



Growers Association's recent "trimmer program," during which the association brought a demonstrator to selected supermarkets in the Dallas, TX and Seattle, WA areas, says Worthing. And although the trimmer program gets top results thanks to intensive demonstrations and sampling, sometimes combined with ads, Worthing says stores can maintain increases of 300 percent or more "with consistent use of the machines."

"We haven't maintained the volume we had [during the trimmer program], but that's strictly because of the ad" used during the program, says Mike Kinner, head produce buyer for 60 Tom Thumb supermarkets based in Dallas, TX, which participated in the recent trimmer program. "We just came off an ad five or six weeks ago and the results were tremendous," close to the volume of the trimmer program.

David Blanchard, traffic manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co. of Boca Raton, FL, which markets a manual peeler as well as an electric peeler in conjunction with Juice Tree Inc., says Dole has seen sales increases of 200 to 300 percent for its fresh pineapple when peelers are used.

Others are more conservative. Jim Davis of Juice Tree Inc., a manufacturer of electronic peeling and juicing machines based in Garden Grove, CA, says sales increases of "probably 30 percent, depending on the store" can be expected. And most of the supermarket produce managers PRODUCE BUSINESS talked to cited increases in the 100 percent range — still quite impressive.

CAN 300 TO 600 PERCENT SALES LEAPS BE IGNORED?

Pineapple Peelers Lift Tonnage But In-Store Value Still Unclear

Many retailers maintain that peelers appeal to upscale customers only, while other produce execs are pushing for machines in every store.

By DONNA CROTHERS

They cost as little as \$150 or as much as \$4,600. And when they are in use, some produce departments enjoy pineapple sales increases of 300 to 600 percent.

The "they" in this case, of course, are the many versions of pineapple peeling and coring machines. And although these devices often achieve impressive results, the jury is still out on whether every produce department should have one.

Some retailers maintain that the equipment pays its way only in stores catering to an upscale clientele. But others say that fresh pineapple, peeled and cored for convenient eating, is rapidly becoming the fruit of the masses.

No matter who is right, there is a machine to suit every store's needs, from simple mechanical models that are easy on the budget to elaborate electrical models that create quite a show for the consumer.

Reduce Intimidation, Increase Sales

"A lot of people are intimidated by pineapple. They don't know how to cut it; they

don't know how to peel it," says Ford Worthing, whose Walnut Creek, CA-based Ford Worthing Communications company handles marketing for the Pineapple Growers Association of Hawaii. "Pineapple peeling machines have done away with this intimidation factor and have dramatically increased sales."

What kind of sales increases can be expected? Estimates vary, but everyone agrees that pineapple sales jump significantly when a coring and peeling machine is used.

Howard Nager, director of trade relations for Del Monte Tropical Fruit Co. in Coral Gables, FL, says produce departments have realized pineapple sales increases of 300 to 600 percent by using the machines. Del Monte, a grower/packer/shipper of fresh pineapple, distributes a manual floor model peeler and corer.

Sales increases as high as 700 percent were not uncommon in the Pineapple

Del Monte has realized sales increases of 300 to 600 percent with its manual floor model peeler and corer.



"My experience is that it increases pineapple sales 100 percent. A machine would pay for itself within three months," says Tom Charles, produce buyer and merchandiser for Rogers Markets based in Fort Wayne, IN. Four stores in the 11-store chain have peeling machines, says Charles. He is hoping eventually to bring peelers to every store.

Winn-Dixie stores in the Miami, FL area that have brought in peeling and coring machines have seen sales "doubled almost immediately," according to Chip Walters, produce buyer for the Miami division of Winn-Dixie. "It has greatly enhanced our business," says Walters, noting that 52 of 156 stores in the Miami division have added peelers in the past year and a half.

Most managers agree that the machines don't hinder sales of unpeeled fruit. Produce managers say it is often a new customer who buys the peeled fruit, while those who prefer to buy the whole pineapple continue to do so.

"It hasn't taken anything away from our regular pineapple sales," says Kinner, noting that all 60 Tom Thumb supermarkets use manual pineapple peelers. "It's all additional sales. It has helped our pineapple sales tremendously."

A Peeler In Every Store?

Although pineapple coring and peeling devices are becoming more prevalent, they are not yet a fixture in every supermarket produce department. For example, the 1986 Produce Marketing Association Retail Produce Operations Survey, the latest PMA

survey addressing this question, showed that 16 percent of 8,708 stores surveyed used pineapple coring and peeling machines. The Pineapple Growers Association of Hawaii estimates that about 7,000 supermarkets nationwide currently have pineapple peelers.

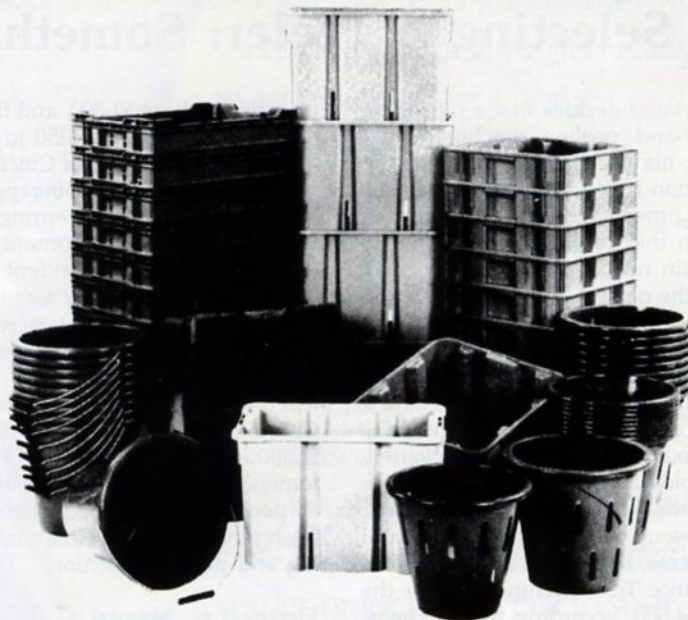
Opinions differ on whether the peeling machines belong in every store. Some say that only stores with an "upscale" clientele will find sufficient demand for fresh, peeled pineapple to make it worth buying the machines. Others say that fresh pineapple is becoming familiar to the majority of shoppers, thanks both to the peeling machines and lower prices.

"I wish we could get them into all the stores," says Walters of Winn-Dixie. "Every new location we open, we put a corer in," the majority of which are manual floor models, Walters says.

Walters disagrees with those who say fresh pineapple is the fruit of the elite. "With the nutrition consciousness increasing, sales really are going up" among all types of consumers, he says. Winn-Dixie wouldn't be as interested in the fruit if it only appealed to a specialized market, he adds, because "we are in business to feed the masses."

One way Walters achieves that goal is by offering fresh pineapple at reasonable prices. He favors medium-sized, 10- to

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12-count fruit from the Dominican Republic, rather than more expensive jumbo, Hawaiian pineapple. "If you can put pineapples out at \$1.29 to \$1.39, they really move," he says. "The jumbo fruit tend to command \$1.99 to \$2.09 [a piece], and that's a little pricy."

With the "trend toward convenience" in foods, Charles also feels that pineapple peeling and coring machines would be profitable in all 11 Rogers Markets. "In the four stores where we do have them, believe me, they help sales," he says, noting that all four machines are manual table-top models.

Like Walters, he tries to keep pineapple prices low to encourage sales among middle- and upper-income consumers. "When we advertise, we may go down to a 10-count pineapple. We just came off a 99 cents [per pineapple] ad," says Charles.

Bill Schroter, vice president of public re-

lations for Publix Super Markets, based in Lakeland, FL, says every Publix store has a manual pineapple peeling machine as "a service for the customer." Adds Schroter: "It

Although pineapple coring and peeling devices are becoming more prevalent, they are not yet a fixture in every supermarket produce department.

doesn't matter what the demographics are. It's sort of a protocol of produce merchandising."

Geared To Upscale Clientele?

Some chains, however, have found that a pineapple peeling machine in every store

is not practical. For example, Vons Grocery Company of El Monte, CA, uses electric peeling and coring machines only in the 50 of its 336 stores that have full-service melon and juice bars, with manual peelers in another 25 stores, according to Richard Spezzano, vice president of produce.

"What we're trying to do is put them in stores where we can maximize sales," says Spezzano. "I think [pineapple peeling machines] have limited use. Fresh pineapple is not a universal item in California."

For about three years, Vons has used the Juice Tree electric corers and peelers, as well as the Juice Tree juicers, in its stores with juice bars. Spezzano says the cored and peeled pineapples cost about \$1 more than the unpeeled fruit, for a total price close to \$3. "It's a value added product, and I intend to make a profit on it," says Spezzano, noting that Vons uses plastic cylinder contain-

Selecting A Peeler: Something For Every Taste

If the retailer decides that a pineapple coring and peeling machine could benefit his produce department, the next question is: Which one? There are a variety of pineapple coring and peeling devices on the market, each tailored to meet certain needs.

One of the newest, most high-tech and certainly one of the most expensive corers and peelers came about as a joint project by Juice Tree Inc., and the Dole Fresh Fruit Co. Juice Tree, which is the world's largest producer of citrus extractors, designed the electric Model 302 PP to handle a variety of pineapple sizes, peel the pineapple within seconds, and provide the customer with a closeup view of the peeling and coring process. Introduced about 2½ years ago, the Juice Tree machine sells for the price of \$4,600, according to Jim Davis, sales and marketing manager at Juice Tree.

The Dole Fresh Fruit Co. also offers a manual tabletop pineapple peeler (it does not core the fruit), the Model 102, for \$675 excluding freight charges, with discounts available for multiple orders. Paul Yoder, manager of trade relations/publicity, notes that this machine has customized blades that can be used to wedge apples and melons, as well as pineapple. A custom-fitted work/display table is available with areas for waste disposal and for displaying the cut and bagged fruit on ice in a drainage compartment. The decorative plastic work/display table sells for \$310.

Del Monte Tropical Fruit Co. offers a manual corer and peeler called the Fresh Cutter, as well as the DelBoat Cutter that cuts the fresh pineapples in half to create pineapple boats. The Del Monte Fresh Cutter is a manual, floor model peeler and corer with two stainless steel blades, heavy-duty wheels for easy mobility and an optional cutting table. The Fresh Cut-

ter sells for about \$1,300, and the DelBoat Cutter is available for \$150 to \$250.

Chiquita Brands Co. of Cincinnati, OH, introduced its manual pineapple peeling and coring machine in spring 1989 after a couple years of development, according to Jeff Krauch, vice president of marketing and operations. "We went through a few design changes that were just completed in May," including changing the leverage of the handle to make the machine "user friendly," notes Krauch. Chiquita's manual floor model sells for \$1,100 and is sold mainly to Chiquita customers, says Krauch, who estimates that 95 percent of the supermarkets that buy fresh pineapple from Chiquita have a coring and peeling machine.

Electrical vs. Manual

What are the major factors in choosing a machine? Price, reliability and ease of operation are among the top considerations mentioned by those in the business, and only the individual store manager can weigh the importance of each. For example, while an electric peeler may be quicker and easier to use, it also carries a higher price tag than most manual models. Therefore, such a peeler may be practical only in a store with high volume that requires speedy operation and supports a higher priced machine.

Yoder says the higher-priced model offered by Juice Tree and Dole "will go into more upscale stores, where you're going to have a lot of action. They have a dramatic presentation, and they are a real labor saver."

The electrical units are undoubtedly easier to use. "You simply place the pineapple in the electric peeler and it does all the work, whereas with the manual peeler, you have to pull down the handle," says

David Blanchard, traffic manager of Dole Fresh Fruit Co.

Some say the electrical peelers are less prone to break down than the manuals. Richard Spezzano, vice president of produce for Vons Grocery Company says his stores switched from manual to electric machines because "we got tired of returning them every other week ... they were difficult to deal with."

Davis says the Juice Tree/Dole electric peeler is "less wearing on somebody's arm and a little less messy" than a manual peeler. But Davis maintains, "The big advantage is that it's a wonderful merchandising tool. People can see it being cored and peeled."

While the manual corers and peelers may not put on as glitzy a show as some of the electrical models, experts agree they do the job just fine. "I think the manuals do a great job," says Ford Worthing of the Pineapple Growers Association of Hawaii.

Kinner says the manual peelers used in 60 Tom Thumb stores are easy to use and rarely break down. The chain considered buying electric peelers, he says, but "we couldn't see the benefit to them except they cut all sizes. Since we stick to one size (5 count), it didn't matter."

Yoder points out that the Dole manual table-top peeler is "much smaller, readily movable and is the most easily cleaned unit available." And, of course, in most cases, the manual peelers are significantly less expensive than the electrical, a factor mentioned by most produce managers who use the manual models.

"The electric does a better job, but the manual is less expensive," says Chip Walters of Winn-Dixie, who notes most of his stores use manual devices. "We're slowly trying to get the electric ones in, but they cost more." ■PB

WHEN HAWAIIAN FRESH PINEAPPLE GETS TRIMMER, PROFITS GET FATTER.

When retail pineapple trimmers were promoted in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego and Phoenix, supermarket produce departments discovered something very nice about them.

They helped increase Hawaiian fresh pineapple sales an average of 300%.

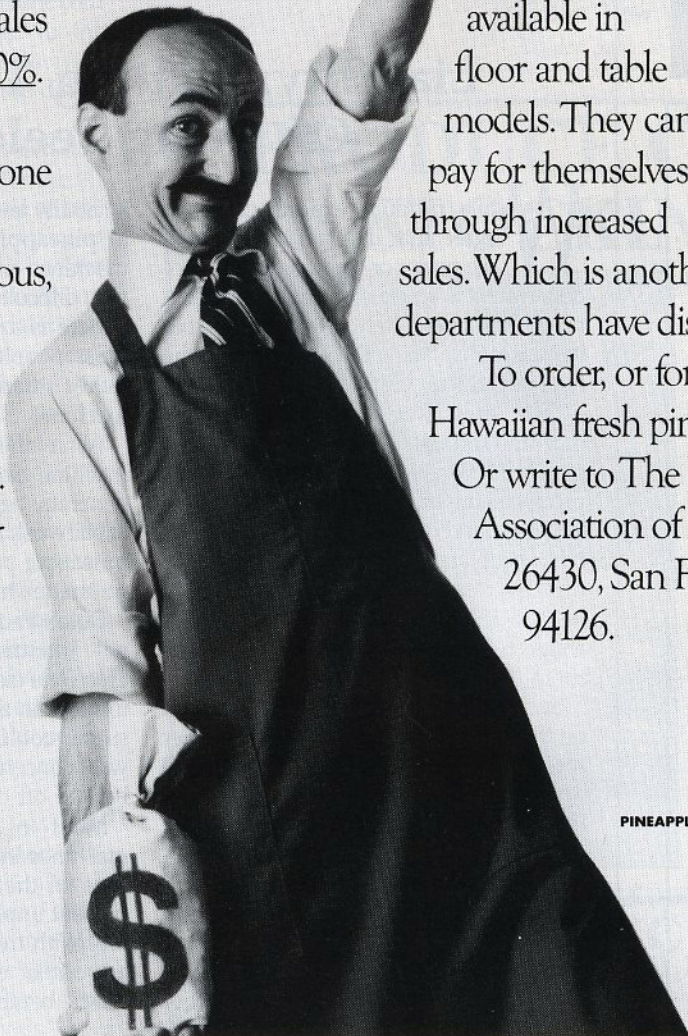
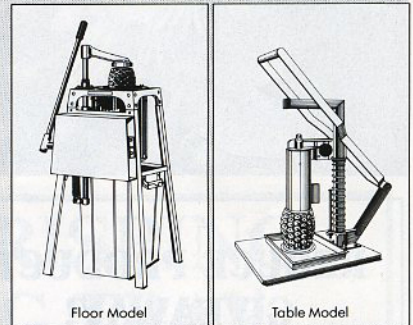
Obviously, consumers took one look at the clear packages of luscious, fresh pineapple and made a beeline for the checkout counter.

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picked was perfectly ripe. And they liked the convenience of having it peeled, cut and ready to eat when they got home.

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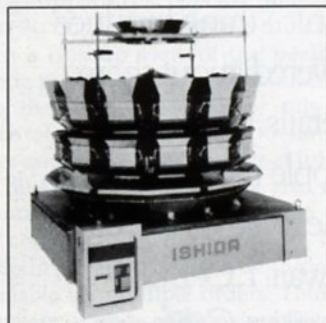


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ers that cost about 28 cents apiece, rather than the plastic bags that cost about a penny, for the fresh peeled pineapple.

Even those in the business of selling pineapple say that a peeler may not be cost-effective for every store. "These units don't work in every store," warns Paul Yoder, manager of trade relations/publicity for Dole Fresh Fruit Co. "The per capita consumption of pineapple is nowhere near what it is for bananas or apples or pears. [Buyers] tend to be people who have enjoyed pineapples on their travels to the tropics," usually a more affluent customer, he adds.

The annual per capita consumption of Hawaiian pineapple is 1 pound per capita in the western United States and 0.13 pounds per capita in the mid-western states, according to Worthing of the Pineapple Growers Association of Hawaii, which keeps figures only for 22 western states that comprise its major marketing area.

But Worthing sees pineapple becoming less of a specialty item. "It's true that upscale stores deal more with pineapple, but more and more people are eating pineapple every year, and more and more stores are carrying fresh pineapple," he says.

Pineapple companies are encouraging the use of peelers as much as possible, keep-

ing prices as low as possible on the machine to encourage stores to buy them. "Both Del Monte and ourselves aren't that concerned about whose unit gets into the store," notes Yoder. After all, Dole fruit can be cut on a Del Monte peeler, and vice versa. The companies' main emphasis is getting peelers, regardless of brand, into the stores, because "they really move pineapple," says Yoder.

Machines Must Be Visible

But obtaining a pineapple corer and peeler is only half the battle. Experts agree that using proper marketing techniques with the machine is necessary to maximize sales. For that reason, the Pineapple Growers Association of Hawaii has changed its emphasis from making produce managers aware of the machines to teaching them how to properly use them, says Worthing.

"Four or five years ago, our trimmer program was designed to make stores aware of the machines," says Worthing. "In the last year or so, the purpose has been to get the machines out of the back room and on the floor."

Experts agree that displaying and operating the peelers on the produce department floor increases sales by piquing customers' interest, letting them see the fruit

Liability: Cutting The Risk Of Using Peelers

While produce experts generally agree that displaying a pineapple peeler or corer in the produce department is an effective marketing technique, some feel there is too much liability risk in displaying the machines on the floor without an employee in attendance.

"The only way I would operate a machine on the floor is if someone manned it constantly," says Tom Charles, produce buyer and merchandiser of Rogers Markets, noting not only the liability problem but also the need to continually clean the machines. "They do need to be kept spotless, scoured with hot water," which is easier to do in the back room.

Even though the blade is not exposed on the Chiquita peeler and on most other models, vice president of marketing and operations, Jeff Krauch, also says there is the potential for injury if the machine is displayed unattended. "Someone could be playing with it and hurt himself. That's why most of the stores keep them in the back," says Krauch.

Ford Worthing of the Pineapple Growers of Hawaii says he has never heard of

a liability lawsuit or problem concerning a pineapple peeler or corer. "The machines are relatively safe. It would be very difficult to have an accident," he says. "There is a built-in safety factor in that most people will go to an attendant" rather than attempt to operate the machine.

While there is debate over where a machine can be safely displayed, it is generally agreed that there is too much liability risk to allow customers to use the pineapple peeling and coring machines, no matter how easy the operation.

Dole's Paul Yoder notes that the original intention of creating the Juice Tree/Dole electrical peeler and corer "was to have an automated unit that the consumer could operate. But what evolved was concern for legal liability, so we backed off on that."

Most of the pineapple peeling machines include safety devices such as caps for the blades and safety latches to prevent unplanned operation of the handle. With the electric peelers, the blades are out of customer reach in the clear plastic compartment. ■PB



Introduced about 2½ years ago, the Juice Tree machine sells for \$4,600, according to a company spokesman.

they buy is freshly prepared and encouraging impulse sales.

"It's an attention-getting device," says Yoder, and Worthing agrees, "You'll find customers will be intrigued by the machines and the cut pineapple."

The Juice Tree machine, in fact, is designed specifically to facilitate closeup customer viewing, with the cutting and coring process performed in a clear plastic compartment. "The main advantage to this machine is merchandising," says Davis. "If you put it in the back room, you're defeating the whole purpose."

Along with the machine, peeled and cored fruit should be on display for the impulse buyer, says Worthing. "Have at least 12 pineapples on ice. If you display pineapple enticingly, people will buy it," he says.

Of course, the number of peeled and bagged pineapples to be displayed depends on the number the store can expect to sell. Notes Walters of Winn-Dixie: "We don't encourage a large number to be cored and displayed, because if you don't sell them that day, you have to eat them the next day" by reducing the price.

Although peeled fruit is ready for the busy shopper, most supermarket produce managers say they are happy to peel a selected whole pineapple if a customer desires. Winn-Dixie stores use signs to inform customers that produce personnel will peel and core the pineapple of their choice if they prefer not to buy one of the peeled and bagged pineapples on display, according to Walters.

Most supermarket managers say they can't afford to have someone stationed at the machine constantly to cut fruit. During high-traffic periods, however, many stores do have an employee operating the machine. Publix stores often have the peelers in operation "during the weekends and during our taste-sampling periods," says Schroter. ■ PB

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