What Exactly Consumers Like About Apples?
By R. Karina Gallardo, Ines Hanrahan, James Luby, Chengyan Yue, Vicki McCracken, James McFerson, Carolyn Ross, and Lilian Carrillo-Rodriguez

We combined sensory evaluation with monetary bids submitted in three different rounds in which information was disclosed progressively, first appearance, then taste, finally appearance and taste. We obtained instrumental measures for salient quality attributes for each apple sample evaluated by each panelist, in this way we were able to make a side-by-side comparison of the effects of instrumental measures and panelists’ ratings on bidding behavior.

The highest bids were observed when panelists were presented with both appearance and experience quality characteristics. We found that for some attributes such as sweetness, panelists preferred levels closer to their ideal rather than objectively-measured higher levels. When evaluating consumers’ preference and valuation for different fresh fruit varieties, a greater explanatory power is obtained when including an indicator variable for the variety along with the set of quality attributes. The indicator variable could improve the control of inherent factors related with the varieties but cannot be observed or inferred easily. Finally, our findings add to previous studies in that flavor, when expressed as a combination of sweetness and acidity in addition to textural attributes, firmness and crispness, are important determinants of consumers’ acceptance of apples. Overall our findings add to the evidence that consumers prefer and are willing to pay a price premium -ranging from $0.18/lb to $0.23/lb- for Honeycrisp compared to Gala apples.