

# Florida Pearl Captivates Consumers

University of Florida



Florida farmers are growing a new white variety strawberry, branded Florida Pearl and have taken consumers and the internet by storm due to its unique color and taste.

Although the fruit looks a little like the traditional, red strawberry, there are some significant differences between the two. When ripened, the white berry takes on a golden blush color and offers a hint of a tropical aroma when eaten, bearing flavors of pineapple and pear. Many refer to this new white strawberry as a pineberry due to the slight pineapple aroma.

The fruit phenomenon certainly did not “grow” overnight. Before the cultivar was released by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) in 2020, white strawberries were typically only found in Japan and other Asian countries. In 2012, Dr. Vance Whitaker, Associate Professor in Horticultural Sciences at UF/IFAS, began exploring how his program could develop such a distinctive berry that would thrive in Florida’s strawberry growing region. Through traditional breeding techniques, Florida Pearl made its way into the berry market in 2020 as the first white berry in the US.

Florida Foundation Seed Producers, Inc., a direct support organization of UF/IFAS that is responsible for technology transfer for new plant variety inventions from UF/IFAS, has exclusively licensed the US rights in the Florida Pearl brand strawberry to a Florida company, the Florida Strawberry Patent Service Corporation (FSPS). FSPS is a sister corporation of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association. FSPS has sublicensed multiple nurseries across the US and Canada that propagate and sell plants of Florida Pearl to growers. FSPS has also sublicensed the international rights to Florida Pearl to the Ekland Marketing Company of California.

“It's an exciting new thing and consumers are always on the hunt for something new and fun,” said Nick Wishnatzki, public relations manager for Wish Farms, one of the first companies to offer wide distribution of the new berry, marketing them as Pink-A-Boo Pineberries.

According to Wishnatzki, Florida Pearl has resonated with consumers of all generations, but particularly with the younger generations, who have shared their experience with the berry all over social media. Videos featuring the viral Pink-A-Boo Pineberries achieved approximately 46 million views, causing sales to skyrocket so viewers could experience the berry for themselves.

Florida is known as the ‘winter strawberry capital of the world’ with a total annual economic contribution of the industry estimated to be about \$1 billion. A large majority of the varieties grown in Florida were bred and released by UF/IFAS. Historically, it has been difficult to promote new Florida strawberry varieties coming to market due to the lack of visual differences and the fact that strawberry varieties aren’t typically sold by variety, as is generally the case with other produce such as apples. The striking white color of Florida Pearl, however, has attracted renewed consumer interest, setting Florida apart from other strawberry growing regions.

Moving forward, Dr. Whitaker and his team don’t plan to stop with Florida Pearl. The UF/IFAS strawberry breeding program hopes to develop new white strawberry varieties, continuing to prioritize flavor and quality, and also aiming to increase yields to levels closer to the leading red strawberry varieties.

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