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Hailstorm Heroes rise in epic storm's aftermath

In the wake of a storm that is estimated to have impacted more than 80 per cent of South Australian apples and pears, Hort Innovation has launched a 'Hailstorm Heroes' campaign to assure consumers that fruit with a few spots and dots is still delicious.

Being delivered in partnership with the local industry, the campaign will feature in supermarkets and green grocers in South Australia and the Northern Territory from today onwards.

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said Hailstorm Heroes is funded using the apple and pear marketing levy and the SA industry has worked closely with the organisation to develop the initiative.

"Effectuated growers are telling us they want to get the message out to consumers loud and clear: pears and apples with a few small hail spots are still great quality and good to eat," he said.

Mr Lloyd said a severe hailstorm hit the Adelaide Hills and South East last October just as apples and pears were beginning to mature, destroying what industry estimated was a quarter of the crop.

Fifth generation apple and pear grower Brett James said his orchard was hit three times by a battering of small hail during the night of the October storm.

"The fine hail was the size of rice grains and went straight through the hail net, covering all the trees and marking the skin of small fruit that was starting to grow," Mr James said.

"Luckily, since the storm, we have had excellent growing conditions and a relatively mild summer so the apples and pears we managed to save have matured and developed delicious, full flavours - they really do taste great.

"We hope shoppers will look past the spots and support us by eating Hailstorm Hero apples and pears.

"It will make a huge difference. Everyone is facing losses this year, so every little bit helps, not only for growers but also for the towns in growing regions."

Susie Green, South Australian Apple and Pears Growers Association CEO, said estimates indicate SA growers are facing losses of more than \$32 million in fruit sales due to the widespread hailstorm.

"The storm has impacted the whole industry. Around 85-90 per cent of South Australia's apple and pears are grown in the Adelaide Hills and almost all the orchards sustained some losses during the widespread storm. There were also some losses in the South East," Ms Green said.

She said no variety escaped the storm, with a range coming to retailer shelves over the coming months.

"Royal Gala apples and Williams pears will be the first Hailstorm Heroes at supermarkets and greengrocers.

"However, all apple and pear varieties were impacted by the hailstorm and the hail marks may actually be more visible on popular varieties harvested in late Autumn, like Pink Lady and Granny Smith apples and Packham pears."

Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit, research and development corporation. It delivers more than \$100 million in research, development and marketing activities each year with funding from the Australian Government, grower levies and other sources.

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