this variety is generally smaller than its red or green counterpart varieties, you still get a very good amount of edible fruit," explains Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. Because of its difficult to pronounce name, Ataulfos are often sold under other names, such as the Champagne mango, marketed exclusively by Ciruli Brothers.

"Customers are definitely looking for more yellow mangos," admits Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC, located in River Edge, NJ. "It's definitely a growing presence in the mango category."

Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers, reports he has seen sales of

Ataulfos grow at a rapid rate, most likely because consumers are discovering their attributes. The Ataulfo's size, which is relatively smaller than the more predominant Tommy/Atkins, also makes it a good fruit to sell in multiples. "That helps drive sales," says Ciruli. "We've seen the fastest growth in six-pack clamshells."

Consumers themselves have driven much of the demand for multiple mango varieties up until now, "especially starting with the ethnic trade and then expanding into the general market," confirms Nienkerk of the NMB and Splendid Products, which markets Ataulfo mangos under the Honey Manila name.

Retailers are also a force behind the growing sales of multiple mango varieties. "A lot more retailers seem to be featuring additional varieties beyond just the Tommy/Atkins," says Jerry Wagner, director of sales and marketing for Farmer's Best International LLC, based in Rio Rico, AZ.

In some cases, it is just a matter of consumers taking a chance on the varieties retailers make available, and many are surprised and happy with what they find. "The yellow and green varieties are becoming much more popular, much like boutique apples are becoming popular," says Nienkerk.


That interest combined with the NMB's newest efforts could mean several varieties are poised to take on popularity. "As the mango consumption in the United States matures and consumers become more educated about the other varieties and the excellent eating qualities they all present, retailers are more likely to promote them," explains Wagner.

#### BETTER PROMOTIONS

Offering more than one mango variety is just a first step for retailers who wish to sell more mangos during the Mexican season. To encourage sales, retailers can take an active part in consumer education. They can do this with the help of the NMB as well as suppliers of Mexican mangos. "Among the main drivers that boost mango purchases at the retail level are education, promotion and consistent, good-eating quality," says Aguilar of Ciruli Brothers. "In addition to consistently good fruit, we provide our customers with POS signage; we add recipes to our value-added packaging; and we sponsor a consumer-based Web site to provide consumers with a wide array of mango information, including nutritional content, delicious recipes and preparation ideas."

Publix already promotes mangos through print ads as well as in-store. "Traditionally, when we feature mangos in our weekly ad,

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Mangos**

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WITH A SMOOTH  
TEXTURE



Squeeze gently to judge ripeness.  
Slightly soft = ready to eat.  
Firm = ripen at room temperature for later.

Photo courtesy of the National Mango Board.

New POS materials are available to educate shoppers about yellow- and green-skinned mangos, courtesy of the National Mango Board.

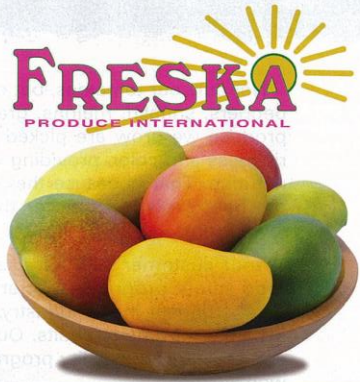
stores will demo them," explains Brous. "In addition, we have our Publix Simple Meals program where we create weekly recipes in-house. Each store demos the meal idea for the week, provides customers with a recipe card and then has all the ingredients necessary to recreate the meal at home conveniently located in an adjacent kiosk. Some of our weekly meals include mangos."

All of these merchandising techniques can lead to increased sales of every mango variety. "POS materials are an excellent way of educating the consumer, as well as demos and sampling. We have seen an increase in demand at retailer stores that demo the product," reports Gary Clevenger, managing member of Freska Produce International LLC, headquartered in Oxnard, CA. Because some consumers need convincing that mangos without red skins can be just as delicious as those with, sampling can be especially helpful.

Now is just the beginning for mango consumption in America, and many believe sales will only increase as Americans learn just how many wonderful types are available to them. What's more, it is possible that additional varieties will be grown for American consumers in the near future. Although only six varieties of mangos are commercially sold in the United States today, Nienkerk predicts more will become available as growers expand the types of mangos they choose to cultivate for mass consumption, just as apple growers have done. "We look forward to the day when mangos can command a space on the shelves for multiple varieties, particularly as we expand the amount of varieties available," he says.

"The exponential mango consumption and untapped growth within the United States leaves a positive future that consumers will come to understand that color isn't the only thing that makes a certain mango variety very flavorful," adds Cohen of Vision Import Group. "It's a matter of time and consumer education." **pb**

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