

# NIAGARA *this* WEEK

## Get ready for the Cold Snap: Canada's first branded pear

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Canada's first branded pear, the Cold Snap, has been decades in the making. Amy Bowen, program leader for consumer insights at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre led a team that helped distinguish this new variety from market stalwart's bosc and bartlett.

When it comes to fruit branding, the apple is king.

Consumers recognize varieties like McIntosh, golden delicious, honey crisp. It's not so much the case with pears. You have your boscs and bartletts, but neither have a following like apple varieties do.

When it came time to market a new pear variety developed by researchers in Vineland, experts looked to the apple.

"When it comes to apples, people have their favourites. But we found that with pears, it was more generic," said Amy Bowen, program leader for consumer insights at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. "We knew that to market this pear, we needed to make it something that consumers would ask for by name."

The Cold Snap pear has been in the making for four decades. It was developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's pear breeding program which began in 1962. The purpose was to develop pear varieties that were resistant to fire blight — a dreaded orchard ailment which can take down an entire tree in one season. The disease is a major threat to pear farmers in North America and the stalwart bosc and bartlett are susceptible to it. Six varieties have made it to market — harrow crisp, harrow gold, harrow delight, harvest queen and harrow sweet. The Harovin Sundown is the latest to reach the market but its name was holding it back.

The pear itself was a hit, with its sweet taste and fresh crunch, but its name was not.

Vineland's consumer insights team conducted focus group studies to better understand consumer preferences. This work built the foundation for a robust marketing and branding strategy.

"We discovered the Cold Snap brand pear's attributes — a uniquely round shape with red blush skin, a perfect balance between sweetness and acidity and a good texture that is not too mushy or crunch — appeal to consumers," said Bowen. "The Cold Snap brand pear refreshes the pear category at retail, introducing the first innovative pear in Canada in a number of years."

The pear was licensed to Vineland in 2009. Vineland Growers Co-operative holds the commercial licence for production of the pear, providing it with exclusive Canadian rights to produce and sell the pear. Since then, 75,000 pear trees have been planted in Ontario and Nova Scotia, with plans to grow the market from coast to coast. Plantings have also begun in Europe and the United States.

This new variety is welcomed by growers for its resistance to fire blight and its longer storage life than most pears.

The pear was launched at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in November and is being marketed as winter's favourite fruit due to its longer than average shelf life.

The Cold Snap pear is available in select Loblaws, Sobeys, Costco Wholesale, Walmart and Metro stores in Canada. It will be a few more years before the pears reach peak production.