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### The Development of the Australian Sweet Persimmon Industry

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#### Abstract

Persimmons were introduced into Australia in the 1850s, probably by Chinese gold miners. Commercial production began in the late 1800s. Small quantities, presumably of astringent varieties, were exported in the early 1900s, but markets never really developed. The first non-astringent persimmon, variety Fuyu, was grown at the Merbein Research Station, in Victoria, in 1967. Commercial plantings started in the early 1980s, and tree numbers exceeded 100 000 by 1990. In 1989 a national workshop addressed the future of the industry in Australia. As a result, a group of 12 growers committed to working together to establish an export marketing strategy. This group grew to become the Australian Persimmon Export Company, now with 40 members from five states, and established as the benchmark for the rest of the industry. APEC has developed markets in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Hong Kong. Its two registered brands, "Sweet Gold" and "Golden Star", are recognized as the leading persimmon brands in Australia. In the future, more research is needed to address fruit softening problems and growers need to be focused on achieving higher percentages of export grade fruit. Market access to potentially lucrative markets such as Taiwan and Japan needs to be negotiated, and the industry must identify the means by which it will raise funds to invest in these key areas of R&D.

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