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Sun World believes new grape variety is a winner

by Tim Linden

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HOUSTON -- **Although it's been 14 years in the making**, Sun World's new grape variety is paying dividends, and company executives believe they have hit a home run with the new Scarlotta seedless variety.

The late-season variety produced 250,000 cartons this year and there are expectations for volume to increase for the next several years until it surpasses the 1 million-carton level. Increases after that will depend upon how many new acres are planted. Like other grape varieties, it takes three years from first planting to produce a commercial crop.

The Scarlotta variety was discovered in 1993 and has gone through many years of trialing and tweaking to reach commercial status. The variety is seedless, has a natural dark red color, and is a late-harvest grape that comes in large clusters.

Mike Aiton and Juanita Gaglio of Sun World discussed the virtues of the new variety with The Produce News at the recent Produce Marketing Association convention, here.

Ms. Gaglio said that the variety produces large, sweet berries and is holding very well. It appears as if it will last eight weeks or longer in storage, which means that it can be marketed into the November-December holiday season. She also said that the vines are expected to be prolific producers for about 30 years, which makes it a very good variety for growers. These grapes do not require any additional treatment for color, and labor and packing costs are lower due to the large clusters of grapes.

Mr. Aiton said that retail acceptance has been very good, as the grapes have held up well in shipping with little shatter. In fact, because of its superior holding quality, Scarlotta seedless has also found some devotees in the export market, evidenced by the fact that a fair amount has been shipped to the United Kingdom.

Sun World is currently growing the grape in the San Joaquin Valley, but it has also distributed grapevines around the world for trialing.

Currently, Scarlotta grapevines are in the process of being trialed in South Africa, Australia, France, Chile, Italy, Israel and New Zealand. The variety is currently being grown commercially in South Africa as well as the United States.