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From Farm to School: An Alternative Market for Texas Citrus

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South Texas citrus producers are concerned with general consumption trends, and so they are seeking ways to add value to their crop. In particular, the red grapefruit variety grown in south Texas is felt to be undervalued. The Rio Star variety is known for its red, sweet flesh and for having superior taste compared to pink varieties. However, much of this fruit can be cosmetically scarred, and is therefore processed for juice. The industry is currently in search of new markets, and is investigating the potential of school foodservice programs as an alternative market and fresh-cut products as alternative product forms.

We investigate the viability expanding grapefruit consumption in Texas schools through available government purchasing programs. The study

focuses on a survey of 171 foodservice directors across the state. According to the survey, directors are willing to pay \$0.18 to \$0.21 per serving for a fresh-cut grapefruit product. Respondents indicate that “food safety” and “student acceptance” are the two main factors influencing the director’s intention to buy fresh citrus. Changing student perceptions of grapefruit is an important key to gaining entrance to this market.

The results of this paper evoke several questions that need to be addressed with future research: which directors are more likely to purchase value-added products for their à la carte lines, which directors are more likely to purchase directly from local vendors, and what effect governmental programs have on citrus purchasing.

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