



“Hailstone Heroes” marketing campaign moves fruit

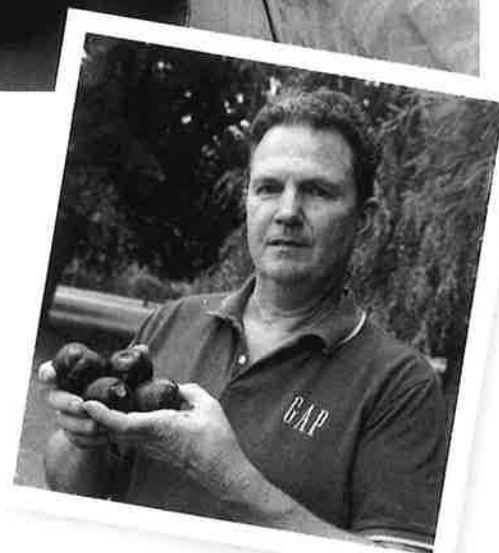
By Rose Mannering

An innovative marketing scheme has helped summerfruit growers sell hail damaged fruit.

The Yummy Fruit Company’s general manager Paul Paynter says a devastating hailstorm that struck much of their growing area in Hawke’s Bay on October 1 last year left them with a massive problem.

With at least 50% of their marketable fruit damaged by the hail, they knew they would have a tough job to find homes for the blemished fruit through the coming season. The idea of garnering consumer support and accepting a lower fruit finish standard than would normally be expected is not new. Paul says they followed in the successful footsteps of a South Australian campaign to sell hail damaged fruit, which ultimately gained a marketing award.

“We wanted to position the hailstoned fruit as being more precious,” he says, “in the end opting for the ‘Hailstone Heroes’ slogan for the fruit. Without the marketing



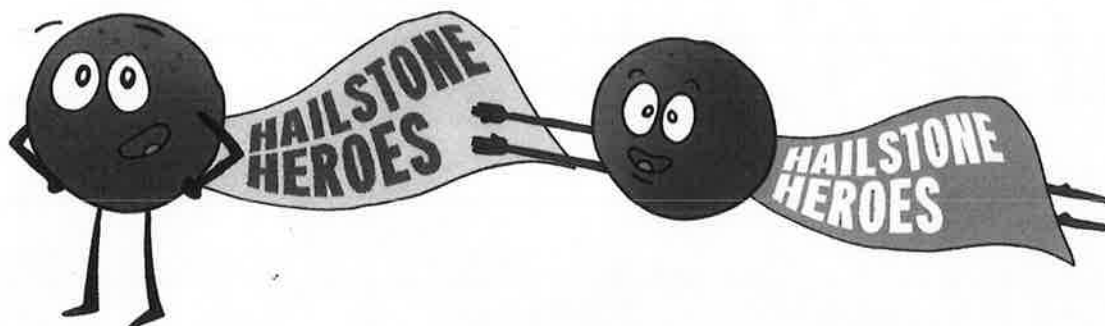
Yummy’s Paul Paynter with plums showing severe damage from the October hailstorm.

campaign to soften consumer perception, the likelihood was they would be grumpy if they found sub-par fruit in-store. If the marketing campaign gave some prior warning that there was a valid reason for cosmetic blemishes on the fruit then they could gain consumer empathy.

“Backed up by point-of-sale material, and a good flavour profile, we thought we could pull this off,” he says.

Now as the season is progressing, they have found 20% of their crop needed to be dumped, 45% was affected by hail but was acceptable for sale, and a further 35% of later varieties are of good quality.

Luckily, other factors this season have been in favour of growing a good product. “Spring weather conditions were very warm, followed by a hot November, we had good yields, and a good flavour profile,” he says.



Ironically, without the hail it could have been one of the best, Paul says. It has been important for the Paynter operation to be able to keep their staff on, and to maintain a 'business as usual' stance under difficult circumstances.

"At best we are hoping to break even; regularly the summerfruit sector goes through trauma. It can be really difficult to be stuck in the trenches without connection to others in the same boat.

"We opted to express optimism, to be honest with the consumer and show fortitude and resilience." Suffering hardship through difficult years is not new to the Paynters. When Paul's grandfather started the business in the 1930s, in his first year he was completely frosted and didn't pick a single piece of fruit.

The early nature of the hailstorm last October meant that Paul and his father John Paynter, had time to come up with the marketing programme, but then had to commit to the purchase of one-million packages which bore the "Hailstone Heroes" marketing campaign, and hope that retailers would support the move.

Yummy cut their normal in-store tasting budget of \$200,000 to focus on the much reduced hail programme. "We have

spent \$60,000 on this campaign, and cut our cloth, as we thought our revenue would be down by 25%."

The back end of the season is definitely looking up, Paul says, with summerfruit quality much improved, and apples looking great.

Hawke's Bay Fruitgrowers' Association summerfruit chairman Gareth Hope says there has been a silver lining for those pockets that were unaffected by the widespread hailstorm. Areas like Haumoana and Twyford largely escaped the hail, and prices for first class fruit prior to Christmas were high.


There had been some concern the higher level of Class 2 fruit on the market may have had a negative impact on prices post Christmas.


The next big concern for Yummy, and the wider industry, will be finding enough pickers for the apple harvest. Five years ago, Yummy would run with one-third RSE (Recognised Seasonal Employer) scheme workers, one-third local, and one-third backpackers. "We used to advertise and have queues out the door looking for work." That is no longer the case; low unemployment is great for the Hawke's Bay economy, but the job of finding pickers is now very tough. ☹️

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