

High packout the sweet spot for improved apple strain, Flash Gala

Bigbucks, the improved Corder Gala apple strain - named after Tru-Cape Fruit Marketing's new variety expert and fruit industry veteran, Buks Nel - is the most successful new variety in the history of the South African Plant Improvement Organisation in terms of orders placed, with more than a million trees already purchased.

Plant Breeder's Rights were awarded to Bigbucks' owners, Pink Vein (Pty) LTD - which comprises Buks Nel, Derek Corder, the grower who discovered Corder Gala, and Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen on whose Oak Valley Estate the strain was found.



Flash Gala (Image Supplied)

Now, after a lengthy process of name selection, a brand name for the fruit is confirmed. Today, Flash Gala, the trademarked fruit of Bigbucks trees, joins other global top fruit brands such as Pink Lady, the improved Cripps Pink strain and is poised to disrupt the global fresh fruit industry.

More purchase-ready fruit

The sweet spot for Flash Gala is the high packout percentage. This means that more purchase-ready fruit from one tree can be picked at one time than many other commercially grown apple or pear varieties.

"It all started on the afternoon of 18 January 2011, one of those few very hot days in Elgin. It was the deep wine-red colour that first caught my eye", explains Nel, "And the fact that unlike most Gala strains which are unstable deep within their souls, this one remains true to type.

Reversion to the original poorer bi-coloured mutations is a negative characteristic that occurs relatively often. Galas are, on the other hand, also very prone to mutate into better-coloured clones. Therefore, reversions (negative) and mutations (positive) are a part of Gala strains. Poorer colour and instability have for years hampered Royal Gala and its clones. This figure could vary from 5% to 50%.

The grower who plants a Bigbucks tree will have a saleable crop of Flash Gala apples every time. And, as the tree can be picked in one go, it is much more efficient than many other trees that need to be picked two or three times as fruit ripens and colours at different stages. We are achieving near 90% Flash Gala packouts which is almost unheard of," says Nel.

In search of the perfect fruit



Buks Nel (Image Supplied)

According to Calla du Toit, chair of the Bigbucks Growers Association and chair of The Pink Lady Growers Association, this find is the kind of reward that makes a lifetime of walking orchards in search of the perfect fruit, worthwhile. "Now, in Buks' seventh decade, a find such as Flash Gala is just reward for a lifetime of passion for the fruit industry and countless hours walking orchards in search of the next big thing. In the fruit industry, a find like this is pretty much like discovering a new galaxy might be for astronomers. The reason that Buks was in the right place at the right time to notice the mutation on the Corder Gala is because he has dedicated his life to being in orchards every day, especially at apple ripening time."

Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen says that the process to arrive at a brand name was a long one. "It was right to name Bigbucks after Buks and with the promise that it would make big bucks for those who planted it. We didn't want to register a name that might suggest to the consumer that this fruit was expensive so we embarked on brainstorming names and then the process of searching that another hadn't already registered the name or, that when sold in one of the over one hundred

countries in which South African apples and pears are sold, that we would not be offending cultural sensitivities.

The idea behind Flash Gala is that it will be sold in a flash and also that the bright red colour of the fruit is like a flash of light. Although it is often said that dynamite comes in small packages, in this case, it is most definitely true."

Grower Derek Corder is among the first who have planted Bigbucks trees. He explains: "The unique pink or red mid-rib on the leaf is used to identify the variety after the fruit has been harvested. While, on the tree, the pink vein (from where the company name comes) down the centre of the leaf is characteristic. The Flash Gala is 80-100% wine-red blush with no striation. Currently, 138 bins have been packed at Two-a-Day in Grabouw at a confirmed packout of 89.45% and the total Class 1 packout is 94.27% which is outstanding. While at Ceres Fruit Growers, 26 bins were delivered at a 93% packout, especially notable as the region suffered from hail which damaged fruit."

Tru-Cape Fruit Marketing has the rights to sell Flash Gala along with others.

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