

Trends in Variety Introduction and Management

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Traditionally new fruit varieties originated from publicly supported breeding programs sponsored by Land Grant Universities or the USDA. Historically, these varieties were released to the public free of charge. Nurseries were the primary agents involved in distributing the varieties to the grower community.

Public funding for fruit breeding has been decreasing steadily forcing universities to either eliminate breeding programs or seek alternative ways to fund these programs. At the same time there has been an increase in private sector breeding activity. As a result, for the last several decades more programs have begun to patent their releases and charge growers a plant royalty, which has traditionally been collected by the nursery and remitted to the breeder.

The most recent trend has been the rise of the club system for new plant introductions. Several variations of the basic model exist. In general, in exchange for limitations on acreage and/or access to the variety, the club members pay the variety owner an annual fee based on

acreage or production. In some cases the nurseries have maintained their traditional role of introducing and managing the club varieties. However, marketers are more frequently becoming the key managers of these varieties. In this model, the marketers control the variety and disseminate it to their growers. Growers are willing to pay because they expect to obtain premium prices and not face over supply associated with overproduction of public varieties.

Another trend is the development of private varieties held exclusively by the developer. These varieties are generally developed by very large grower/marketers who develop their own marketing and promotion programs around the varieties.

As chain stores merge and become mega chains, we may well see a new trend with the retailers becoming the owners of new varieties. They might contract with outside companies to coordinate growing of the variety worldwide to provide year-round supplies of their exclusive product.

Public funding for fruit breeding has been decreasing steadily, forcing Universities to eliminate breeding programs. At the same time there has been an increase in private sector breeding activity. A significant trend has been the rise of the club system for new plant introductions. In the future we may well see a new trend with the retailers becoming the owners of new varieties.



Dr. David Cain is a private plant breeder who started his own fruit breeding company, International Fruit Genetics. He was a former graduate student under Bob Andersen.

