



Massimiliano Ceccarini of SIPO

Massimiliano Ceccarini, general manager of Italian fresh and prepared produce company SIPO, believes two or three more years of growth are needed before his company's new fresh-cut product really takes off. Tit-Bit, a range of fresh-cut fruit and fruit salads, is produced by Speedyfrutta, a new joint venture set up by SIPO and Apofruit Italia.

At the moment, the single, packaged portions of ready-to-eat fruit are being trialed in a number of Italian bars, some of them by the sea - the Riviera Romagnola, Rimini and Isola d'Elba for example - and others in city centres such as Rome, Bologna, Genoa and Milan. Trials are also being carried by a number of supermarkets, including Coop Italia, Auchan, Conad and Carrefour, but with limited success.

"The supermarkets are still not entirely sure about Tit-Bit, because they are not sure

they can sell it," says Mr Ceccarini. "We are definitely having better results in the bars. It's a high-cost product and perhaps tourists are prepared to pay more. If we continue to see positive results then we will introduce Tit-Bit to all parts of the Italian coast," he says.

Although the product's six day shelf-life makes it impractical to export throughout Europe, Tit-Bit is currently being shipped to Athens, with labels printed in both Greek and Italian. However, the Italian market remains the primary focus, according to Mr Ceccarini. "When it really takes off we are aiming to be producing some 2,000 crates (3,200kg) per day," he says.

The produce used for the Tit-Bit range of products comes from all over the world. Oranges are brought in from Sicily and apples from Trentino, while pineapples, melons and coconuts are imported from Central America. While out of season, kiwifruit is shipped variously from Chile and Africa. "We try to source from Italy wherever we can. All of them are high quality products," says Mr Ceccarini.

So why fresh-cut? Mr Ceccarini believes eating habits in Italy have changed dramatically, even in the last few years. "The rhythms of work have changed. We can't go home and have long lunches anymore," he says. "What's more, people are leaving home at a younger age, more of them are living alone and less are getting married. The need to buy produce that is already prepared has grown considerably." ●●●