

# Strawberry



Strawberry variety trials

Florida's strawberry breeding program began in 1948 with Albert Brooks, a plant pathologist. Brooks introduced **Florida Ninety** in 1952, and it quickly became the dominant variety grown in Florida. Its yields were as much as three times higher than those of **Missionary**, the variety it replaced, and it had a moderately high degree of resistance to crown rot. Florida Ninety remained the standard variety in central Florida until the mid-1960s, at which time it was replaced by **Daybreak**, a Louisiana variety susceptible to crown rot, but with better shipping quality than Florida Ninety.

During the 1970s and 1980s, growers in west central Florida used mostly University of California varieties. These varieties produced fruit that were acceptable to consumers, but most of them ripened in March and April when fresh market prices were relatively low. In addition, the California varieties were generally quite susceptible to anthracnose fruit rot, a disease that can be devastating in warm, wet weather.

Charles Howard, a plant pathologist at GCREC-Dover, introduced **Florida Belle** in 1975 and **Dover** in 1979. These varieties had good resistance to crown rot and

were higher yielding than the California varieties when grown in central Florida, but neither was long-lived in the industry because of fruit quality problems.

Plant breeder Craig Chandler introduced **Sweet Charlie** in 1992. This variety produced higher fruit yields from December through February than any other available variety. It was also the only variety adapted to central Florida that was resistant to anthracnose fruit rot. The percentage of the west central Florida strawberry acreage planted in Sweet Charlie rose steadily from 5 percent in the 1992-93 season to about 50 percent in the 1998-99 season. Concurrently, from 1991 to 1998 the average per-flat price rose from \$8.00 to \$12.00, acreage rose from 5,400 acres to 6,200 acres, and total value of the crop rose from \$109 million to \$161 million. Internationally, Sweet Charlie has been grown successfully in many of the world's winter production areas, and plant sales of this variety outside the U.S. and Canada have grown steadily.

The Florida strawberry industry has continued to grow. There are now approximately 7,000 acres in production, with a crop value approaching \$200 million. This growth is being fueled, in part, by new variety releases from the FAES breeding program.

**Earlibrite**, **Strawberry Festival** and **Carmine** can produce high early-season yields of flavorful fruit, and their fruit have a significantly longer shelf life than that of Sweet Charlie. Strawberry Festival is currently the number one variety in west central Florida, occupying more than 30 percent of the acreage.

## Strawberry Varieties Produced at FAES

Variety	Date of Release
Florida Ninety	1952
Florida Belle	1975
Dover	1979
Sweet Charlie	1992
Rosa Linda	1996
Earlibrite, Strawberry Festival	2000
Carmine	2002