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The Burdekin Grower

Achacha finds new northern home

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The Achacha has found a new home in sunny North Queensland. Picture: supplied

WITH its hip-wiggling name and sweet, yet tangy flavour, the Achacha looks set to be the newest exotic tropical fruit on the block.

Known as the achachairú in the Bolivian Amazon Basin, where it originates, the Achacha is a luscious eye-catching fruit with an orange shell.

Reminiscent of a mangosteen or a lychee from South-East Asia, the fruit has been cultivated for centuries as the prized 'honey kiss'.

The Achacha has now found a new home in sunny, north Queensland alongside mangoes, melons and mangroves and vast fields of sugar cane.

A part-owner of Palm Creek Plantation, Australia's only commercial grower of Achachas, Helen Hill said the venture started when a Bolivian friend, Hugo Aguilar, decided he could not live without his favourite New Year fruit.

"Thirteen years ago, at the encouragement of Hugo, we became part of a group establishing the world's first commercial Achacha plantation," she said.

Given that it was impossible to import, Hugo Aguilar turned to some of his friends to help him grow it in Australia.

"First of all, he had to convince them that it existed, as there were no web or book references to the fruit. He imported a small quantity and based on its attractive look, unique taste and its long shelf life a team was assembled.

An agreement was drawn up with the Bolivian Government and AQIS to bring in the seeds and things have progressed from there," Mrs Hill said.

In Bolivia, the fruit is grown in small forest clearings but for the project to succeed in Australia, (the first time the fruit had been grown in a commercial environment) long unprotected rows were required.

Helen Hill said they've had their ups and downs and still have a long way to go and a lot to learn.

"It has been a steep learning curve growing, marketing and transitioning what was a forest fruit to a sophisticated commercial environment. It has been a big gamble. We didn't see our first fruit until seven years after the first seedlings were planted.

"That year, we had 700 Achachas, which were used to learn how best to describe the flavour. Output has been increasing steadily ever since and as our 16,000 trees mature, each should produce about 2,000 fruit," she commented.

Palm Creek Plantation is located 45 kilometres south of Townsville; at about the same latitude as where the Achacha is grown in the Amazon Basin. The area, on the edge of the Burdekin, is very beautiful and is backed by mountains and is close to wetlands.

Helen Hill said they are now exporting to several countries around the world, including the United Kingdom.

"The word is slowly getting out and demand is growing. We also have an Achacha blossom honey which is growing in demand."

Both the fruit and the honey were selected as finalists in this year's ABC Delicious Product Awards.

Taste experts have described the fruit as sweet, tangy, refreshing and sorbet like and, along with the flesh, the skin can be used to make a healthy drink.

Some ice-cream makers have discovered the potential of the pulp for a lovely refreshing sorbet on a hot day.

The University of New South Wales has carried out nutritional tests and given the fruit the thumbs up. It is low in sugars, a good source of vitamin C, folate, potassium, antioxidants, among other things and if a drink is made from the skin, then this is also a good source of betacarotene and hydroxycitrate.

The future certainly seems bright for the exotic and delightful Achacha.

Helen Hill will also be taking centre stage at this year's Queensland Rural Regional and Remote Women's Network (QRRRWN) doing a Question and Answer segment at the Conference in Charters Towers, September 15 to 17.