

There's exciting news for Fresca this week with the announcement that a cash injection of £30,000 has been awarded to an innovation project we've been working on with a grower in Essex.



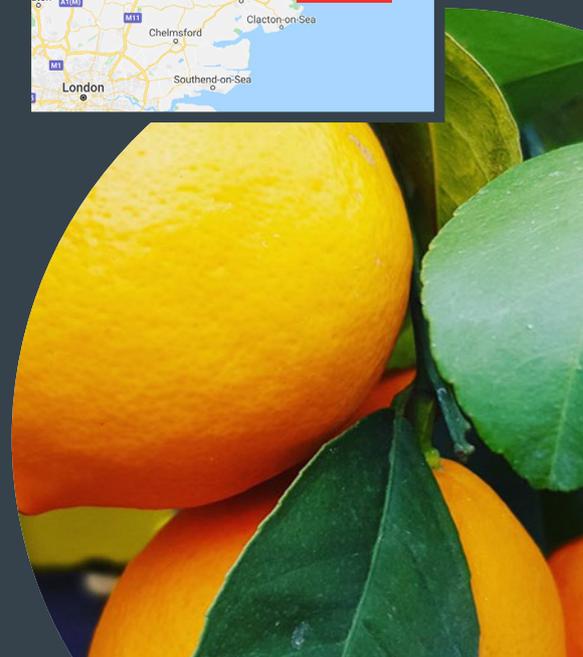
Sharing ideas with people who think creatively and who want to develop fresh opportunities is very important for Fresca. Our customers need us to keep pushing new products and ideas forward to help them keep a point of difference in stores.

For a number of years now we've had an informal partnership with grower Pete Thompson. He's a third generation, family farmer at George Thompson Ltd near Harwich on the Essex coast.



Whilst the core production on Pete's farm is a Chinese-style leaf and jumbo salad onions supplied mainly to the Chinese wholesalers and restaurant suppliers here in the UK, the farm has a maritime climate that's ideal for fruit growing too. It's particularly mild and offers good protection for orchard crops.

Alongside apples and pears, Pete has been experimenting with some very unusual products and there are parts of his farm where the weird and the wonderful grow! We've visited the farm to see it progress, and now we want to work more closely to help Pete grow on a larger scale. What he's doing is very unusual for the UK.





The potential is that we could offer products like UK-grown lemons, figs, stone fruit and oca. We're looking to see if the warmer temperatures that climate change brings us will facilitate an expansion of crops that we had always dismissed as 'too difficult' for UK production.

The £30,000 has been awarded to Fresca's joint project with Thompsons, The Innovation Centre. It's a grant made by The Worshipful Company of Fruiterers together with the Journal of Horticultural Science and will be paid over a 3 year period.

Three years is the perfect amount of time for Pete to plant new, young trees and bring them into production. This money allows experimentation with different varieties and rootstocks, to assess which combinations will perform best in the UK. Alongside the orchard work, Thompson's have also been growing unusual tomatoes, fresh chickpeas and a wide variety of herbs, for example. There's huge potential and it's a lot of fun seeing the ideas progress to reality. The partners share a vision of sustainable production and will be investing in environmentally-friendly tree protection, additional crop monitoring, experiments with aquaponics (using fish production as part of the growing system) and building a small lab and demonstration kitchen.



Fresca Chief Executive, Ian Craig, said:

"Keeping ourselves at the forefront of innovation work is so important to Fresca Group and our customers. We are very proud of how many 'first to market' opportunities we've had in the past and we aren't slowing up now. Demand for UK crops is high. This is a great way to invest in the future of the industry and to help define the opportunities for growers as we look to grow more in a changing climate."

Both Fresca Group and George Thompson Ltd want to thank the panel from the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers and the Journal of Horticultural Science for this generous award.

