

Gala apple passes Red Delicious as America's favorite

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Credit: Charles Rondeau/public domain

At their core, Americans have changed—at least when it comes to their apple preferences.

The Red Delicious apple is expected to lose its title as the most popular apple this year, a perch it held for more than half a century.

The U.S. Apple Association is projecting that the Gala apple will usurp the Red Delicious for the top spot.

The group, which advocates on behalf of 7,500 apple growers and 400 companies in the apple business, predicted that the U.S. would grow 52.4 million Gala apples in 2018, up 5.9 percent from a year earlier.

Red Delicious apple production is expected to tumble 10.7 percent to 51.7 million.

Consumers apparently like the Gala's "taste, texture and sweetness," the U.S. Apple Association said in a statement.

"The rise in production of newer varieties of apples aimed at the fresh consumption domestic market has caused demand for Red Delicious to decline," said Mark Seetin, the association's director of regulatory and industry affairs.

The Granny Smith, Fuji and Honeycrisp apples are expected to rank third, fourth and fifth, respectively.

The Honeycrisp is surging in popularity, with production rising 21.8 percent to 23.5 million this year. That puts it ahead of the Golden Delicious apple for the first time.

The association predicted that "within a year or two" the Honeycrisp may pass the Granny Smith and Fuji, vaulting into third place.

The Honeycrisp, which was created by the University of Minnesota's apple breeding program, debuted only 21 years ago. It typically costs more than its competitors.

Until the 1970s, Americans had only a few choices of apples. While

Golden Delicious offered a color contrast and Granny Smith brought tartness to the table, the iconic Red Delicious was the star, heavily promoted by Washington state growers, Virginia-based apple historian Tom Burford told USA TODAY last year. Then wholesalers began looking for tastier varieties, finding them overseas in Japan, home to the Fuji, and New Zealand, which had the Braeburn and Gala.

Despite some encouraging trends, it's been a sour year for the apple business in general.

In fact, U.S. Apple Association Chair Mark Boyer told the group's 2018 Crop Outlook and Marketing Conference last week that it's "been one of the most challenging and unusual years in the 123-year history" of the group.

After President Donald Trump started a trade fight, retaliatory tariffs in foreign markets took a toll on the U.S. [apple](#) business, the association said. China, for example, slapped a 15 percent tariff on U.S. apples.

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