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New fig cultivar comparison report released by UC Kearney REC

Oct 21, 2006 12:00 PM, By James Doyle and Louise Ferguson UC Research and Extension Center

In the latest University of California Topics in Subtropics newsletter, two UC Kearney Research and Extension Center experts released a comparison of the new Sequoia fig cultivar (variety) with the recently released Sierra and standard fig varieties in the California fig industry. The KREC's Fig Breeder/Evaluator J.F. Doyle and Extension Specialist Louise Ferguson authored the comparison.

According to the newsletter, figs are grown on about 16,000 acres of California farm ground. According to the 2002 Statistical Review published by the California Fig Advisory Board and the California Fig Institute at Fresno, seven varieties are used primarily, although in some cases not exclusively for dried whole figs and fig paste.

The seven varieties include: the Calimyrna grown on 6,559 acres; a four variety grouping called Adriatics which includes the Conadria, Adriatic, Di Redo and Tena varieties on 3,364 acres; the Kadota variety on 1,105 acres and the Mission on 3,702 acres.

Two additional varieties are grown in California primarily for the fresh market including the California Brown Turkey on about 2,000 acres, and the 2005 UC-released Sierra fig grown on about 200 acres.

The nine varieties differ substantially from one another in usage, horticultural type and fruit characteristics. The Sequoia fig is for the fresh market. Although of good quality when dried, it develops a dark skin and a dark pulp color that limits its acceptability as a dried product.

resources

Five varieties are sold fresh including the California Brown Turkey, Sierra, Calimyrna, Mission and the Kadota. These will be compared to the Sequoia. The four "Adriatic" class figs are used only as whole dried figs or fig paste, and are too small for the fresh market.

Horticultural Types

Two horticulture fig types are found in California. The Smyrna type fig needs to be pollinated (caprifig) to set fruit that will persist on the tree until maturity. The Calimyrna is the only variety of this type grown commercially for fresh consumption in California. The other four fresh market figs listed above, as well as the Sequoia, are of the "common" type. These do not need to be pollinated in order to set and mature fruit.

The advantages of the common type figs over the Smyrna type are substantial. A common type fig grower does not need to: maintain caprifig trees or buy caprifigs from other growers; treat the caprifigs to disinfect the wasps (the pollen vectors) living in the caprifigs; distribute the caprifigs throughout the Calimyrna orchard; and deal with the variables or the costs of the caprifigation process.

Climatic factors such as heat, cold, rain, wind and disease can have a substantial impact on the success of the insect vector of the pollen and the eventual level of productivity of the Calimyrna crop. A good Calimyrna orchard often produces in the .5 to 1 ton of dried fruit range compared to two to three times the tonnage in common types. If not for Calimyrna's excellent quality when well grown, it would probably not be planted in California.

Usage

The Brown Turkey, grown almost exclusively for the fresh market, does not dry well. The Calimyrna, Mission and Sierra which dry well are dual-purpose figs. Some growers often send part of the crop to the fresh market. The Kadota is a multiple use variety that can be dried, canned, and picked for the fresh market.

Fruit characteristics

Calimyrna fig - a green-yellow to yellow skinned fig with amber pulp which requires caprifigation to set a crop. The first (Breba) crop drops without coming to maturity because caprifigs containing pollen and the vector wasp are not available at the time the Calimyrna Brebas require pollination. The second crop is abundant but of limited duration (from late August to late September in Fresno County). Fruit set coincides with the mid-summer (or profichi) flight of the fig wasp. When the flight is complete, no more fruit is set for that season. Early in maturity of the second crop, fruit size is large, although size can drop off in late September.

The size of the Calimyrna fruit eye, or ostiole, is the largest of all the commercial varieties and can range from 2.2 to 3.5 mm, allowing substantial amounts of internal insect infestation and spoilage. The variety is also prone to large numbers of eye splits during periods of high humidity, cool weather, or rain. When the fruit is grown well, the quality sets the standard for excellence.

California Brown Turkey — a purple-violet colored fruit with areas of yellow to yellow-green visible especially over the fruit neck and near the fruit stem. Pulp color is a strawberry red. The variety is of the common type and does not need caprifigation. The Brown Turkey can set a small crop of large sized Breba fruit. As grown in California, however, the tree is severely pruned in the winter to keep it short in height and to facilitate hand harvesting of the large second crop from the ground. This pruning essentially eliminates the first crop. The second crop is abundant and the fruit is large and retains its large size well into the harvest season.

The Brown Turkey is a common type fig. Once fruit production begins in late August, the fruit will continue to develop and mature until fall. Production ceases only when the orchard dries out and the tree stops producing extension growth, or when a weather event (rain, frost, etc.) damages the fruit or sends the tree into dormancy. The fruit ostiole is relatively large and in some locations the fruit can be subject to insect infestation and souring. Fruit quality is good when harvested with sufficient maturity.

Mission - a violet-black colored fig with the coloration usually covering the entire fruit surface. Pulp color is a strawberry red. The variety is a common type fig not needing caprifigation. The variety usually sets a good crop of Breba fruit large in size and very good quality. These Mission Brebas are often harvested from orchards that have been established to produce fruit for drying. Such trees are often very large and picking can be difficult and expensive.

The Mission's second crop is abundant and very good quality. The fruit size is large enough to pack fresh for a week or two, but then size diminishes rapidly eliminating its use for the fresh market. The fruit ostiole of the Breba and second crop are quite small and fruit spoilage is usually not a problem. Fruit quality of both crops is very good.

Kadota - a medium sized greenish-yellow skinned fruit that is grown only in limited quantity for the California fresh market. The pulp color is amber. The Kadota is a common type fig. Production of a Breba crop can be variable from light to good in volume. The second crop is abundant but most fruit is too small to be valuable for picking fresh. Towards the end of the season, many small, dry, commercially worthless fruit, known as puffballs, can be present. The fruit ostiole is medium in size, partially restricting insect access. Fruit quality of the Brebas and second crop is sweet and good.



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Sierra - a new variety released for planting to California growers by UC in 2005. Although developed as a high quality fig for drying, initial plantings are being made for the fresh market so that the new variety appears to be suitable for both purposes. Skin color of the Sierra is a yellow-green and the pulp color is amber.

The Sierra is a common type fig. The Breba crop of Sierra to date does not appear to have commercial value. The Breba crop has been light and the figs produced have not been particularly large or highly flavored. The second crop, however, is abundant. The fruit is medium to large in size and holds fruit size well into the fall. The fruit ostiole is very tight, effectively restricting insect access to the fruit interior. Fruit flavor is very good.


Sequoia Comparisons

The new Sequoia variety that is proposed for plant protection and release to the California fig industry has been developed for the fresh market. The fruit is yellow-green in skin color with a reddish-amber pulp. The skin color is competitive with the yellow-green Calimyrna, Kadota and Sierra but complimentary to the violet-black colored CA Brown Turkey and Mission.

The second crop of Sequoia is abundant with large to medium size. The Sequoia appears to maintain fruit size well into the fall in contrast to the small late-season fruit size of the Mission and Kadota and the absence of fruit on the Calimyrna.

The ostiole or eye of the Sequoia is very tight, similar to the Sierra and Mission but substantially tighter than the Calimyrna, Brown Turkey and Kadota.

The fruit flavor and quality of the Sequoia is as good as or better than all of the five established varieties listed here with the exception of the Calimyrna. The Sequoia, which has Calimyrna in its pedigree, approaches the flavor of Calimyrna, but the Calimyrna, with all of its many production problems, still retains its position as the premier quality fig.

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