

REPORT

—Rijk Zwaan

Sweetening the pepper deal

DE LIER—The Sweet Palermo pepper from Rijk Zwaan is seen as an important innovation to help reinvigorate the somewhat stagnant and commoditised pepper segment.

by Carl Collen



Rijk Zwaan is continuing to push forward in the vegetable category, this year focusing very much on the pepper segment with the introduction of its Sweet Palermo variety.

February's annual Fruit Logistica event in Berlin marked the launch of the Sweet Palermo, a new pepper brand described by Rijk Zwaan as a "breakthrough innovation" in the pepper category. Indeed, the Dutch vegetable seed company has pointed out that, after a long period dominated by the success of the blocky pepper – a time in which there was seemingly little interest in new innovations – the pepper market is now ready for an advancement.

"The pepper category is on the brink of a similar development, that we have previously seen in tomatoes," explains Florent Rezeau, marketing specialist for peppers at

Rijk Zwaan. "Sweet Palermo is an innovative product that will significantly boost the entire market. As consumers will soon discover, it is truly different from regular peppers."

Rijk Zwaan highlights the fact that the fresh fruit and vegetable category has been "continually evolving" in recent years yet, compared with other popular crops like apples and tomatoes, peppers remain under-represented on supermarket shelves.

"It is becoming increasingly common to see fresh produce branded to highlight taste characteristics or eating occasions, and that is a good reason to upgrade the pepper category with what is a surprisingly different pepper in the form of the Sweet Palermo," the group says.

The pepper range offers opportunities for specific segmentation,

Rijk Zwaan continues, with the blocky pepper losing much of its exclusivity to become a commodity, bought by consumers in larger quantities or in multipacks – while, simultaneously, the sweet pointed pepper has suffered from a lack of familiarity among consumers. As a result, consumers are unaware of the difference between the various types of pointed peppers and, as a result, are often confused.

In addition to bringing a touch of innovation to the pepper category, Sweet Palermo is also designed to create a greater number of 'moments' for people to eat peppers – the product's sweet taste, convenient preparation and versatility makes it an ideal product for daily use in consumers' kitchens.

Rijk Zwaan says that the Sweet Palermo range will be extended regularly, and is expected to stimulate overall pepper consumption.

"In addition to a red Sweet Palermo, a yellow one is already available and an orange version will follow shortly," adds Rezeau. "Hence the future of the pepper category is looking very colourful, in more ways than one."



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FAR LEFT—The Sweet Palermo is set to "significantly boost" the pepper category, the group says
LEFT—Rijk Zwaan's Florent Rezeau

OPEN DAY SUCCESS

Rijk Zwaan held its annual International Winter Open Field Days event in Spain on 9-13 February. Taking place at the group's research and development location in Murcia, Rijk Zwaan presented ten winter crops, over 300 varieties and several innovative production systems to an international crowd.

Among the most popular products in Spain were Salanova Duo Packs and Salanova 'Lechugas Vivas' (living fresh lettuce) – concepts that perfectly play into the trend of fresh, healthy and convenient products.

Other highlights were the crunchy cos concept – a cos lettuce with the crisp and crunchy bite of an Iceberg lettuce – and a number of new spinach varieties, with resistances to the most recently recognised mildew (*Peronospora*) strains.