

1. INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Background	2
1.2 Marketing Objectives	3
1.3 Highlights	4
1.4 Summary of Findings	5
1.5 Researcher's Interpretation of Findings	8
2. RESEARCH OVERVIEW	10
2.1 Research Objectives	10
2.2 Methodology	12
2.2.1 Food Professionals - Interviews	12
2.2.2 Consumers - Focus Groups and mini tastings	13
3. RESEARCH FINDINGS	14
3.1 Food Professionals - Interviews	14
3.1.1 Perceptions of blackcurrants	14
3.1.2 Tasting - patisserie filling and berries	15
3.1.3 Potential new uses for the lower acid blackcurrants	20
3.1.4 Trial products - feedback from professionals and their staff	20
3.2 Consumers - Focus Groups and mini tastings	21
3.2.1 Perceptions of blackcurrants	21
3.2.2 Tasting - patisserie filling and berries	27
3.2.3 The name	31
3.2.4 View of potential use	31

Appendix One - Documents used in the research
Appendix Two - Written responses of Focus Group participants

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This document is the report of findings of qualitative consumer research carried out in Christchurch, New Zealand, in February 1997, for Blackcurrants New Zealand Limited, on the subject of consumer acceptance and response to new varieties of lower acid blackcurrants.

In New Zealand the predominant variety of blackcurrant is Magnus. This is the traditional blackcurrant, often found in home gardens. There is a large number of other varieties of the fruit, some of which have lower acid, others varying in size and other attributes.

Plant scientists here and in Scotland have developed a number of low acid varieties which are thought to have the potential for wider appeal than that enjoyed by the traditional tart currant.

To date there has been no consumer testing of the lower acid blackcurrants. Because the market is small, it is assumed that there is growth potential both in New Zealand and for export. No previous research in NZ has focussed on consumer perceptions of blackcurrants or the potential for developing increased consumer demand for the fruit.

1.2 Marketing Objectives

My understanding is that the marketing objectives of Blackcurrants NZ Ltd are:

- To “grow” the market for New Zealand produced blackcurrants, by:
 - providing a blackcurrant with wider flavour appeal - assuming that the present demand for blackcurrants is limited by a prevalent “dislike” for the existing flavour.
 - achieving higher level of usage for blackcurrants in commercial foods - in restaurants and in prepared foods.
 - presentation of blackcurrants in the market place as a desirable fruit - thereby creating consumer demand in restaurants and supermarkets.

1.3 Highlights

- **People are positive towards blackcurrants - they bring back warm memories of grandmothers, family meals, family gardens.**
- **Blackcurrants are associated with jam, juice, and fruit pie (often blackcurrant and apple).**
- **The aroma is an important trigger, bringing back images of picking from and brushing past bushes in an old garden, and topping and tailing blackcurrants around Christmas time.**
- **There is no other fruit with aroma or flavour like blackcurrants.**
- **The acidity, usually expressed as tanginess or tartness, is a very important positive attribute.**
- **The fullness of flavour, which can in many ways be attributed to the acidity of blackcurrants, is another positive and significant feature of blackcurrants.**
- **Blackcurrants are seen as a healthy food, despite the large amounts of sugar added to make them palatable.**
- **The texture of blackcurrants can be a negative feature - pips, skin and "tufty bits" are not always welcome. However, the "berriness" is important for texture in pies and many other products.**
- **Blackcurrants are often associated with laborious preparation.**
- **Although most participants could sense a difference between the three varieties tasted, and could describe this difference in some detail, they were mainly agreed that all three varieties tasted "like blackcurrants", and that the lower acid varieties would not necessarily appeal to people who do not like blackcurrants.**
- **Lower acid Ben Ard was considered bland and lacking in flavour, and tasting as if it was thickened with cornflour.**
- **Magnus was generally preferred as "tasting the way a blackcurrant should taste".**
- **Millist was preferred by some who thought it was sweeter than Ben Ard and Magnus but still flavoursome.**

1.4 Summary of Findings

This summary focuses on the consumers' perceptions and expectations of blackcurrants, and responses to flavour of patisserie fillings and thawed currants in three varieties of blackcurrants - Magnus (A), Ben Ard (B), and Millist (C).

Perceptions and expectations of blackcurrants:

- Food professionals were open to the potential of blackcurrants in each of their particular fields. None saw any real reason why they should not be used in a restaurant or commercial food, although in some cases the skin and pips presented a problem, and for Ernest Adams the moisture content of frozen berries or pulp makes them unsuitable for long shelf-life products.
- They remembered blackcurrants as a fruit growing in their grandmothers' or mothers' gardens - and had mixed memories of "topping and tailing" and favourite old fashioned puddings and more commonly, jam.
- Their present commercial use of the fruit is limited - in an occasional dessert and sauce for a special meat dish, and juice as a beverage.
- They expected to see blackcurrants in desserts, muffins, sauces, pastries.
- The reasons given for not using blackcurrants varied from not having been asked to buy them (either by a salesperson selling blackcurrants or by a customer wanting a dish made from them) to not having thought of it.
- Focus Group participants had similar expectations of blackcurrants. Some had plants growing in their own gardens, while others wished they were more readily available. They recalled juice, jam, jelly, muffins, queen cakes, sauces and wine made from blackcurrants. No one could recall a restaurant or commercial food made with them.
- Consumers had strong perceptions, prior to tasting, of the aroma and flavour of blackcurrants. The strong flavour burst, the intense sweet yet tart flavour, and the aroma of the leaves were key recollections.

Flavour/aroma response

Although there were individuals among the food professionals and the focus group participants who enjoyed Ben Ard, the consensus was that Ben Ard in its sweetened, patisserie filling form is not a "real blackcurrant". It was generally thought to have a bland, less interesting flavour than Magnus or Millist. As a berry, however, Ben Ard was considered by some to be edible alone - as distinct from the other two which were considered too "tart" to enjoy unsweetened. Others thought Ben Ard was bitter.

Most thought that Magnus patisserie filling had a more enjoyable blackcurrant flavour and aroma. "Fuller" and "rounder" were some of the expressions used. As a currant, Magnus was definitely more "tart" and fitted their expectations of a blackcurrant.

For some, Millist was their preferred currant, being more typical (ie more like Magnus) than Ben Ard, but being slightly less acid and therefore more palatable as a raw berry.

The overall response could be summarised as:

Magnus was the favourite in sweetened, patisserie filling form. Professional cooks considered that they would sweeten whatever they made anyway, so they may as well have the fuller flavour of the higher acid fruit to start with.

Some felt that there was a future for Ben Ard in sweet foods. Most, however, wanted the intense acid of Magnus, or the perceived better balance of Millist for sauces and in the main for sweet products.

Appearance

Some participants remarked on a difference in colour between the varieties, but this difference was indistinct and did not influence their perceptions or appreciation of the currants themselves.

Several chefs and some focus group participants liked the small, round Magnus currants, especially for use as a garnish or in a meat sauce.