

Chile to ramp up production of South African Stargrape 2 variety

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A red seedless table grape variety that originates from South Africa and is touted as an alternative to Flame is now under commercial production in Chile, with hectareage set to grow significantly this year.

The variety Stargrape 2 was developed by the Stargrow Group, one of the African country's leading providers of plant material. The variety's parentage is unknown, as its late breeder never revealed the secret.

During an event on a Chilean vineyard, *Fresh Fruit Portal* joined numerous growers who had been invited to learn more from Stargrow Fruit Marketing representative Nikko Maree.

"The main characteristic of this variety is that it colors naturally - it doesn't need anything to be applied to it to color correctly," he said.

Like Flame, Stargrape 2 is also an early variety, but Maree explained that an important aspect of the new cultivar is that it is not prone to cracking due to rainfall.

According to Maree, cracking is a common problem with early varieties, and can result in growers losing the entirety of their crops.

"Stargrape 2 is a very productive variety, in South Africa we are on the third leaf this year and around 5,000-6,000 cartons of 4 kilograms are being produced," he said, adding around 25 hectares had been planted so far.

"It is a variety that adapts well to different climatic conditions, it colors well in hot areas and colors even better in cold areas. In terms of our grape varieties, I think that Stargrape 2 can be considered a star."



Sample shipments have so far been sent to North America and Europe, regions which Maree said the company would like to develop before moving onto Asia.

The variety has been under trials in Chile for the last four years, with the first commercial vineyard established in 2015, according to Luis Fernández of Andes New Varieties Administration (ANA) Chile - the variety's license manager in the country, as well as Peru and Argentina.

A year later the first 15 hectares were planted and in 2017 around 100 hectares more are forecast to go in the ground, he added.

He explained plantings were relatively limited at the moment due to the supply of plant material, but said the variety had strong potential in an industry that was increasingly looking toward early cultivars.

While no exports have been carried out from Chile, Fernandez estimates the first ones will be sent during the 2017-18 season.

"For the Chilean growers this gives them the chance to have an early red seedless variety to replace Flame, which never performed in the best way in Chile, but it was the only existing variety that was early and red," he said.

The variety is being planted from the Coquimbo region to the O'Higgins region.

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Stargrow Fruit Marketing representative Nikko Maree