



Ekland Marketing Company of California, Inc (EMCO CAL)

Ekland Marketing Company of California, Inc. (EMCO CAL) introduces competitive berry and citrus varieties to an extensive network of producers around the world.

Established in 1982, it implements trials and evaluation of new cultivars developed by leading variety development programs; works with growers and marketers to select and bring to market new varieties that fit the needs of the region; licenses propagators and marketing entities to use new cultivars and administers royalty programs.

Alliance boosts Florida Beauty strawberry production in Australia

EMCO CAL acts as a global commercial partner and licensee for the University of Florida's (UF) strawberry breeding program to introduce, manage, and promote UF-developed varieties. In 2022, EMCO CAL entered an agreement with JCLM Farming to supply UF-bred Florida Beauty (Australia variety denomination FL 12 121 5 cultivar) tissue culture to propagate and distribute plants to Australian growers. JCLM Farming is one of four propagators licensed to supply Florida Beauty. The variety is the only variety from the breeding program propagated by JCLM Farming. A dual-purpose variety, JCLM employs different techniques in order to supply Florida Beauty plants for both winter and summer production.

EMCO CAL Asia Pacific region vice president Dr Bharat Bhojane, who manages the Asia Pacific business from his base in India, says Florida Beauty plants perform extremely well in Australian growing conditions.

"Florida Beauty plants are designed for warm climates where traditional cold winters do not occur. Unlike traditional 'high chill' strawberries that need a long cold winter to produce fruit, zero-chill plants perform extremely well in tropical and subtropical regions. This is why the variety is such a popular choice for growers in south-east Queensland and in the major production hubs north of Perth, Western Australia," Dr Bhojane says.

Although bred as a zero-chill cultivar, JCLM Farming also chills Florida Beauty plants in a cool room so it can be supplied as a day-neutral variety to cooler growing regions in southern Queensland, south-west Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania for production during the Australian summer.



Dual-purpose versatility provides options for growers

The Florida Beauty FL 12 1215 cultivar developed by the UF in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries first became available to commercial growers for the 2017-2018 season. It is a cross between a Queensland selection (2010-119) and the Florida Radiance variety. It is highly valued for early, high-yield production, providing the potential for early market access and optimal prices for growers.

“Our UF varieties focus mainly on flavour but also high-yield, disease-resistance. Before Florida Beauty, we had Fortuna and Festival and recently we’ve been given access to three more varieties including a white strawberry variety (sold commercially as Florida Pearl® brand). Florida Beauty is not new but its main drawcard for Australian growers is that it has a very good flavour profile and has a good size. While it is generally disease resistant, in the same way that a Formula 1 race car requires special fuel, Florida Beauty requires growing techniques to prevent exposure to Neopestalotiopsis, which is easy to do now with modern growing systems. The brix is also very good, averaging between 9 and 12,” he says.

“Another advantage of this variety is its good pollination and cell pollination ability. The plant itself is very compact so growers can accommodate slightly more plants in the growing area – it’s an excellent variety for substrate and tunnel production for winter production.

“For farmers with substrate and tunnel or open-top systems, I would recommend plug plants because when plants are propagated in coir, they do better when grown in coir. If the grower is using bareroot plants, it's best the flower is removed first (by JCLM Farming) so there's a good balance between roots and the leaves.

“JCLM Farming is doing a very good job with the Florida Beauty variety, especially making two types of product – bareroot plants and plug plants in a hanging curtain system.

“The Australia strawberry industry still has many challenges. Growing in soil is very difficult due to climate change and weather events. Growers are having to transition to tabletop systems where they have more control. Access to new varieties – including Australian-bred varieties – is important.

“The Australian quarantine system is also very strict and it takes a great deal of time to make a commercial variety which requires significant investment from the propagator. Once a propagator shows interest in a variety, we send four to six tissue culture plants in a tube, they have to be in quarantine for a minimum of one year and they will take another three or four years to get to commercial production. It's a very long and time-consuming system to bring a new variety to market” Dr Bhojane says.

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