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# Postharvest

## Focus On Consumers To Increase Sales

**F**OR years, the basic recommendations for handling of fruit after harvest have been to avoid physical injury and store the product at the lowest safe temperature. The focus has been to extend the usable life of the product for as long as possible to provide more flexibility in marketing the commodity. Such a focus on maximizing time after harvest and aversion to risk of product loss has resulted in the fruit industry losing sight of the consumer. On average, consumers in the U.S. eat only two servings of fruits and vegetables per day, far lower than the five servings that are recommended. If U.S. consumers began to follow the recommended servings of two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables in the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, this would represent a 50% increase in consumption and

thereby a similar increase in production and sales to meet the demand.

### Flavor Potential

While several factors contribute to the low consumption of fruits and vegetables, it is clear that dissatisfaction with flavor is a key contributor. Long shelflife varieties, minimum harvest maturity, lowest storage and shipping temperatures, and extended time from harvest to consumption are not generally compatible with optimum flavor quality and consumer satisfaction. Long shelflife varieties may not be the varieties with optimum flavor quality. In many breeding programs, the focus on yield, disease resistance, shelflife, and fruit size often preclude a significant focus on flavor potential. Harvest maturity has a clear link with flavor potential; early harvested fruit produce fewer

flavor compounds and have lower sugar content than later harvested fruit from the same field. Recent studies have clearly shown how exposure of fruit to low temperatures reduces their flavor quality, too. In addition, flavor life is always shorter than appearance life, highlighting the need for expedited handling and rapid marketing.

All components of the supply chain play a role in determining consumer satisfaction. For example, the grower or grower/shipper determines if a variety with good flavor potential is selected for planting. Making this choice may result in lower yield or greater disease susceptibility, thereby increasing costs to the grower. For this to be feasible, the buyer must recognize the enhanced flavor potential of the variety and compensate the grower through a higher price or more consistent business to compensate for his loss in yield.

The grower also determines harvest maturity. The retailer, in cooperation with the grower/shipper, must be willing to accept a somewhat higher risk of losses due to over-ripe fruit, understanding that the overall customer satisfaction with his produce will increase along with his sales, compensating for the increase in losses. Such a dynamic has been demonstrated with the marketing of ripened pear fruit, where sales increased three-fold, more than compensating for a small increase in losses. Unless the retailer agrees to accept a few more over-ripe fruit and also begins to reject under-mature or under-ripe loads, this change in harvest maturity will not be possible.

Research conducted at universities, USDA, and private companies related to handling of fruit after harvest has focused for many years on how to maximize life after harvest. The focus is shifting to how to deliver maximum quality to consumers economically and feasibly. Such a change in focus will be challenging for the fruit industry to achieve, but in the end will result in greater sales and increased consumption of fruits by U.S. consumers. ●

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.producecommunity.com/>. The page features a header with the text "ProduceCommunity" and "Online Community for the Produce Industry" and "Growing Produce". Below the header is the main heading "The Social Community for Growers and Marketers of Produce." followed by a dotted line and the sub-heading "How To Get Started:". To the left of the instructions is a smaller image of the website's sign-up form, which includes a "Powered by Growing Produce" logo. The instructions are as follows:

- 1 Go to [ProduceCommunity.com](http://ProduceCommunity.com).
- 2 Click "Sign Up" on the top of the page.
- 3 Enter your email address and choose a password.

At the bottom of the page, there is a call to action: "DON'T WAIT! JOIN THE DISCUSSION TODAY!"

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