**CONTACT:**

Julia Stewart for Fiction Tribe

jstewart@prclarity.com

(703) 727-8808 cell

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**RETAILERS “REALLY TAKING TO” VINTAGE SWEETANGO CROP, DRIVING UP SALES**

**Swedesboro, N.J.** (*Sept. 16, 2020*)Just three weeks into the 2020 SweeTango® apple season, the brand’s marketing and sales desks report that retailers are “really taking to” a “vintage” crop, driving sales up more than 15 percent year-over-year. Meanwhile, the grower cooperative behind the variety reports it is working to fuel consumer demand by executing a range of outreach tactics adapted for COVID times.

“Our focus this season is on powering consumer pull-through, since food at home is where it is now and will be for a while,” said Jennifer Parkhill of Next Big Thing, A Growers’ Cooperative. “So we’ll be online, on air and in print where our target audiences are.”

**Crop is “vintage”**

This year’s SweeTango harvest got underway first in Washington state’s warmer climates, and is now wrapping up in the cooler regions of the East and Midwest. The co-op’s regional marketing and sales leads all called out the extraordinary quality of this year’s crop.

”This is the best eating fruit we’ve ever had – grab any bin coming in from the field, it’s top-level stuff. The packinghouse smells like a candy factory, the aroma stays on your clothes like cologne,” said Austin Fowler with Eastern region marketing and sales lead Fowler Farms. “We are really excited to have this quality of fruit this year, that makes us an easy choice for retailers and consumers.”

“We’ve got a vintage crop. The quality, condition and eating experience are outstanding,” agreed Scott Swindeman with Midwest region SweeTango lead Applewood Fresh Growers. “That creates opportunities for us to work with retailers to promote and advertise this apple to consumers like never before.”

Roger Pepperl with Western region SweeTango marketing and sales lead Stemilt Growers, concurred. “Our growing season was fantastic; the fruit has great color and sugars. And [in Washington state] we got the crop off the trees before the fire winds hit.”

A former retailer, Pepperl noted several factors are converging for this now-proven, consumer favorite brand. “We have really wide distribution this year, with more participation from a broader variety of retailers – from the local and regional upscale markets, to the national chains and big-box retailers,” he said.

Pepperl also reported SweeTango has developed a strong organic following as those supplies expand, noting, “Organic has become the real deal, lots of organic retailers are jumping into SweeTango.”

And he highlighted the brand’s packaging pivot to meet consumers where they are today. “Our new 3-pound pouch is made for today’s shoppers: they are shopping less frequently, but their basket size is larger. We’ve shifted at least 5 percent of the SweeTango crop from bulk to bagged,” he said.

Swindeman attributed the variety’s strong success to date to the cooperative’s unique team-centered organizational model.

“We grow and pack fruit in five states and two Canadian provinces, so we coordinate across five time zones to get this apple to market,” he said. “This brand has succeeded because our regional sales desks do a great job of working together, all pulling as a team from the same end of the rope to get great product in front of consumers.”

Scotian Gold is SweeTango marketing and sales lead in Canada.

**COVID spurs marketing creativity**

Reporting on the brand’s marketing strategy this year, Fowler said, “With COVID, a lot of the usual person-to-person marketing tactics have been wiped out. We’ve had to get more creative to reach consumers.”

He noted the Next Big Thing cooperative has a range of consumer engagements planned, from animated videos that rewrite history to insert SweeTango, to a new partnership with the influencers at The Produce Moms. “We even wrote a jingle – we think we may be the first apple variety to have a jingle,” he said, “Retailers have bit on that hard.”

Calling on retailers to tap into SweeTango’s early momentum this year, Fowler said, “We want to target markets where we’ve historically had good customers and good movement, and build on that… We don’t want anyone to miss out in such a great year.”

To convert consumer interest into purchases, a new SweeTango.com website launching soon will feature a zip code-based product locator to help them find a seller in their area. Alternately, consumers can order fruit directly from SweeTango growers through the site.

Recognizing another reality of the times, a “Crunch with Care” humanitarian campaign will donate to SweeTango fans’ food banks.

“We are proud to be essential to feeding America’s families, and want to help Americans be healthier and happier right now,” said Fowler.

***EDITORS,*** [***DOWNLOAD***](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4ngg25r0qh1yscy/AAD43t5ttjoRtntDzlhDHgH4a?dl=0) ***HIGH-RESOLUTION ARTWORK TO ACCOMPANY YOUR COVERAGE OF THIS NEWS:***

* *SweeTango® color logo*
* *Retail waterfall display (note, this photo is not from 2020): 2020-crop SweeTangos are now shipping to retailers coast to coast.*
* *Guitar photo: With a new jingle on board, SweeTango apples will literally rock this season.*
* *Cut apple photo: SweeTango growers call this year’s crop quality “vintage.”*

***ABOUT NEXT BIG THING, A GROWERS’ COOPERATIVE***

*Next Big Thing, A Growers’ Cooperative is a member cooperative of more than 50 family growers, spread over five time zones from Nova Scotia to Washington state. The co-op licenses, grows and markets premium, managed varieties of apples, beginning with SweeTango®.*

***ABOUT SWEETANGO® APPLES***

*SweeTango’s signature taste, texture and quality stem from careful breeding, meticulously-selected growing locations and expert horticultural practices. Expert apple breeders at the University of Minnesota crossed the sweet Honeycrisp and the tangy Zestar! varieties to create SweeTango’s more complex, crowd-pleasing flavor profile: sweet, with a touch of citrus, honey and spice. First introduced at retail in the United States and Canada in 2009 and supported by coordinated strategic marketing, this brand has grown into a top-5 trademark apple. SweeTango is a registered trademark of Regents of the University of Minnesota. More information on SweeTango can be found at*[*www.sweetango.com*](http://www.sweetango.com/)*or on Facebook at*[*www.facebook.com/sweetango*](http://www.facebook.com/sweetango)*.*

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