

WORLD NEWS

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AUSTRALIA

Record returns for growers with new, niche varieties

BRISBANE-BASED MARKETING

executive Martin Walker said growers had been rewarded for good-quality fruit by a strong growth in exports. "All in all growers have had very, very good, record returns this year," Mr Walker said. "The 'Fay Zee Siu' variety is in large demand for good quality, that price was averaging between \$60 and \$70 throughout the season, that's back to the grower. 'Kaimana', which is a fairly new variety that's becoming more and more popular on the domestic scene, averaged \$60 return for the entire crop. The future looks very good for the industry to start following up with these newer variety lychees." The potential of these new varieties and the United States export market is exciting growers like Frank Bosnic, who has already planted up to 15 different lychee varieties in his orchard, at Mareeba in far north Queensland. "Up here it's a bit cooler, we can probably get into the earlier markets. Some varieties perform better in cooler conditions, some perform better in warmer conditions. Overall, I think the more varieties, the better it is. Consumers want a different taste: it's just like stone fruit, other fruits, mangoes," he said.

'Erdon Lee' excites

Bearing fruit up to four times the



'Erdon Lee' variety of lychees bears fruit up to four times the usual lychee size.

Photo: Charlie McKillop

usual size of about 25 grams, the new Chinese variety 'Erdon Lee' is showing promise. Mr Bosnic is trialling several hundred trees at his Mareeba farm and will know within the next five to eight years if it can be developed commercially. "If it serves well, eats well, sells well and the consumers love it, that's a benefit for us. I think this year was probably one of the better years. Volume was up, quality was good and we didn't have much rainfall. We suffer when we don't have rain, but if rain comes at the right time it's beneficial to everybody." ❖

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-21/good-and-bad-in-queensland-lychee-picking-season/7103826>; authors: David Sparkes and Charlie McKillop; published 21 January 2016; shortened

INDIA

Eating lychee fruit can kill underfed children

RESEARCHERS CONFIRM THAT a toxic chemical in the fruit of the Asian lychee tree (*Litchi chinensis*) is responsible for outbreaks of a fatal brain sickness in children in India's Bihar state where the fruit is commercially grown. Methylene cyclopropyl-glycine (MCPG) or hypoglycin G was detected in both semi-ripe and ripe lychee fruit by a team of virologists led by T. Jacob John at the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, in Tamil Nadu. The findings were published in *Current Science* (December 2015). The chemical is akin to another toxin methylene cyclopropylalanine (MCPA), which is found in ackee (*Blighia sapida*), a West Indian fruit. Both lychee and ackee come from the *Sapindaceae* (soapberry) family of plants. MCPG is known to cause hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, a metabolic illness that affects the brain when body sugar levels are low due to fasting or undernourishment. Earlier, viral encephalitis was suspected to be causing the deaths. "When no virus was detected, researchers suspected a toxin from pesticides or from the fruit itself," says John. Only undernourished children living near lychee orchards appeared to suffer and during May and June, when the fruit is harvested. "The victims had signs of brain cell damage and seizures, indicating that a toxin and not just undernourishment was causing the disease," says John. The toxin is seen in high concentrations in the seed and semi-ripe pulp. "Children who are malnourished are most vulnerable, as they have low glycogen stores," says Thomas. Immediate treatment for victims includes administration of glucose, says John. "Villagers have been told to let children eat the fruit only after a meal," John says. ❖

Source: <http://www.scidev.net/south-asia/children/news/eating-lychee-fruit-can-kill-underfed-children.html>; authors: Zackary Canepari / Panos; published 8 January 2016; shortened