

NZ GROWER

Queensland fruit fly...

Strikes twice in 18 months

Stink bug alert

MPI on watch for nasty insect

Product Groups

Exciting conference lineup

Aussies buy local

So should we



HIGH FLIER

Allan sets up shop
in Hong Kong

A photograph of Allan Fong, a middle-aged man with short dark hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark purple zip-up jacket with a small logo on the chest and dark blue cargo pants. He is standing in a vegetable field with rows of green plants stretching into the background.

Kiwi grower flies high in Hong Kong

By Glenys Christian

Pukekohe vegetable grower Allan Fong's grandfather and father left Canton in China to come to New Zealand 60 years ago.

Now Allan is air freighting two consignments of fresh fruit and vegetables a week to Hong Kong to be sold in his Fresh Grower store there.

"It's crazy we're sending Asian vegetables up there. It's like sending coals to Newcastle."

The venture came about after a friend of his sister Noon, Angela Leung, visited from Hong Kong to buy racehorses.

"She said to me the produce here tasted so good and they didn't get that in Hong Kong."

So two years ago they started talking about the possibility of opening a

shop in Hong Kong to supply a range of vegetables to shoppers prepared to pay top prices for the quality Allan could provide.

Allan had tried exporting fresh vegetables to the market four years ago but found that with the larger volumes he was sending he couldn't compete with the prices of other imported produce coming from China, South East Asia and the United States.

"The freight cost is three times the produce's value," he said.

But Angela Leung convinced him that he could send smaller parcels of

produce there and sell them for prices up to 10 times what Hong Kong buyers would usually spend.

With the branding of the small store in Kennedy Town, cooking demonstrations by his chef son Ryan and listening to customer feedback passed on by store manager Jason Li, Allan's earnings have doubled over the last six months.

A head of cos lettuce sells for more than \$10 and Belleverde sweet stem broccoli for more than \$15/kg with eager customers returning for vegetables fresher and more full of flavour than competing offerings.



Crops harvested in the morning from the 150ha where Allan grows vegetables will be on sale in the store in Hong Kong the next afternoon.

Generally a selection of vegetables which are seasonally available are sent with consignments filled out with a small amount of fruit customers ask for, such as blueberries.

Allan said shoppers want to know a lot about where the produce they buy is grown. Because of the high levels of air and water pollution in China they don't trust vegetables grown there. Salad vegetables are particularly popular due to food safety concerns, with customers needing to know that

what they buy is not only fresh but good for them.

"It's like wine being characterised by the environment where the grapes are grown.

"Veges have that same provenance. It's all about water, air and sunlight and we also talk a lot about our volcanic soils and their characteristics."

Allan has done his turn, talking to customers, answering questions about different crops and how they can be used in a variety of dishes, and looking at what Kiwi and Chinese cuisines can learn from each other.

While ex-pats were some of the first to come and shop at the Fresh Grower, Allan said the growing number of Chinese customers is surprising.

"Hong Kong families are small and they want the best for their children. And we do produce in a different way, with a Western twist."

In the future he'd like to look at opening more stores to build a bigger customer base in Hong Kong. Inquiries have also come in about setting up shops in Singapore or Malaysia.

"But you have to find the right partner." 🇳🇿