

Tim Jones opening remarks Summerfruit NZ Conference 2018

Summerfruit NZ Board chair, Tim Jones, used the conference's opening slot to launch *Sensational Summerfruit: A bold plan for growth*.

Sensational Summerfruit is a publication which provides an overview of the programme for a proposed Primary Growth Partnership (PGP) that will achieve the growth required for the summerfruit industry to be a \$465 million industry by 2035.

The project has been worked on over recent times and is due to be submitted for approval to the Ministry of Primary Industries' PGP Panel in a few months, he said.

Conferences were always great opportunities to catch up, Tim said. Growers, suppliers, and those throughout the supply chain have the chance to celebrate the hard work that gets done to put fresh, tasty, nutritious products in before the summerfruit sector's loyal customers.

'Our industry has great products; five of them, they are fantastic fresh and fantastic when processed into other products that can be eaten 12 months of the year,' said Tim.

'We all work as hard as we can to make sure that each piece of fruit we sell is healthy, tasty and nutritious. We hope that our ever-smarter consumers will make the same choice each and every time they shop and choose summerfruit over the multitude of choices in front of them.

'But are we seeing signs of real growth in our category? I'm not too sure.

'With cherries the answer is obviously yes, it's the boom crop at the moment. But let's be honest, we might just be standing on the edge of the cliff – the boom and bust cycle of horticulture has been well documented.'

Other fruit types are either growing so slowly, or perhaps are even declining and there is cause to be concerned, he suggested.

'Our sensational summerfruit and everything that's in this booklet, is a bold plan for growth.

'We have a vision to make transformational change and by 2035, and to have all our fruit types contributing to an industry worth in excess of \$460m – four times what it is today.

'To achieve this growth, the summerfruit industry will need to do things significantly differently from the way we operate today. This may well challenge our current practices at every level we operate.'

He said the 'Sensational Summerfruit' project will encompass five major initiatives. The first two are based around better understanding consumers in the markets summerfruit are sold to.

The questions that require answering, include:

- What do consumers want?
- How do they want fruit packaged and delivered?
- What cultural variations are needed to be better understood?
- What specific health or nutritional requirements are required for different markets?

Such work is relevant to both export and domestic markets.

'From a domestic point of view, let's remember those Nielsen surveys that indicate, time after time, there's genuine potential for growth in New Zealand, if we can consistently deliver superior-quality produce,' he explained.

'It's going to be important to work closely with exporters to ensure market development work is closely aligned with that consumer information. Not only do we need to retain and improve market access but access to new opportunities, such as apricots to China, needs to be progressed fast.'

Tim said it was also important to understand what the industry's competitors are up to – what are Chile and Australia doing?

In-depth analysis needs to be undertaken. New data will help the industry better understand what the opportunities really are, he explained.

A major project will continue with the current Future Orchard Planting Systems (FOPS) work. This will focus on new genetic material developed from a breeding programme in association with Plant & Food Research at Clyde.

Years of breeding and evaluation is close to coming to fruition.

Commercial production and continuing development of high-performance orchards will optimise the practices required to produce consistent high yields of that quality fruit, he added.

'The new apricot varieties being released under ApricotCo are so far ahead of existing selections that one 'wise head' suggested they shouldn't even be called apricots – they've got size, colour, firmness, sweetness, and funnily enough, they've got flavour too,' Tim said, as the audience's muffled amusement appreciated the irreverent quip.

The new apricots had proven consumer appeal in key Asian markets in which Summerfruit NZ is focusing.

There are plans to devise a raft of innovation and ideas from industry development.

Consumer and marketing analysis work will be aligned to develop new innovative packaging and transport solutions. This is to ensure that large volumes of fruit can be moved from the tree to the consumer in the shortest possible time. It's also important to ensure the summerfruit that arrives is of unquestioned quality.

Sustainability is the key here and such thinking not only applies to the fruit, but also the packaging it sits in, he stressed.

The *Sensational Summerfruit* plan needs to ensure the whole industry is equipped with the models and the practices to meet the challenge of increasing its value by four-fold.

'We'll need to improve the quality and information of data we collect. Some can be used in strategic decision making, but we'll need to build industry awareness, understanding and commitment to effectively implement this strategy.

'The whole project needs to be underpinned by industry systems that collect and share data, insights, and benchmarking. This will enable a rapid uptake of the innovation that comes out of our bold plan for growth.

'Achieving the target of moving fruit through with velocity will challenge current practices on every level but the goal and prize is there for all to see.

'The document is not just a seven-year plan, but the start of an industry 20-year plan. It's still being refined before submission to the PGP Panel in the next couple of months,' he stated.