

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



VEGGIE-FORWARD

DISHES BECOME TRENDY

SUPPLEMENT

The Future is NOW

NEW YORK MARKET PROFILE

EXCLUSIVE

PRODUCE BUSINESS FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

INSIDE

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES PMA/UNITED'S JOINT LABOR INITIATIVE
TURMERIC • FOODSERVICE IN SCHOOLS • SNACK ATTACK
CALIFORNIA GRAPES • FIGS • DISTRIBUTION SOFTWARE
ALFALFA'S MARKET • REGIONAL PROFILE: INDIANAPOLIS
GARLIC • HERBS • DATES AND DRIED FIGS



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Dole is making healthy living a team sport in 2016! For the second year in a row, we're launching a nationwide summer tour and providing unique new recipes and action-inspiring incentives, all to challenge Americans to get healthy together by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables.

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TOUR



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CHALLENGE



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RECIPES



Developed by our Culinary Nutrition team, our newest fresh fruit and vegetable recipes are ideal for sharing with family and friends this summer.

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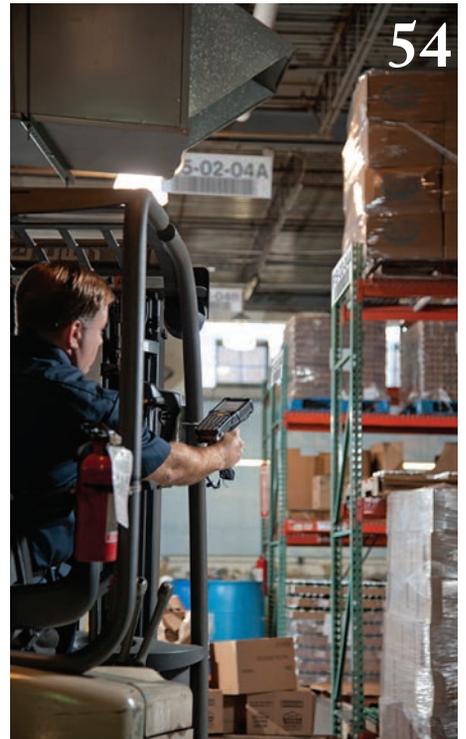
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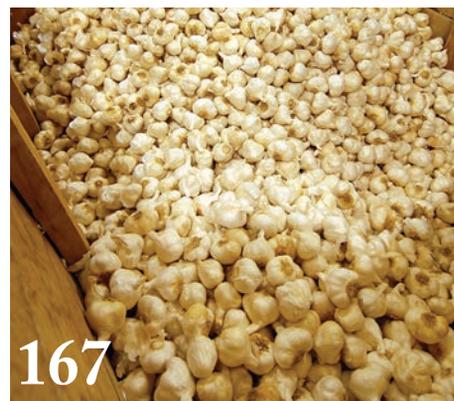
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produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



MARK BARRY
Manager - Produce
Wendy's Quality Supply
Chain Co-op, Inc.
Dublin, OH

Prior to his history with Wendy's, Mark Barry received his economics degree from Penn State University, and he began working for a manufacturing company in Cleveland buying traction motors.

His educational strengths and prowess for analytical work led him to a position with Wendy's Quality Supply Chain Co-op (QSCC) as an analyst for commodities in the risk management area.

"I took the position with Wendy's three-and-a-half years ago, and I worked on

hedging the commodities that go into our final products," explains Barry.

Then, close to four months ago, some internal shifting offered him the opportunity to take on management of produce for the QSCC. He's learning how often the distribution centers receive deliveries, product is moved, how many times a week, as well as how much food is grown and shipped.

"We work with distribution centers throughout the country, including Canada, to ensure all product is ordered on time to restaurants and within the correct amount of time," says Barry.

He says the produce industry is treating him well. "It's fast pace, it keeps you on your toes; you're always learning something new every day, so it makes [work] interesting, and the people are great to work with."

How To Win! To win the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our September issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

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Perfect for this hot summer month, homemade frozen treats are just minutes away. From ice cream and gelato to fruit sorbet (using fresh fruits) and frozen yogurt, this brushed-stainless-steel device whips up a 2-quart batch of your favorite frosty dessert in roughly 20 minutes. The digital control panel has a countdown timer and one-touch settings for ice cream, gelato or sorbet. The lid has a spout with integrated measuring cup for adding mix-ins such as chocolate chips and nuts.



QUESTIONS FOR THE JULY ISSUE

- 1) Which certified Women Owned Business offers Nourish Bowls? _____
- 2) What brand has fresh-cut celery sticks containing peanut butter and Ranch dips? _____
- 3) What grower delivers hydroponic Butter Lettuce from the East Coast to the West Coast? _____
- 4) What is the Twitter handle for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc.? _____
- 5) What is the sales department email address for Tasti-Lee Tomatoes? _____
- 6) What type of dip is showcased on the ad for Simply Concord/Concord Foods? _____

This issue was: Personally addressed to me Addressed to someone else

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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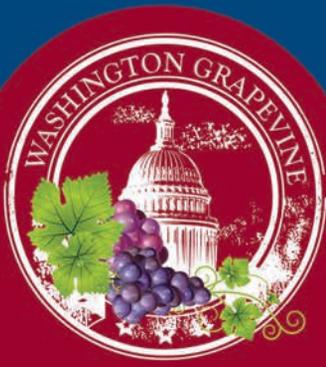


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The Future Of Labeling Biotechnology In Foods



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS,
UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

“**G**enetic engineering” (GE) has become a lightning rod in public discussion of food. Many people refer to genetic engineering — or more confusingly — GMO (genetically modified organism) as a catchall term for products developed through biotechnology.

Crops that utilize what we’ve come to know as biotechnology first came into the food supply in the 1990s. For much of the time since, the issue of regulating the use of biotechnology has largely not been a matter of controversy. But that has changed significantly in recent years. A watershed moment in the regulation of biotechnology happened in 2014 when the state of Vermont was the first in the nation to pass a genetic engineering label law.

Under the Vermont law, starting on July 1 of this year, foods produced through genetic engineering, or that contain genetically engineered ingredients, must be labeled as such at the retail point of sale. More specifically, what does the law do? The state of Vermont will require foods that have been genetically engineered, or that contain genetically engineered ingredients, be labeled with that information at point of retail sale.

The law defines what is “genetically engineered,” and implementing regulations define what is not “genetically engineered,” that is, traditional breeding techniques and hybridization. The law also outlines specific requirements for food suppliers and retailers of those products.

What does this law mean for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry? There are actually very few fruits and vegetables that could be genetically engineered (GE)

and would be subject to the law. The only genetically engineered fruits and vegetables approved for sale in the United States are a few varieties of sweet corn, squash, papayas, potatoes and apples. However, the recently approved Arctic Apple variety (produced by Summerland, British Columbia-based Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc.) is not yet in the retail market; therefore, no apples for sale in the United States are currently genetically engineered.

The law in question applies only to foods sold in Vermont. The compliance requirements of the law are applicable only to Vermont retailers who sell food, and suppliers of genetically engineered varieties to those retailers. While this is a very narrow audience, United Fresh advises produce suppliers of commodities that are of genetically engineered varieties to ensure that their products do not inadvertently make their way to Vermont unless those products are in compliance with the Vermont labeling standards.

For companies handling produce commodities other than those listed above, and for supply chains truly distinct with no chance of arriving in Vermont retail stores, there is no need to take any other action.

All of this begs the question: What does this mean for the labeling of foods across the country that have been produced using biotechnology? The passage of Vermont’s law has set off an intense debate in Congress about what standards should be at the federal level for labeling GMO-derived foods. As of this writing, protracted negotiations in that body have not resulted in a final agreement. However, a lack of a unified federal policy will not dampen the debate and how best to provide consumers

with information about foods made with genetically engineered crops is a discussion that is bound to continue.

As for United Fresh, we believe the most recent National Academy of Sciences analysis of current commercial genetically engineered crops to be the definitive scientific review of these issues. After reviewing more than 900 research publications, hearing from 80 different experts, and reviewing 700 comments from the general public, the NAS committee found no evidence of a difference in risk to human health or environmental impact between current GE crops and conventionally bred crops.

In the marketplace, we believe consumers are best served by one national standard with regard to labeling foods that may or may not contain genetically engineered ingredients. Federal labeling standards are essential to prevent a patchwork quilt of varying state rules and regulations that would confuse consumers and cause significant disruption in the interstate food distribution chain.

United Fresh will continue to work with the FDA and Congress to implement sound, national policies that assure the safety of all foods, and provide consumers with transparency in their food choices.

Finally, we also believe a robust dialogue about plant breeding, biotechnology and development of new varieties to meet consumer needs is important. Much of the concern in today’s marketplace is the result of lack of information about plant breeding, and the specific care that is used in developing new plant varieties. We call on government and industry partners to continue building a transparent dialogue with consumers.

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TRANSITIONS



Gina Nucci



Loree Dowse

**MANN PACKING
SALINAS, CA**

Mann Packing Company announces **Gina Nucci's** promotion to director of corporate marketing and **Loree Dowse's** role as foodservice marketing manager. In her newly-created role, Nucci will lead the company's efforts to develop, implement and evaluate marketing programs that promote Mann's image in the marketplace. She will also develop strategic product messaging and support revenue-generating initiatives, as well as establish and maintain consistent company and brand messaging communication. Dowse will now be in charge of all marketing programs geared toward Mann's foodservice customers. She brings with her a background in marketing and communications as well as culinary arts. In addition to traditional marketing activities, she also conducts recipe development, advises on new products, and authors the foodservice blog.

TRANSITION

**CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL
LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION
SALINAS, CA**

The California Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF) announces the hiring of **Barry Bedwell** as its new president. CALF operates the California Agricultural Leadership Program, which is considered to be one of the premier leadership development experiences in the United States. Since it was first delivered in 1970, more than 1,300 men and women have participated in the program. As president, Bedwell will be responsible for directing all foundation activities and guiding the leadership program to a half-century of excellence and beyond. Outgoing CALF president and chief executive, Bob Gray, is retiring after seven years with the foundation.



TRANSITION

**UNITED FRESH
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

United Fresh Produce Association names Jennifer McEntire, Ph.D., as its new vice president, food safety & technology. She succeeds Dr. David Gombas, who retired from the association, recently, after 11 years leading its food safety program. Dr. McEntire served as vice president for science operations at the Washington, D.C.-based Grocery Manufacturers Association, working with the largest food companies in the world. Dr. McEntire received her Bachelor of



Science degree with distinction from the University of Delaware, and her Ph.D. in food science from Rutgers University.

Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a high resolution image to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com

TRANSITIONS

**MISSION PRODUCE
OXNARD, CA**

Mission Produce hires two sales representatives in its domestic sales department. **Dale Sanders** comes to Mission with more than 12 years of sales experience in agricultural seeds and fresh produce. His responsibilities include new business development and key account management. He is a graduate of California State University Channel Islands, with a degree in business.



Santiago Peña comes to Mission from Boskovich Farms with seven years of sales experience, where he was responsible for selling more than 20 commodities, and managing customer relationships. He is fluent in Spanish and has a business administration degree from California Lutheran University.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**NATURIBE FARMS'
FIRST PICK OF NEW
JERSEY BLUEBERRIES**

The New Jersey blueberry harvest season has started for Naturipe (Salinas, CA) grower, Atlantic Blueberry Company, with anticipation for another great season. Established in 1935, Atlantic Blueberry Company, fully owned by the Galletta family, exemplifies what it means to be a local family farm, yet the company's efforts reach beyond the local communities. Art Galletta, president of the blueberry operation, works hand in hand with second, third and now fourth generation Galletta family members to work the farm.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**UNITED SALAD CO. AND DUCK
DELIVERY PRODUCE, INC.
COMPLETE EXPANSION PROJECT**

Portland-based United Salad Co. and Duck Delivery Produce, Inc. recently concluded the final phase of its expansion to its fresh produce warehouse in Portland. The additional 50,000 square foot space increases overall capacity by more than 30 percent, including a state-of-the-art refrigerated storage space and additional parking for 75 semi-trucks and 100 spaces for employee parking. The expansion project is dedicated to facilitating the growth of the customer base, as well as increasing the distribution of USDA-certified organic produce.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**RED SUN FARMS SETS STANDARD
IN GREENHOUSE HOUSING**



Red Sun Farms (Wapakoneta, OH) is investing in VectorBloc housing at its new Wapakoneta greenhouse location. Its continued commitment to social responsibility and quality of life are the driving forces behind this revolutionary housing investment. Each modular design includes 1,134 square feet of living space complete with two living rooms, two kitchenettes, two bathrooms, and four bedrooms. A minimum of five housing units will be built on the property this September.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**MCDILL ASSOCIATES OFFICIALLY
CERTIFIED AS A WOMAN OWNED
SMALL BUSINESS**

McDill Associates (Soquel, CA), a strategic marketing agency with deep roots in the produce industry, has been officially certified as a Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB), by the National Women Business Owners Corporation (NWBOC). As the first national certifier of Women Business Enterprises, more than 700 public and private sector individuals participated in establishing the NWBOC's standards and procedures of this rigid certification review. The goal of the certification program is to streamline the certification process and increase the ability of women business owners to compete for contracts at a national level.



ANNOUNCEMENT



**RESEARCH SHOWS
CORRUGATED PACKAGING IS SAFER**

The Fibre Box Association (Itasca, IL) announces that new scientific research indicates corrugated packaging keeps fruit fresher and safer than reusable plastic crates (RPCs) and can significantly reduce contamination from transferred microorganisms. The research, conducted by the University of Bologna and initiated by the European Federation of Corrugated Board Manufacturers (FEFCO), found corrugated trays ensured higher-quality packed fruits with reduced microbial cross-contamination and longer shelf life. Lower bacterial contamination decreases the risk of foodborne illnesses and increases the fruit's freshness, scent, appearance and taste.

ANNOUNCEMENT



TANIMURA & ANTLE LAUNCHES NEW HYDROPONIC PROGRAM

Tanimura & Antle (Salinas, CA) is expanding its East Coast operation to a state-of-the-art clear glass greenhouse, bringing the total growing area to nearly 16.5 acres in a protected agricultural environment. In addition to the expansion, T&A has a new West Coast Hydroponic farm that will allow for national distribution of Hydroponic Boston Lettuce. Hydroponic product will be available year around from Salinas, California and Yuma, Arizona.

ANNOUNCEMENT



WENDY'S HIGHLIGHTS CHURCH BROTHERS IN NEW VIDEO SERIES

Wendy's (Dublin, OH) is celebrating the value of its supplier partnerships with the first video in a series called Profiles in Quality. The video, *Lettuce From Start to Fresh*, takes viewers on a tour of the Wendy's lettuce supply chain. It features Tom and Steve Church of Church Brothers Farms (Salinas, CA) and showcases the values and exacting standards shared by Wendy's and its suppliers. Church Brothers Farms is a family-owned and operated farming company that supplies Wendy's with fresh Iceberg and Romaine lettuce for salads and sandwich toppings. Their commitment to quality has made them a valuable partner of the Wendy's Company.

ANNOUNCEMENT

NWPB COLLABORATES WITH CHEF JOSE MANUAL MARTINEZ

The National Watermelon Board (NWPB) is excited to be first time exhibitors at PMA Foodservice. The NWPB sponsored the event last year but the organization is diving into being an exhibitor, with plans to submit recipes for the Sensory Experience and sample inspiring watermelon recipes during the show. The NWPB is working with Chef Jose Manual Martinez, senior executive chef, Residential Cal Dining at the University of California, Berkeley, to create innovative recipes highlighting watermelon. The NWPB offers educational materials, menu ideation support and promotional support to distributors and operators to increase watermelon on menus.



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ANNOUNCEMENT

FRIEDA'S JACKIE CAPLAN WIGGINS HONORED

Frieda's Specialty Produce (Los Alamitos, CA) vice president and chief operating officer, Jackie Caplan Wiggins, was honored by the Long Beach Cancer League, a fundraising auxiliary of the American Cancer Society. Wiggins was recognized for her contribution to furthering the work of the American Cancer Society in her hometown. A recent breast cancer survivor, Wiggins is a mentor to other women in various stages of their diagnosis. Through the support of friends in the produce industry, Wiggins raised more than \$50,000 for the Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.



ANNOUNCEMENT

PRICE CHOPPER/MARKET 32 RECEIVES PRODUCE BUSINESS RETAIL SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

At the Food Marketing Institute/United Fresh trade show in Chicago, IL, *PRODUCE BUSINESS* presented its venerated Retail Sustainability Award for 2016 to Golub Corp/Price Chopper. The chain's progressive new store concept Market 32 embodies its first rebranding in 40 years. Mona Golub, vice president of communications of the Golub family's 137-store chain, headquartered in Schenectady, NY, says she was particularly pleased by the recognition, as "family-owned supermarkets are a dying breed." Golub singled out Rick Reed, vice president of produce and floral merchandising, to accept the award on behalf of the company.



Pictured left to right: Ken Whitacre, publisher/editorial director of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*; Mira Slott, special projects editor of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*; Rick Reed, vice president produce and floral merchandising at Golub Corp/Price Chopper; Mona Golub, vice president of communications, Golub Corp/Price Chopper; and Jim Prevora, president/editor-in-chief of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*.

ANNOUNCEMENT



MORNING KISS ORGANIC GETS AA FOOD SAFETY RATING

Participating in the industry-driven Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), DiSilva Fruit, (Chelsea, MA) parent company of Morning Kiss Organic, is certified with a AA Food Safety Rating by the British Retail Consortium (BRC), a leading trade association. GFSI participants are recognized worldwide as adhering to the highest standards in the food-manufacturing industry. Morning Kiss Organic is among the first companies to receive the AA Food Safety Rating, an excellence level that was introduced to foster continuous improvement amongst participants. The rarely award AA rating is a result of Morning Kiss Organic's exceptional safety practices, impeccably clean distribution center, and dedication to employee training centers.

ANNOUNCEMENT



INTRODUCING SIMPLY CONCORD CARAMEL DIP

Meeting the growing consumer demand for cleaner labels, Concord Foods (Brockton, MA) presents Simply Concord Caramel Dip. As a leading caramel manufacturer, Concord Foods has used its expertise to create a caramel dip that not only tastes great, but is made with simple ingredients, no artificial flavors, colors or preservatives, no high fructose corn syrup and is Non-GMO. This will be the first clean label caramel dip in the produce department. Consumers will be able to purchase the product in the U.S. starting in August 2016. The Simply Concord Caramel Dip will be sold in produce departments with apple displays.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MUSHROOM COUNCIL AND THE BEEF CHECKOFF PARTNER

The Beef Checkoff (San Jose, CA) and the Mushroom Council (Centennial, CO) team up for a second Veal Mushroom Summer Grilling Promotion. A new Veal and Portobello Mushroom Blend Burger recipe will be introduced through labels placed on specially marked packages of veal. The promotion will be supported with a consumer sweepstakes featuring a \$500 grand prize and two \$50 Williams-Sonoma gift cards. The promotion runs through September 7.





Ann Youngman, Mann Packing; Bree Bowman of University of Akron



(L-R) Sean Drake, Narelle Lombardi, Doug Hoover, Natalya Calleja, Rick Twiggs, Roy Arroyo of IFCO

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS UNITED



(L-R) Mark Swanson, Kelly Green and Elis Owens of Birko



(L-R) Vicky St. Geme, Taylor Farms; Craig Enos, Taylor Farms; LeighAnne Thomsen; Julianna St. Geme, Mission Produce

On Monday, June 20, the guests for the 2016 Opening Night Reception, which was co-sponsored by PRODUCE BUSINESS, for the United Fresh Produce Association's annual conference mixed and mingled amongst the sculptures and art installations of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art.



(L-R) Christine Lund, Seth Stedke and Rob Wilson of Total Quality Logistics



(L-R) Doug Ranno, Harvest Sensations; Kim Brooks, Westlake Produce; Bill Brooks, Westlake Produce; Troy Le Cheminant, Westlake Produce



(L-R) Bob Cummings, Leslie Freytag, Tony Freytag, of Crunch Pak; Brett James of Henningsen Cold Storage; Krista Jones and Gary Zych of Crunch Pak; Tom Stenzel of United Fresh Produce Association



(L-R) Eric Mitchnick, E. Armata Fruit and Produce; Jim Allen, New York Apple Association; Charlie Eagle, Southern Specialties, Inc.



(L-R) John Sheehan, Harvest Sensations; Brian Kocher, Castellini Company; Jordan Grainger, Castellini Company



(L-R) Katie Sunshine and Mike Prather of Flavor Pic Tomato Co.



(L-R) Tim Stachowiak, Matt Powers and Matt Middleton of Ventura Foods



(L-R) Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission; Rick Antle, Tanimura & Antle; Tonya Antle, Tanimura & Antle



(L-R) Carla Conte, NatureSweet; Janine Meyer, NatureSweet; Heather Dunagan, NatureSweet; Chris Ciruli, Ciruli Brothers



(L-R) Braden Goodere, Matt Christ, Matt Minthorn, Bob Rose of Allen Lund Company



(L-R) Karen Caplan, Frieda's; Jim Lemke, C.H. Robinson



(L-R) Bryan Silbermann, PMA; David Hewitt, 4Earth Farms; Mark Munger, 4Earth Farms



(L-R) Juliette Giles, Locus Traxx; Gabriela D'Arrigo, Kevin D'Arrigo, Peter Anthony D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers; Marc Hatfield, Produce Pro; Kristen Esposito, Produce Pro; Brian D'Arrigo, D'Arrigo Brothers



(L-R) Reggie Griffin, Reggie Griffin Strategies; John Cameron, Renaissance Food Group; Allen Davis, Central West Produce; Michael Voice, Sundrop Farms; Neil Merritt, Fusion Marketing



(L-R) Gerrit Van Der Merwe, Summer Citrus; Miles Fraser-Jones, AMC North America; Casey Ison, AMC North America; Phillipetri Fourie, Summer Citrus



(L-R) Francois Engelbrecht, South African Summer Citrus; Stiaan Engelbrecht, South African Summer Citrus; Miles Fraser-Jones, AMC North America; Tommy Leighton, Produce Business UK



(L-R) Mary Furman, Bill Kelley, Mike Orf, and Craig Clasen of Hy-Vee



(L-R) Michele Youngquist, Bay Baby Produce; Steve King, ESI Group; Tyann Schlimmer, Bay Baby Produce; Michele Lopgnow, ESI Group



(L-R) Lisa McNeece, Grimmway Farms; Cory Oliver, Sprouts Farmers Market; Michele McNeece, Ippolito International



(L-R) Rudi Groppe, HMI; Jennifer Meacham, Naturipe; Cammie Wheelus, Naturipe; Kane Palacios, Mann Packing; Jacqueline Padilla, Naturipe



(L-R) Rob Medcalf and Nick Williamson of Mucci Farms



Perspective Needed On Current State Of The World

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is as if the world turned dark. In the United Kingdom, the nation lit the fuse via the referendum to overturn almost a half-century toward ever-closer union with Europe. Now, the educated in Britain watch in horror at the multiple explosions that follow. They believed they dodged a bullet when Andrea Leadsom, who virtually nobody had heard of four weeks ago, dropped out of the race, thus leaving Theresa May to become Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister.

Just as Jeremy Corbyn, the head of the opposition Labour Party, was elected by a bizarrely small part of the population due to British rules allowing party members to select party leaders, now the next Prime Minister could have been contentiously elected by 0.003 percent of the population. Yet the Brexiteers had, as the Brits would say, the “cheek” to accuse the EU of not being democratic!

Yet the impact on global markets was not due to one country leaving the EU; it is that polls show in other countries, such as France and the Netherlands, important countries that contribute more to the EU than they get back, the citizenry would also vote to leave the EU if given a chance. In other words, the carefully designed program to forestall the European competition, which (twice in the last century) led to World War, is crumbling.

Things are clearly not much better in the United States. The presidential race features two candidates that share one thing: they are both exceedingly unpopular in their own parties. Recent violence of many types — Orlando, Dallas, the division represented by police shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota, and the Black Lives Matter movement — all haunt us. These events all happening in a country famous for citizens who stop at stop signs on deserted country roads at 2 a.m., because it is the law, and the law in a democracy is properly established and worthy of respect.

Then, all over the world, the forces of good seem unwilling or unable to stand up. The North Koreans test nuclear missiles with regularity; the Chinese seize expansion in the Pacific; the Germans announced that Iran did not wait for the ink to dry on its agreement with the West before attempting to acquire high-end and illegal nuclear technology; and it is not so much that we cannot defeat ISIS, it is that no leader in the West is willing to commit to do what it takes to do so.

In practice, this means the U.S. won't stand up. Leaders in the U.S., especially President Obama, yearn to apply the available funds to social welfare programs, not military expenditures. One hears the voice of General Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “I certainly agree that we should not go around saying that we

are the world's policeman. But guess who gets called when suddenly somebody needs a cop.”

But if the U.S. won't provide leadership against forces such as ISIS, there will be a vacuum of power, and only bad things can result.

It is easy and true to say these are not good times or a happy world we live in.

Still, perspective is called for. The market panic over Brexit is part of a short-term run to safety by the capital markets. British productive capacity is unchanged by the vote. One reason the British people can indulge an interest in sovereignty is they are so much more prosperous than they were in 1975 at the time of the last Brexit referendum.

One could gain from remembering what Lloyd Blankfein, then chief executive of Goldman Sachs, said to a young aid panicking during the collapse of Lehman Brothers as Goldman had been summoned to an emergency meeting: “You're getting out of a Mercedes to go to the New York Federal Reserve; you're not getting out of a Higgins boat on Omaha Beach.”

We are blessed, in the U.S., in the U.K., in Europe and in the free countries of Asia that have seen such extraordinary economic growth since World War II, as well as in other spots of freedom around the world, with enormous resources. Some of these are economic and some are the legacy of great intellectual and political

achievement such as the Magna Carta in England and America's Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Most of our problems can be solved through a combination of good governance and a good civil society.

If you think back to the American founding, and the extraordinary group of men who gathered in Philadelphia to draft first the Declaration and, years later, the Constitution, one can marvel at the intelligence and leadership that men such as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams and Franklin possessed, but it is no less a source of marvel to consider the habits of a society and the political systems that served to elevate these men and bring them together to establish a new Republic.

Perhaps the missing link in modern political discussion — be it about immigration or broadening the franchise or regulations for party politics — is this: Will these policies lead to better governance?

The day is dark, but not as dark as our forefathers have known. Our opportunity is vast. Our challenge is to build the systems that will enable us to build a bright future.

pb

**Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.**

The Second Coming
— William Butler Yeats

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Website: sialparis.com

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Millennial Avocado Buyers Outspend Other Households

BY EMILIANO ESCOBEDO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HASS AVOCADO BOARD

Millennial shoppers are becoming increasingly important to a retailer's bottomline. The Hass Avocado Board's *Keys to the Cart: Driving Hass Avocado Sales at Retail* study reveals how Millennials are impacting one of the largest categories in fresh produce.

Millennial households are one of several "high-value" shopper groups that are particularly influential in driving avocado category growth. Other high-value groups identified in the study include households that buy both bulk and bagged avocados ("Both" households) and households in regions with above average avocado sales relative to the region's population ("Developed" regions).

This study analyzed two years of data (June 2013 through June 2015) from the IRI Consumer Network™, which is a continuous household purchasing panel that captures actual shopper purchases and behaviors. For this study, Millennials were defined as households in which the head of household was between 25 and 34 years of age. Non-Millennial households were those in which the head of household was 35 or more years of age.

The avocado shopping habits of these two demographic groups were notably different, with Millennial households outperforming Non-Millennial households across a number of key purchase metrics. One prominent difference was household penetration — the percentage of households purchasing avocados. Fifty-six percent of Millennial households purchased avocados in the most current 12-month period studied, compared to 51 percent of Non-Millennial households.

Moreover, the annual Millennial spend of \$22.66 exceeded the Non-Millennial spend by \$2.43. Millennials bought less often than Non-Millennials (5.6 versus 6.1 occasions), but spent +22 percent more per occasion. The high household penetration and high spend rate for Millennials are evidence of their important influence on category growth.

The benefits of focusing on Millennial

shoppers extends beyond the avocado category, with Millennials driving higher overall retail market basket value. Millennial baskets with avocados averaged \$76.36 compared to \$65.56 for Non-Millennial baskets — delivering an additional +16 percent average sales boost.

For many fresh produce commodities, sales of fixed weight/package units are exhibiting a clear retail growth trend. This study examined how fixed weight and bulk purchase options are playing out for the avocado category. The data showed that over the course of the year, the majority of households (82 percent) purchased only avocados sold in bulk. A small percentage (3 percent) purchased only bags. The remaining 15 percent of households purchased both bulk and bagged (not necessarily on the same occasion). Similar to the Millennials, this "Both" group comprises a high-value shopper segment in the avocado category.

Although not the largest group, "Both" buyers have above-average avocado spending habits. At \$41.84, the annual spend by "Both" shoppers was twice that of Bulk-Only and three times that of Bagged-Only shoppers. One factor driving this high annual spend is frequency of purchase. "Both" shoppers averaged 9.7 purchase occasions per year compared to 5.4 for Bulk-Only and 2.3 for Bagged-Only households. Retailers who offer bulk and bagged avocados may realize an increase in the value of their shopping baskets. At \$81.22, the basket value for "Both" shoppers was +32 percent higher than Bulk-Only shoppers.

The study also looked into purchase habits across different geographies. Using the eight standard IRI regions, the study created an index that compared each region's share of total avocado sales to its share of U.S. population. Regions with a higher index (California, West and South Central) were aggregated into the "Developed" group. Regions with a lower index (Plains, Great Lakes, Midsouth, Southeast and Northeast)

were classified as "Emerging."

The high index in Developed regions can be partly attributed to the higher percentage of households purchasing in these regions. Sixty-six percent of households in Developed regions bought avocados, compared to 45 percent in the Emerging group. Households in Developed regions also spent more each year on avocados. At \$25.85, the annual spend in the Developed group was nearly +\$9 higher. The strong household penetration and annual spend rate in the Developed group are indicative of a high level of shopper engagement, which bodes well for continued avocado category growth.

In contrast to the Developed regions, avocado consumption in the Emerging regions indexes lower. Yet the purchase metrics in this group point to ample opportunity for category growth. Currently, less than half of all households in this group purchase avocados. Increasing this rate — bringing more users to the category — could have a notable impact on category growth.

Among those households currently buying avocados, the annual avocado spend is up +32 percent versus the prior year. Retailers in Emerging regions also had higher value market baskets with avocados. At \$69.11, the value was nearly +\$3 higher than in Developed regions. Headroom to expand penetration, and strong annual spend and basket values point to a healthy outlook for growth in the Emerging regions.

The high-value segments detailed in this study, are key drivers of category growth at retail. The insights gained in this study can help decision-makers spot prime opportunities for the next big wave of category growth.



The Hass Avocado Board (HAB) was established in 2002 to promote the consumption of Hass avocados in the United States. A 12-member board representing domestic producers and importers of Hass avocados directs HAB's promotion, research and information programs under supervision of the United States Department of Agriculture. Hass avocados are grown in California and imported into the U.S. from Mexico, Chile, Peru, Dominican Republic and New Zealand.

Perfect Storm Accounts For Avocado Success

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PRODUCE BUSINESS

Trying to understand the future actions of consumers brings to mind Winston Churchill's explanation of the difficulty of predicting the actions of Russia. He said the forecast was "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" — so it goes with consumer data.

It is true, of course, that Millennials behave differently than other age cohorts, but it is also true that age cohorts differ from each other by more than age. They have different family sizes, different ethnicities, different work habits, living arrangements, familiarity with technology, and so forth.

For example, according to the white paper, "Millennials Coming of Age" by Costa Mesa, CA-based Experian Marketing Services, 10 percent of the Baby Boomers are Hispanic, but 22 percent of Millennials are Hispanic.

So this leaves open the question of whether the driving force behind any procurement or consumption differences between these age cohorts is age, or some other factor, such as ethnicity.

Some of these questions are chicken-and-the-egg-type questions. That those consumers who purchase both bulk and bagged avocados should lean toward the high end of purchasing is not surprising.

But do retailers that have these consumers have a propensity toward carrying both bagged and bulk product and promote both with discounts and recipes? Likewise, are those retailers with customers who are not fans of avocados less inclined to carry both bagged and bulk? If these retailers do carry bagged and bulk without adequate consumer demand, then do they give smaller displays without sales or promotional support?

Geography is also a conundrum. Many years ago, a U.S.-based group of Italian chestnut importers was established with the goal of spending money to increase sales of chestnuts from Italy. The goal was clear, but the effort foundered over geography.

The importers, working with the late

Moving marketing to the next level will mean studying the research more shrewdly.

Barney McClure, simply could not agree on whether it was a wiser path to promote chestnuts in traditional markets, such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco — places where Italian immigrants and street vendors had long ago established the habit of eating "chestnuts roasting on an open fire," as the Nat King Cole classic explained — or to go to markets where chestnuts were not widely consumed.

It is a truism among marketers that the easiest sale is to your existing customers.

So, almost certainly, a promotional campaign targeted on markets where consumers are familiar with the item and enjoy the item would be the most effective way to boost short-term sales. The chestnut marketing campaign would remind consumers to buy, suggest additional recipes, and boost top-of-mind awareness. Because all local retailers sell the product, consumers could translate this awareness into procurement.

Of course, long term, there is a big win in converting areas that do not heavily consume one's product into high consumption areas.

It is a challenge and, perhaps, not really a function of individual product marketing. As an ethnic group moves into an area where people of that ethnicity were only lightly populated before, one would expect consumption to rise. Indeed, one would expect a kind of triple causation:

First, the ethnic group eats the product and that boosts sales. Second, the presence of the ethnic group leads to ethnic-themed restaurants, which leads consumers who are not members of that ethnic group to

try the cuisine and to possibly duplicate it at home. Third, the presence of a core market makes it feasible for retailers to carry the item, and its availability makes it an option for all consumers.

It is also true that due to the popularity of travel, the *Food Network*, etc., a certain cuisine can become more popular. So we sell more avocados for guacamole as Mexican food becomes more popular.

Plus health news can boost sales. Avocados have surely been helped by the idea that fats and oils are not bad. Healthy monounsaturated fat of the avocados should be consumed, not avoided.

Of course, the marketing by geography is really an issue for producers. Retailers have little choice but to sell to the customers they have in their locale.

One other issue that complicates reading data such as this *Research Perspective* is that it is based on dollars spent — not volume. Very low prices often accompany very high volume, and thus do not fully reflect the increase in sales of avocados, or any item that moves from a low volume/high price to high volume/low price situation.

Avocado sales boomed because of a perfect storm: A growth in immigration by ethnic groups that love avocados; a change in merchandising to allow the sale of pre-ripened, ready-to-eat avocados; a boom in cuisines that use avocados; a health message encouraging consumption; and regulatory changes that allowed for imports from Mexico to spread across the country. Moving marketing to the next level will mean studying the research more shrewdly.

PMA/United's Joint Labor Initiative Will Have To Navigate A Difficult Path Between Shielding The Industry And Actually Trying To Improve The Lot Of Laborers

JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and the United Fresh Produce Association (United Fresh) sent a letter to their members about an initiative on labor practices, which is excerpted here:

In late 2015, the Boards of Directors of PMA and United Fresh formed a Joint Committee on Responsible Labor Practices. The committee's charge is to evaluate appropriate labor practices across the produce and floral supply chain, potentially leading to an industrywide, global approach to responsible labor practices and consistent expectations among trading partners and the public.

The committee is being co-chaired by Brian Kocher of Castellini Group of Companies on behalf of United Fresh, and Wesley Wilson of Walmart on behalf of PMA. The committee was launched with 16 members, equally divided among produce suppliers and buyers. After two meetings discussing goals and objectives, the group is now being augmented to include additional specific expertise as we begin our work ahead. The entire list of members will be publicized once final. Our staff CEOs Tom Stenzel of United Fresh and Bryan Silbermann of PMA are leading the project for our associations.

Responsible labor practices are an important issue for our industry, and we recognize the growing interest of stakeholders in transparency throughout the global supply chain. This Joint Committee is working to help ensure our industry has a clear and well-defined commitment to treat all workers with dignity and respect as they work to bring fresh produce to consumers. As an industry, we want to proactively address this issue.

Members have met to discuss the wide range of information available on labor issues, which supports an industrywide approach to help drive consensus across the produce and floral supply chain and increase consumers' confidence that the produce they buy is responsibly sourced. With support from both associations' Boards, the committee now intends to engage with a broader set of stakeholders inside and outside the industry to develop specific goals and action plans to achieve those goals.

The input and collaboration of many stakeholders on this issue is important in order to drive real change. We know that multiple perspectives are critical to bringing consensus and positive movement. It is also important to acknowledge the huge diversity among commodities, growing regions and cultural practices in the broad produce and floral industry. We want to meet with grower organizations, labor employers and others serving different aspects of the supply chain to ensure that we understand their specific views and incorporate their thinking into any future action.

We want our members to know that this will not be a short process or an easy one. But, we believe this is a critical discussion we need

to have as an industry. We anticipate this will be the beginning of a continuing dialogue with our members, the broader global produce industry and other stakeholders.

We received a number of letters on this matter, including this one from a former chairperson of one of the national associations, which seemed to summarize industry concern:

I am genuinely concerned about this task force. I have absolutely no "inside" information about the genesis of this initiative, nor do I know anyone who is serving on this task force. However, this certainly appears on the surface to be a very dangerous trend line getting our national associations involved in what essentially is a marketplace economic issue.

My bet is that some large organizations are looking for someone else to do their dirty work for them. However, this is precisely the wrong thing to have an association get involved with because this is an individual buyer/seller issue. I know that there are some real outspoken social justice advocates out there among industry leadership. I have a sneaking suspicion that a handful of folks are driving this agenda, and Bryan is riding it as a "legacy" initiative.

Here's the rub: Our company, just as an example, has a very rich package of employee benefits, and we also reward our employees very generously for their hard work. That's something that my Board of Directors and I have decided is in the best interest of the company in order to attract and maintain a very talented team of produce/transportation professionals. This policy has served us quite well for many decades.

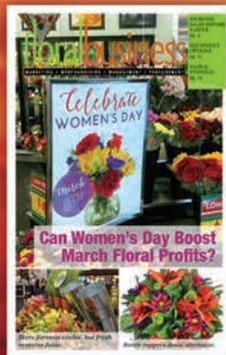
I also have the freedom as the employer to do the exact opposite. That would be both foolish and short-sighted, but it also is my right as long as I do not violate any Federal or State laws doing so. If a buying organization did not like how we treated our labor, then they are perfectly free to discontinue buying from us until we changed our practices. That would be a marketplace decision for our company to either adjust our labor practices or walk away from that portion of our business. That's free enterprise at work.

What I cannot accept is having our joint national organizations set a group of standards that our company has to meet. Obviously, our company would far exceed anything determined to be a minimum by this group, but this is such a dangerous precedent whereby a 501(c)3 organization determines how an industry should structure their labor practices.

This is the old complaint surfacing once again about the operational arrogance whereby a trade association has the temerity to deem what is appropriate for all organizations in the industry. Obviously, I am not advocating for anything less than fair treatment for all workers in our industry. However, it's not up to a 16-member Task Force to determine

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Obviously, we have had a multitude of buying organizations with a litany of questionnaires asking about a whole host of “social” issues. Do I like these inquiries into our business practices? No, because I do not view them as a value-added and I am very proud of how we conduct our business.

However, I do feel that any buyer has the right to ask us how we do business before a relationship is established. However, I also strongly believe that this is a marketplace decision between buyers and sellers — not something that a Task Force determines will be the minimum requirements.

Sorry to be long winded, but this just smacks of overregulation by industry volunteers. There’s enough of this garbage coming out of D.C. We don’t need it from our trade associations.

We found the press release rather confusing and reached out to both Bryan Silbermann, and Tom Stenzel. Bryan was on a plane, so Tom provided some context, which Bryan later endorsed when he landed. We asked three sets of questions:

At one point the memo refers to “the global supply chain” — does this imply that one of the goals of the initiative is to define appropriate labor standards for, say, workers on farms in Senegal that ship green beans to the U.S.? What about if they ship the green beans to Kuwait?

There is also a reference to working with “grower associations,” but not retail or foodservice operator associations — as you know there has been a great deal of attention to worker pay issues in fast food, etc. Is this to imply that retailers and restaurants are considered “post” produce industry and are not included in this initiative?

Finally, is this initiative encompassing office and warehouse workers in produce firms that do not work on farms? What about vendors to the produce industry? Truckers, for example?

Stenzel responded:

Probably the first thing we should say is that we are at the very beginning stage of an extensive dialogue with the industry. We anticipate many questions, and in fact, plan to create a list so that we can work with the committee to make sure we address everything.

We likely can’t answer everything, especially because we won’t know many of the answers until we go down this path. But, we felt transparency with the industry was important to say we are embarking on this effort and welcome their views.

Having said that, I’ll try to provide clarity to your questions where I can. We do mean “global produce industry,” while recognizing that’s a hugely complex task. But, there’s little intellectual space to say that workers shouldn’t be treated appropriately wherever they are. Of course, there are tremendously different laws and cultures around the world, and anything we do must recognize and respect that.

We definitely intend to work with all sectors of the produce supply chain, including wholesale, retail and foodservice organizations as well as grower organizations. This is probably an oversight in our letter. These groups will be an important part of our efforts to dialogue with all sectors to understand and take into account their views.

But I will also clarify that we are focused on companies and people who work directly in the produce and floral supply chains, not worker issues in another sector such as restaurants. That can certainly include off-farm workers directly in the produce/floral supply chain.

Two other thoughts that might be helpful in clarifying goals:

First of all, we all believe the produce industry has a very positive story to tell about workers in our industry. We all probably know thou-

sands of companies that are committed to the welfare and responsible treatment of their workers. But, we as an industry don’t currently have a framework to tell that story.

We want to be able to talk about what our industry stands for in worker welfare, and reinforce that produce industry jobs are good jobs with dignity and respect.

Second, we also know that many consumers and companies are interested in learning more about their food, how it is grown and distributed, etc. That can inadvertently lead to companies seeking to verify practices in their supply chains in many different ways. The last thing we want to see is another balkanization of multiple audits and verification schemes in the social accountability space similar to what happened with food safety.

So for those trading partners who do want to discuss those issues, our second goal is to see if we can find common ground across the industry that can serve both ends of the supply chain with greatest efficacy and efficiency, without adding needless cost.

As I said at the beginning, we are anticipating many more questions and lots of learnings as we go. The fact is that we don’t have all the answers now.

The drivers behind this initiative are not hard to intuit:

1) Part of the general consumer interest in knowing your farmer and knowing where your food comes from is interest in knowing that the food one eats is grown with labor treated in a satisfactory, non-abusive, manner. This is hard for consumers to know on a farm-by-farm, product-by-product basis, so if there was some kind of recognized standard that could give all consumers peace of mind, no matter what they buy or where they shop, that would seem appealing.

2) Producers are haunted by what has happened in food safety in which they are vexed by countless different standards with countless different auditors performing multiple audits. Following the big controversy of the LA Times reports on worker conditions in Mexico, producers saw the writing on the wall. They desperately would like to avoid multiple audits and multiple standards, so an industrywide initiative is appealing.

3) Should attacks be made by the media or advocacy groups against labor standards? It may be advantageous to have a third-party take some of the heat. Better the media reports be about the XYZ standards than to have an individual company name dragged through the mud.

This being said, we hope the committee will narrow its focus. First, our letter writer, a highly intelligent person, read the association’s open letter and thought they were talking about his sales people, office workers, executives, etc. That hardly seems likely. There is no known issue of abuse or complaint, so why get involved?

Second, the inclusion of restaurant, supermarkets, etc., doesn’t really make sense either. These organizations are important because, in the end, it is their insistence that vendors sign on to these standards that will give them heft in the marketplace. But no produce industry committee has any competency in setting labor standards for restaurants and supermarkets. Leave this to the National Restaurant Association and the Food Marketing Institute.

Third, setting global standards is hard enough, even if we constrain our interest to food that is going to wind up in America. Trying to set standards for trade between Rwanda and Burundi or the domestic trade of produce in Mali seems a bit of a reach.

For more on this piece, please visit this link:

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FRESH TURMERIC

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH DIRECT PRODUCE

The root with its tantalizing scent and entrancing color is bringing a unique edge to produce departments.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Native to India, turmeric is an ancient ingredient cherished for providing its mouth-watering yellow hue in dishes like curry and for its healing properties in Ayurvedic medicine. More recently, this spice played the mundane role of enhancing the color of processed foods such as cheeses, salad dressings, butter, chicken broth and prepared mustard.

Today, it's the fresh form of this root that has shot to fame as a superfood. Turmeric is getting big play at retail, but other than in juice bars is "hardly showing up on restaurant menus ... yet," according to Baum + Whiteman, LLC, a Brooklyn, NY-based food and restaurant consulting firm that named turmeric the 'spice of the year' in its report, *11 Hottest Food & Beverage Trends in Restaurants and Hotel Dining for 2016*.

"We have carried turmeric for more than 20 years, but with limited availability and distribution," explains Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles. "The trend really started in the past two years — especially when the fresh root became more widely available. Since then, the trend is driven by use in juicing and nutritional information about the root, increased popularity of Indian cuisine in the marketplace, and chefs using it more on the menu."

WHAT IS IT & WHAT TO DO WITH IT

Turmeric is a member of the ginger family, with a taste that James Macek, president of Coosemans-Denver, Inc. and partner in Coose-



mans Worldwide, describes as orange and ginger, with bitter, earthy undertones. Coosemans-Denver featured turmeric in its February 2015-published *Garden Party* newsletter for foodservice distributors.

"Widely used in India, Pakistan and thereabouts for centuries, it is consumed in its dried/powdered form and used to season vegetables, lentils and curries," says Macek. "As you move west, the Asian population prefers the fresh product over the dried, and this is the case in the U.S. as well, based on the current culinary interest it is receiving. Its appeal

is its brilliant color. In my opinion, it's best when grated and tossed into stir-fry or added in the last few minutes to a vegetable sauté. It makes a nice tea, too. Peel, grate and steep in hot water, then serve with honey and lemon."

Turmeric's widely reported health benefits lie in its natural abundance of *curcumin*. According to scientific studies, this phytonutrient is full of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that can help to prevent and treat chronic ills like cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

GET IT WHILE IT'S HOT!

Los Alamitos, CA-headquartered Frieda's sources fresh turmeric root year-round from Fiji and Jamaica. Two Canadian-based companies began to import turmeric from Peru over the past year.

"India is the major producing country for turmeric, but it's logistically easier as well as fresher and less costly for us to fly it in from Peru," says Davis Yung, president of Fresh Direct Produce Ltd., in Vancouver, BC. "It's too perishable, and there's not enough volume yet to bring turmeric in by sea containers. We work with two or three organic farms and bring it in in 30-pound bulk cartons. For retail, we have 5-pound boxes for bulk merchandising or prepackaged 3-ounce bags that we sell under our Simply Organic brand. It's best to store turmeric in a dry cool place away from sunlight so it doesn't lose its aroma, flavor and pungency. It also becomes less pungent if stored in refrigeration."

Thomas Fresh, based in Surrey, BC, preferentially sources fair-trade turmeric from Peru, according to brand manager Jason Tubman. "Turmeric can be pricey; right up there with ginger. For example, a 3-ounce bag can retail for \$3.99 to \$4.49 based on the market as well as if it's fair trade or not, organic or conventional."

ON THE SHELF

One retailer that carries fresh turmeric root is Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain based in Carson, CA. "Although the spice's powdered and fresh root forms have most of the same properties, I think the root form is a little more popular because it's fresh and is what organic shoppers tend to lean toward. We carry turmeric in bulk root form and prefer it to be organic. It seems our organic customers consistently buy it more than our conventional shoppers," explains produce director,



John Savidan.

Recipes often call for both fresh turmeric and fresh ginger together, so retailers should merchandise turmeric and ginger roots together, recommends president and chief executive of Frieda's, Karen Caplan, whose company sells turmeric in bulk as well as 6-ounce and 8-ounce clamshells. "Juicing sections are also a magnet for health-conscious consumers and a great place to feature turmeric, along with other juicing favorites like kale and young coconut."

Melissa's Schueller suggests merchandising fresh turmeric near Asian vegetables such as Napa cabbage, bok choy and lemongrass.

Another suggestion, from Thomas Fresh's Tubman, is to display turmeric near other seasonings such as peeled garlic, shallots and fresh herbs.

Education is critical to turmeric sales at retail. "If consumers don't know what it is or what to do with it, they won't pick it up," says Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND, founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc., based in Carmichael, CA. "Incorporate signage into the display with short bullet points about turmeric and its uses. Or have a copy of a food magazine open to a recipe using fresh turmeric."

ON THE MENU

Ethnic condiments and spices, which include curry, rated as the No. 1 global flavor trend in the National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot 2016 Culinary Forecast*, with 71 percent of the nearly 1,600 chef members of the American Culinary Federation surveyed labeling this item a hot trend.

Many chefs are experimenting with fresh turmeric in non-traditional ways. For example, Fall Pumpkin Bisque, a silky soup served with a twist of ingredients such as as chicken confit, crispy chicken skin, heirloom apples and turmeric, was featured on the October 2015 menu at The Kitchen Restaurant in Sacramento, CA, a semi-finalist for the James Beard 'Outstanding Restaurant' Award.

"It may be awhile before we see fresh turmeric used on the chain restaurant side. This is due to cost, the need for knife skills, and its labor intensiveness. In the future too, while Indian cuisine isn't mainstream, it is something that appeals to Millennials who are looking for more plant-based, vegetarian or vegan, sustainable dining options," says Myrdal Miller. **pb**

REMEDIES FOR STAIN REMOVAL

Turmeric is what puts the bright yellow in prepared mustard and curried rice. Unfortunately, this golden hue can leave a doozie of a stain on hands, clothing and kitchen surfaces when the root is cut exposing its moist bright interior. Here are a few ways to remove stains.

Hands and Nails: Make a scrub by mixing together a few tablespoons of granulated sugar with a few drops of olive oil. Rub on hands; then rinse well. Clean finger nails with a stain-riding blend of baking soda moistened with a couple droplets of lemon juice.

Clothing: "The key is to begin treating as

soon as possible to reduce absorption," says Miki Hackney, chef at Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles. "Remove any mass of the product by scooping up or picking off of the surface. Blot, do not rub, as this will only spread and deepen the stain. Wash in cold water only. Warm and hot water will set a stain."

Kitchen Surfaces: The folks at Frieda's, a specialty food supplier in Los Alamitos, CA, suggest two methods to remove stains from counters, cutting boards and containers on the company's website.

The first is to make a paste with baking soda

and a few drops of water. Apply this mixture generously around the stained area. Let sit for 15 minutes, then scrub well and rinse thoroughly.

Second, combine half a tablespoon of bleach or distilled vinegar with 1 cup of water. Soak containers in this solution for 30 minutes; then rinse thoroughly.

"Stains only happen when the turmeric is cut open, so there are no worries about stains when setting a bulk display in the produce department," says Robert Schueller, Melissa's director of public relations. **pb**



Alfalfa's Market

A natural retailing pioneer grows with fresh produce focus.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALFALFA'S MARKET

A giant rooster sculpture crafted from farm tools which goes by “Alfie” greets shoppers at the entrance to Alfalfa’s Market, an independent grocer blocks from the Rocky Mountains in Boulder, CO. The store’s downtown neighborhood includes a busy pedestrian shopping district, a public library and park, and the University of Colorado campus.

Musicians play for shoppers in the shaded seating area near a wagon of whole organic watermelons for 89 cents a pound. Cut-flower bouquets line both sides of the airy entry to the 20,000-square-foot retail space.

Shoppers’ first encounter is a cold case that entices with cups of ready-to-eat cut fruit and berries, bags of cherries, clamshells of freshly whipped cream and whole pound-cakes. A bright “Welcome to Summer” sign points customers toward the 2,000-square-foot produce department, which claims to carry the largest selection of organic produce in the state.

Straight ahead is a table of organic nectar-

ines, black plums and apricots. A nearby cooler features grab-and-go cut fruit, vegetable platters, and containers of vibrantly hued house-made guacamole and mango salsa.

The salad and greens cooler is full with everything from loose spinach and kale to bagged salads, croutons and chilled bottled dressing from Canoga Park, CA-based Follow Your Heart and Bakersfield, CA-based Bolt-house Farms. The greens are freshened by misters using filtered water.

A low table catches the eye with an appetizing array of multi-color heirloom local greenhouse tomatoes, along with shallots, several varieties of garlic, avocados and a basket of Parmigiano-Reggiano wedges. Alfalfa’s produce department replenishment approach is to touch every table at least three times a day.

A higher table is loaded with yellow, Vidalia, red and white onions along with potatoes and just a few winter squashes. Two shoppers are choosing from a back row of coolers lined with colorful bell peppers, cabbage, boy choy, red

dandelion greens and curly parsley. Specialty items range from living butter lettuce, cress and basil to loose horseradish, Jerusalem artichokes, and a hot commodity, fresh turmeric.

Right now, only poblano and Anaheim green chilies are stocked. By late summer multiple fresh chili varieties are available along with portable gas-fired roasters.

The asparagus, like many produce items throughout the store, is marked with a highly visible “Local” sign stating that it came from “62 miles away at Golden West Farms.”

Alfalfa’s market COO Paul McLean started working at the original Alfalfa’s Market in the ‘90s, when kale was still a garnish. “Now we go through 10 cases a day, a lot of it as juice and in the salad bar,” he says. He had a 15-year career with Whole Foods Market concluding as a vice president of purchasing for the northeast region before returning to Alfalfa’s Market when it reopened in 2011.

“Boulder is a very particular market. The people here care a lot about what they put into their bodies, so transparency is essential,”

he says. The bike-friendly city has 45,000 acres of open space and a highly educated, higher income population. The city boasts award-winning restaurants, 20 craft breweries, plus distilleries and the Celestial Seasonings tea factory tour.

“We put a stake in the ground for local and organic produce. That’s what our consumer identifies with the store. Produce is 5 to 18 percent of store sales,” says McLean.

Only 1 percent of the produce used by the store is conventionally grown. “It’s for filling gaps in certain products like asparagus in the early spring,” he said. “Our other main category is ‘Local & Natural.’ In a lot of cases it’s organic, it just hasn’t been certified, which is very expensive for small farmers.”

Rebirth Of A Natural Foods Retailer

Alfalfa’s Market debuted as the tiny Pearl Street Market in 1979 with Alfalfa’s Market launching at the current Boulder location in 1983. With 11 stores in Colorado and in the West, it was a natural foods icon through the 1990s. Wild Oats Markets, which acquired Alfalfa’s in 1996, was itself acquired by Whole Foods Market. When the original location became available again, some of Alfalfa’s original founders reopened it in 2011. They faced a starkly different retailing environment than 28 years earlier.

There are now 16 major retailers selling food in the city of Boulder for a population of about 105,000 residents. McLean says the roaster includes two Whole Foods Markets, one Whole Foods-owned Ideal Market, three Kroger’s King Soopers plus locations for Safeway, Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, Sprouts Farmers Market, Natural Grocers/Vitamin Cottage and Trader Joe’s. Alfalfa’s Market is now the only strictly locally owned grocer since Lucky’s Market (which has a second Boulder store in the works) expanded nationally with major investment from Kroger.

A Team Of Industry Veterans

McClean heads the team responsible for purchasing produce for display, for a significant juicing operation and a large culinary and catering department. McLean handles most of the ordering from large distributors out-of-state. “For what we can’t get locally, we get mostly from California and Texas. We partner a lot with Albert’s Organics,” says McLean.

The produce managers have a lot of autonomy and the selection may be different at the two locations. “We deal with so many small growers. When the office gets involved the decisions can go into a black hole. A couple

“We put a stake in the ground for local and organic produce. That’s what our consumer identifies with the store.”

— Paul McLean, Chief Operating Officer

of days is a long time in the produce business,” says McLean.

Growers have a habit of showing up at Alfalfa’s back door with surprises. “A farmer had a huge load of cucumbers last summer. We asked a local company if they could pickle a barrel of them. We gave them away with every sandwich,” says McLean.

During July and August, the percentage of produce provided by nearby farms can be 40 percent or more, according to McLean. That’s when the first 20 feet of the store displays will be all local with Rocky Ford melons, Western Slope peaches, Munson Farms sweet corn, greens and other vegetables.

“We are learning how to source better locally and get out in front of a crop. When we develop a relationship with a grower, it’s not for one summer — it is long term,” he says. At least one professional farmer works in Alfalfa’s produce department in the fall and winter.

Alfalfa’s Market’s biggest produce event of the year in the “Local” sale in July and early August. “We put everything locally grown on sale for a month. We have our farmers come in and do sampling and meet shoppers the way they do at the farmers markets,” says McLean, adding that he didn’t think of farmers markets as competitors.

Alfalfa’s COO Paul McLean knows which promotional effort he would hang his hat on. “Last year the Colorado peach crop looked great, but we decided to wait even though we could have had a higher margin with the California organics. We made a commitment to stay with it all summer for \$2.99 a pound; for a week it was even \$1.99. We sold more peaches than ever in the store’s history, 1,000 pounds a week from the Boulder store alone, and shoppers came back week after week.”

Produce In Every Department

Produce finds its way into nearly every department at Alfalfa’s Market along the perimeter of the store including meat and

seafood where peppers fill out kebobs. Juice is a major component. Besides the juice bar, fresh-squeezed organic orange juice is bottled daily and available in produce, dairy and Meals to Go. The 48-item olive bar near the Cheese and Specialty Department features house-roasted sweet peppers along with garlic-stuffed olives, balsamic onions and hot crunchy okra.

Every shopper ends up in the expansive area featuring a bakery, large sushi bar, a coffee and tea counter, a salad and hot foods bar, and juice bar. Executive chef Zack Guard oversees a counter dishing prepared foods including sweet potato salad, a build-your-own woodfire pizza spot, and a hot sandwich counter with extras such as a grilled avocado half. “Culinary is 25 percent of our store sales. The customers want to eat clean, delicious food and they want it quick and convenient,” says McLean.

The salad bar is constantly replenished with everything from greens to sliced cremini mushrooms and tri-color quinoa. “The salad bar is the No. 2 selling item in the store day in, day out,” he says. The breakfast bar includes berries and cut fruit. Meals-to-go coolers merchandise ready-to-eat salads, vegetable trays, and wraps packed to show off the fresh Romaine and carrot matchsticks inside.

At the 100 percent organic juice bar, fans order drinks juiced with beets, carrots and bananas. Bright green shots of fresh wheatgrass are available as well as drinks like the Cuke Crisp with cucumber, dandelion greens, apple, lime juice and coconut water.

Cutting Waste To Zero

Most of the produce looks perfect on display, and Alfalfa’s generally doesn’t offer markdown produce. The integrated use of produce throughout all departments in both locations means that less-than-pretty fruits and vegetables are used elsewhere. “We buy No. 2’s for juicing. Culinary cuts smaller No. 2 bell peppers for the salad bar,” says McLean. Leftover edible food at both locations is donated to Community Food Share and other community organizations. Boulder Food Rescue picks up and delivers donated food using bicycle-pulled trailers to nonprofit organizations across the city.

The corporate sustainability philosophy includes using recycled building materials, energy-saving and water use reduction systems, and making a car changing station available. “Last year, 97 percent of all waste in the stores was diverted to recycling and composting. We give whatever is left to our farmers for their chicken and pigs and coffee grounds go to gardens,” says McLean. **pb**

VEGGIE-FORWARD DISHES BECOME TRENDY

Industry rallies behind movement of produce from side dish to center of the plate.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMANDA COHEN AT DIRT CANDY IN NYC

Dietitians have tried for several decades to achieve what the industry has accomplished in just a few short years – move produce from side dish to center of the plate. Side dish classics such as steamed green beans and broccoli topped with Hollandaise are being replaced with innovative and exciting combinations and cooking methods.

James Beard award nominee Eric Gabrynowicz, who is executive chef and co-owner of Restaurant North in Armonk, NY, embodies the new attitude. “Vegetables are now the stars of the plate more than ever. I get excited about the first Brussels sprouts after the first frost almost as much as I get excited about a whole heritage pig that graces the kitchen doors.”

NOT VEGETARIAN

What does it mean to be vegetable-forward on the menu? Kori Tuggle, vice president, Church Brothers Farms, Salinas, CA, notes vegetable-forward can take many forms, including “adding vegetables to classic dishes to increase their health factor and take advantage of the vegetable ‘health halo,’ reducing or replacing proteins with vegetables, or making the vegetable serving equal to the protein in an entrée.”

“We’re not just talking about adding lettuce and vegetables to burgers and sandwiches,” says Maeve Webster, president, Menu Matters, Arlington, VT. “Adding produce bulks up a dish to create greater volume, greater value, better eye appeal, and more flavor.”



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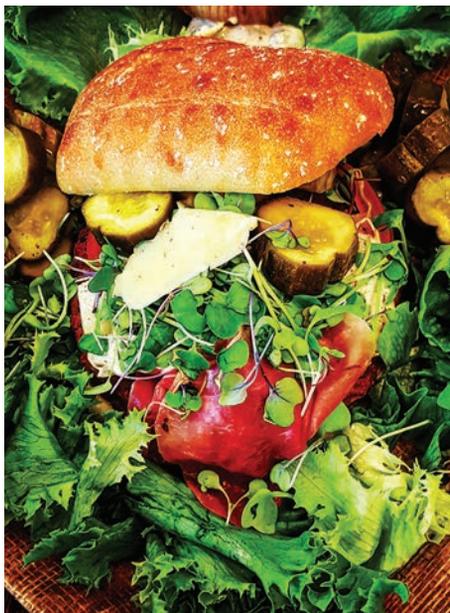
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Burger with Microgreens

Today's produce-forward plate differs, however, from plant-based vegetarianism or popular movements such as Meatless Monday. "Chefs are ideating new menu items and treating fresh produce with the same regard as meat-based protein, but not entirely replacing meat with vegetables," observes Gerry Ludwig, corporate consulting chef, Gordon Food Service, Grand Rapids, MI.

No longer content with soggy, drab-colored, boiled vegetables, chefs are applying traditional meat cooking methods to vegetables. Chef Chris Koetke, vice president, School of Culinary Arts, Kendall College, Chicago, acknowledges vegetables lend themselves to a multitude of classic cooking methods, including grilling, smoking, braising, and



Roasted Sweet Potato Wedges with Avocado Chimichurri

spicing, that coax a larger and more complex flavor profile out of the vegetables.

SAVINGS MEETS SUSTAINABILITY

Rising costs, environmental concerns and attention to health combined to create the perfect storm for the vegetable-forward plate. In commercial and non-commercial foodservice, wage equity movements and higher prices for animal protein have increased meal costs. For operators surveyed in 2015 for the Technomic operator survey, and whose responses were summarized in the Mann Packing *Viva la Veggies* report, this means moving vegetables from the side to the center of the plate for visual appeal, to meet customer demand for healthier items, and to help manage costs. Sustainability is increasingly promoted by organizations such as Cambridge, MA-based Chefs Collaborative, which encourages chefs to help build a

better food system through food choices that emphasize delicious, locally grown, seasonally fresh and whole or minimally processed ingredients. On the health side, Webster of Menu Matters notes menu labeling laws spur operators to bulk up dishes with produce to lower calories without reducing portions.

Each of these influencers is likely to remain at the forefront. "Everyone is encountering big beef prices and increased labor costs," says Chris Neary, corporate executive chef, Crown 1 Enterprises, Bay Shore, NY. "Chefs are designing around produce rather than protein for more colorful and profitable plates."

"Sustainability is not going away, because the underpinnings are not changing," says Koetke. "Emphasis on animal protein is not sustainable so vegetables have to play a larger role."

"Many more consumers have a balanced approach to healthy eating," says Webster. "They are not just counting calories as in the past."

FARMERS, CHEFS AND DINERS

The vegetable-forward plate has strengthened ties between farms and foodservice. "The relationship between the farmer, the chef, and the diner has deepened and become more complex," observes Bill Fuller, executive chef, Big Burrito, Pittsburgh. "Chefs want more and better vegetables all the time, and they push for higher quality and better supply. No longer is local good enough. Produce has to be local, fresh, delicious, clean, interesting and fairly reasonably priced. Diners want more 'healthy' dishes, which usually means more vegetables (even if they are swathed in butter and bacon). Farmers are slowly opening up to the idea of growing new crops, expanding offerings and extending growing seasons to increase sales and profitability."

State departments of agriculture often serve as matchmakers between farmers and chefs. In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo sought ways to help grow the upstate economy. He partnered with Richard Ball, commissioner, New York State Department of Agriculture, to convene an upstate-downstate summit and explore markets and opportunities for state-grown produce. Ball notes New York State farms are adding new crops and chefs are planning their menus based on what farms have available week-to-week.

Some restaurants establish formalized relationships with area farms. Chef Gabrynowicz participates in an RSA (restaurant supported agriculture) arrangement whereby his restaurant helps financially support a

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FreshPoint Local Farmers

farm in exchange for a share of its crops. New York City's Dig Inn seasonal market invests in sustainable best practices at area farms to help farmers grow more food and find new markets. "My mantra is you find me the vegetable, and I'll make the menu," explains Dig Inn culinary director Matt Weingarten. "We can help stabilize crops that the farmer wants to grow."

Distributors such as Baldor and J. Kings, both in New York, facilitate transportation logistics. Benjamin Walker, director, marketing and business development, Baldor Specialty Foods, Bronx, NY, describes Baldor's role as the player in the middle, sending trucks to deliver to restaurants and then back hauling products from farms. During growing season, Baldor can bring products from farm to fork in 24 hours.

BALANCING LOCAL WITH RESPONSIBLE

Local sells and is increasingly appealing to both chefs and diners. However, sourcing vegetables from local producers can be difficult as quality, availability and costs fluctuate throughout the year.

"In the height of the growing season, we get very close to 100 percent local but outside the growing season that number is nowhere near that figure," says Gabrynowicz. His priority instead is to procure the best products, raised in a sustainable manner, that have the least negative impact on the environment and the biggest impact on the local economy. Gabrynowicz tries to "think outside the box" in ways that support local farmers, for example, taking approximately 4,000 pounds of local winter squash, waxing it to extend its shelf life, and preserving it through pickling, jarring, canning and confit. "We think by working hard to extend the

seasons we can inspire a younger generation to cook like this and create a DNA of sustainability going forward."

A growing number of distributors, including industry giant Sysco and its FreshPoint division, offer local purchasing programs. Gordon Food Service's NearBuy program features 100-plus seasonal items from Michigan farmers. Baldor customers who "take the local pledge" automatically receive a local product when its price is within 10 percent of commodity price. "By automatically creating greater demand for local items, Baldor can work with farmers and producers to bring down prices," says Baldor's Walker.

Local produce consistently ranks near the top of the National Restaurant Association poll of 1,500 chefs nationwide and its "What's Hot" culinary forecast. Britni Webster, director of business development and marketing, FreshPoint Inc., Maitland, FL, notes "this tells us sourcing local produce is a priority for many chefs. However, it does take more time and resources for them to identify and work with smaller farms that may carry just one or two particular items. FreshPoint assists in the purchasing function for the chef, bringing in small quantities from multiple farms, putting them on a pallet, and delivering on one truck with one invoice."

WHAT'S NEXT?

There's no arguing kale revolutionized the vegetable-forward menu. While it no longer is among Datassential's one-year fastest growing vegetables in fine dining and holds only the fifth spot for fast casual, it continues to grow in QSR.

Loree Dowse, foodservice marketing manager, Mann Packing, Salinas, CA, notes kale moved from trendy to mainstream in such dishes as Chick-fil-A's kale/broccolini

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salad. Tuggle of Church Brothers observes baby kale is less intimidating but still has the nutritional halo that allows large chains such as McDonald's to add it to their mainstream menus in salads and limited time offer (LTO) dishes.

Brussels sprouts replaced kale, and cauliflower replaced Brussels sprouts, with chefs guessing the next vegetable superstar. With inspiration coming from fine dining, Datassential's fastest growing vegetables are padron pepper and mustard greens. Mann's *Viva la Veggies* report names kohlrabi, broccolini and sugar snap peas as "cutting-edge" vegetables. Chef Koetke from Kendall College has his eye on Jerusalem artichokes, heirloom carrots and wild mushrooms. Webster of Menu Matters predicts growing in interest is darker, bitter greens, including Swiss chard and Chinese cabbage. Ezio Bondi, account manager, Bondi Product, Toronto, expects growth in urban-farmed crops such as herbs and microgreens. Chef Ludwig likes the versatility of hard winter squash. "It is economical and plentiful, offers wide variety and keeps well, so it is not exclusively seasonal. It can be oven-roasted, smoked, torched, shaved into ribbons as carpaccio, or turned into a

thick puree."

On the fruit side, blueberries continue to be popular. "Creative dishes include blueberry pizza, nachos, bisques, marinades and even blueberry salt," says Kyla Oberman, director of marketing, Naturipe Farms LLC, Salinas, CA. "LTO blueberry dishes moved to the permanent menu, aided by our food-service-pack washed, ready-to-eat berries that are perfect for back-of-house as they don't require prep or additional handling."

"The rising vegetable tide lifts all boats," says Commissioner Ball. "Restaurants are asking for cardoon and more unusual vegetables. Chefs are using beets and rediscovering the many varieties of potatoes."

INTERMEDIARIES STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEM

Few players at the beginning and end of the vegetable supply chain, namely farmers and foodservice, are in a position to source directly from each other without intermediaries. New York State's Commissioner Ball is exploring infrastructure for storing and transporting produce procured from upstate farms.

Ben Friedman, president, Riviera Produce, Englewood, NJ, describes his company as

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHURCH BROTHERS



Church Brothers' Kale Color Crunch Salad Mixed with Fruit

"the ambassadors of farm produce. We will pick up and deliver even one box of produce to help move product. We're driven by what chefs want to work with and what farmers are growing. We also utilize our own storage facility."

Supply chain manager Pro*Act created and administers Greener Fields Together, a sustainability program. "Greener Fields Together engages and involves local and national farmers, distributors, commercial and non-commercial foodservice operators and retail locations in an effort to work toward available and safer produce from seed to fork," explains Kathleen Weaver, supply chain sustainability manager, Pro*Act USA, Monterey, CA.

Distributors and other industry partners also update foodservice clients on trends, insights and new products. "If one of our chef clients orders an interesting product, we let other clients know through our newsletter. Maybe they'll want to order it too," says Bondi. "For example, we publicized that a chef in fine dining was using fava beans. Three to six months later, a QSR customer added favas to its grain bowls as a seasonal promotion."

VALUE-ADDED GAINS VALUE

Value-added products facilitate adding vegetable-forward items to the menu. According to Mann's *Viva la Veggies* report, two-fifths of surveyed operators say they purchase ready-to-use vegetables for ease of use, availability of clean product and time-savings. Furthermore, one-third of operators who do not use ready-to-eat vegetables are interested in purchasing them in the future. Primary reasons for not using them, however, include high price related to value, shelf life, freshness and quality.

"For a lot of operators, the desire to add more produce becomes more challenging, because it requires some level of skill and staff to prep," says Webster of Menu Matters.

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"That is why more operators, particularly in QSR, are looking for value-added products."

Don Odiome, vice president, foodservice, Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID, notes fresh-cut potatoes are top-selling items. "The most recent foodservice recipes added to our website do not include a big protein portion, and many are ethnically-inspired."

Baldor's Walker expects a growing variety of value-added and pre-formatted products in the future and at all restaurant levels. "With increased labor costs in the U.S., restaurants are likely to over-index for labor-saving products like chopped onions. We're already seeing this trickle down to fast casual."

WHAT GROCERS CAN EXPECT

Produce departments can expect changes in supply and packaging. Grower/shippers continue to add to their product lines for trendy value-added timesavers such as shaved Brussels sprouts, mixed deep greens and recipe-ready cauliflower crumbles. Packaging increasingly reflects local and/or sustainable practices. Produce items also may bear a state certification. New York, for example, is exploring a symbol or label for New York-grown that would communicate to shop-

pers the produce is New York-grown and GAP-certified and cultivated adhering to good agriculture practices and an Agriculture Environmental Management plan.

The trend toward vegetable-forward dishes is likely to have a greater impact behind the glass in the prepared foods department than in the produce department. Prepared foods continue to grow as shoppers turn to these growing sections rather than the produce department for quick-meal solutions. Foodservice companies play an important role in keeping the prepared foods department well stocked.

"We've been supplying stores with ready-to-eat entrées for about five years," says Chef Neary of Crown 1 Enterprises. "Starchy side dishes used to be an area of high growth for us, but now shoppers are more into vegetable sides. We also dressed up classics, such as potato dishes, offering a five-color fingerling dish, for example, instead of plain roasted potatoes. Vegetable dishes have grown to about 15 percent of our cooked business." He adds markets want to position themselves as culinary experts, whether with an in-store chef or by using a foodservice culinary department.

Produce departments need to be proactive to avoid losing ground to prepared foods. "While I observed more convenience packaging in the produce department, I don't see an abundance of recipes or efforts in showing shoppers how to make vegetables the center of the plate," says Jim Matorin, president, Smartketing, a Philadelphia-based market resource company. "Cauliflower, for example, is a hot item in restaurants, but it's not actively promoted in the supermarket."

Kelly Jacob, vice president, retail and emerging channels, Pro*Act USA, questions whether produce executives follow and jump on restaurant trends.

"Grocery stores historically react to consumer trend demands but rarely create them," she says. "That said, since restaurant food dollar sales equal grocery sales for the first time ever, the blurring of channels between grocery, 'grocerant,' and restaurant is real. Smart folks will watch what cutting-edge chefs are doing. Those who find out and exploit the trends will find a point of differentiation and incremental sales. Even better, grocerants that start trends with fresh ingredients will give the restaurant industry a run for its money." **pb**



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PRODUCE GETS SCHOOLED

Nation's school districts, industry organizations implement initiatives to introduce, grow and promote fruits and vegetables.

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

It doesn't take much to get the 48,000 students in Florida's Manatee County School District to eat the recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables.

Though just 11 of the district's 50 K-12 schools participate in the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), produce consumption has always been consistently high with its students.

"We've always required schools to offer two fresh fruit items a day for our students," says Regina Thoma, the district's director of food and nutrition. "Our kids eat a lot of fruit and vegetables."

By contrast, New York's Buffalo Public School students and staff are less enthusiastic

about produce, despite a number of promising initiatives.

"I believe that our schools are up to their eyeballs in produce, but there is no effective plan to focus on getting kids to try it, like it and consume it," says Bridget O'Brien Wood, director of the Buffalo Public Schools' food-service department.

The district provided kale, Brussels sprouts and potatoes to its students as part of a farm-to-school planting grant, but the initial excitement waned even before the grant was discontinued.

Buffalo Public Schools also partnered with businesses in the community to develop nutrition education plans, which included a Produce

of the Month program.

"Very few teachers used the materials for this program or talked about produce, and the same thing happened with an initiative to plant kale in the classrooms, which was a huge effort," says O'Brien Wood. "Less than 20 percent of the district's teachers used the curriculum, even though it was just one lesson plan a week."

Under federal requirements that were instituted in 2012 and updated under the Healthy Hunger School Meal Act, U.S. schools are required to serve larger portions of fruits and vegetables, with every lunch offering a serving of produce.

Required serving sizes were increased and

based on grade level. For example, high school students are provided a full cup of fruit and vegetables at each meal, while students at all grade levels are provided a half-cup of fruits or vegetables for the meal to be reimbursable.

“Each week, schools have to serve at least one dark leafy green, legumes and a red or orange vegetable, which ensures a variety of choices are being offered,” says Patricia Fitzgerald, director of education services at the Oxon Hill, MD-based School Nutrition Association (SNA) and editor of its School Nutrition magazine.

The non-profit organization works with the school foodservice industry to provide nutrition education and ensure best practices with menu offerings. SNA also regularly conducts member surveys regarding industry trends.

“Salad bars are definitely more popular in today’s schools and locally sourced produce is a huge trend,” says Fitzgerald. “The USDA’s farm-to-school census found tremendous growth in the number of schools sourcing locally, including an increase in districts partnering with local farms.”

SCHOOL PRODUCE INITIATIVES

The Manatee County School District isn’t able to get the necessary produce volumes to fully stock its cafeterias with locally grown products, but has initiatives starting next year to partner with local farmers for educational purposes in conjunction with the University of Florida Ag Extension Service. Bradenton, FL, is the county’s largest city, as well as Manatee’s county seat.

“We’re also working on Fresh From Florida initiatives,” says the district’s Thoma. “With this program, local produce is offered every

Friday, from November through April.”

Taking local to the next level, Wisconsin’s School District of Holmen is part of Fifth Season Coop, where local farmers join forces to sell produce to distributors.

“We used to purchase our apples direct from a local orchard, but now we can get these same products through our distributor,” says Michael Gasper, the district’s nutrition services supervisor. “This way, the quality is more consistent.”

Also, local farmers have donated land for the district’s 3,800 students to plant a variety of products, including sweet corn. In addition, each school has an on-site garden. One high school recently sowed more than 2,500 asparagus plants and is operating an indoor hydroponic lettuce operation.

“These kids are far more vested in what we’re serving because they’re helping to produce it,” says Gasper. “The difference in consumption is really remarkable.”

Education is part of the process. This includes monthly taste tests with less common produce, such as edamame and succotash, as well as elementary school cooking classes taught by local chefs.

Because many schools plan menus far in advance, it can be challenging working with farms and relying on local product.

This is the case at Fairview School District 72, based in Skokie, IL, which often isn’t able to take advantage of locally sourced produce due to the state’s short growing season.

“With local fruits and vegetables, there are limits to what we buy,” says Karen Kempf, Fairview’s foodservice director. “We locally source apples when we can.”

The K-8 school serves 500 lunches a day, with produce served four out of five school

days. Children can choose a fruit or vegetable one day out of the week.

One local supplier that provides the district with fresh and frozen produce includes a product card with farm information, which is put on display in the lunch line.

Fairview procures whole produce that is sliced on-site during the lulls between lunch hours. This includes strawberries, oranges, pears, clementines and kiwi.

Instead of local products, O’Brien Wood spends the majority of Buffalo School District’s dollars on unique items for students to sample. She’s looking at alternatives to increase local buys.

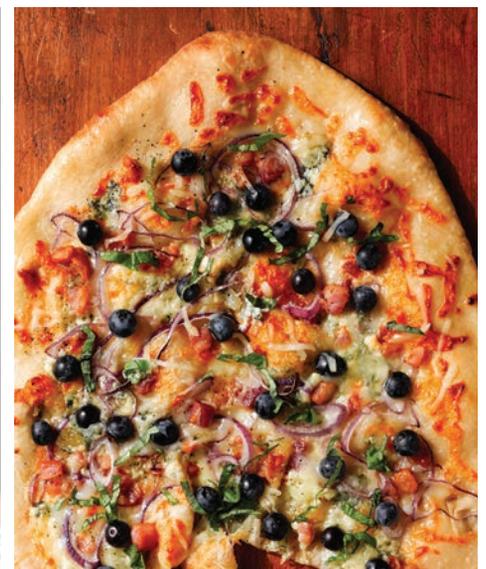
“Serving 28,000 lunches and 24,000 breakfasts daily, with a produce purchase order of more than \$2 million, it’s difficult to work directly with farmers,” she says. “We’re working to change our produce bid to entice more local farmers.”

The Buffalo School District currently has 18 school gardens run by a district committee. The project is guided by Grassroots Gardens WNY of Buffalo, NY, an agency that provides grant money to help create planting opportunities for students.

INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

Two years ago, the Washington, D.C.-based United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA) implemented its United Fresh Start Foundation with the sole mission to increase children’s access to fresh produce.

The association partnered with the Chef Ann Foundation, National Fruit & Vegetable Alliance (NFVA) and Whole Foods Market to create the Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools program. To date, this program has incorpo-



The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council worked with Kaleidoscope Youth marketing to deliver educational materials with blueberry recipes, nutrition facts and activity sheets to more than 350,000 families.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF US Highbush BLUEBERRY COUNCIL

rated salad bars in more than 4,500 schools serving nearly 2.5 million children.

“Salad bars are definitely on the rise,” says Andrew Marshall, United Fresh Produce Association’s director, Foundation Programs & Partnerships. “The Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools program currently has about 609 schools on the waiting list for salad bars.”

All Holmen School District cafeterias include salad bars, which were acquired from the Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools program. This has significantly increased student produce consumption.

“At our schools, students used to go through 10 to 15 pounds of vegetables with each meal; with the salad bars it’s now 100 or more pounds,” says Nutrition Services Supervisor Gasper.

The Fairview School District is in its third year with a salad bar program and, due to the popularity, has had difficulty keeping it stocked during lunch hours.

“We serve about 500 lunches a day, and 130 kids supplement with salads,” says Fairview’s Kempf. “The kids like it more than we expected.”

The Buffalo School District currently has 10 salad bars in its schools, with five donated by supermarket chain Tops Friendly Markets and the other five provided by the U.S. Potato Board.

In addition to promoting salad bars in schools, UFPA instituted its Produce Forum for School Success program. With this program, more than 50 leading foodservice directors participate in an educational program during the association’s annual June convention.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MANATEE COUNTY

The association also has a school foodservice committee under its new foundation that includes distributors and foodservice directors.

“With this committee, we want to educate distributors about school nutrition standards, so when the amount of produce schools are purchasing increases or the standards change, they will be aware of it,” says UFPA’s Marshall.

SUPPLIER AND COMMODITY COUNCIL EDUCATION

The school nutrition standards have been beneficial to produce suppliers, including Bakersfield, CA-based Grimmway Farms, which sells 20 percent of its carrots directly to schools.

“The standards have had a significant impact on our carrot business,” says Lisa McNeece Miceli, vice president of foodservice and industrial sales at Grimmway Farms.

“We’ve seen double-digit growth in our school foodservice business in recent years.”

Although the school foodservice segment has been on the radar of many produce organizations for years, the Mushroom Council came on board about four years ago.

“Now we work quite a bit directly with schools, introducing mushroom blends, assisting with recipes and menu training, and incorporating point-of-sale graphics into elementary schools,” says Bart Minor, chief executive and president of the Council. “We also work with school nutrition specialists to ensure our recipes conform to school nutrition requirements.”

The Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program allows schools to use USDA Foods entitlement dollars to buy fresh produce. Its commodity food program primarily utilizes three-eighths-of-an-inch

■ WHAT IS THE URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE?

Three years ago, to better control costs, six of the country’s largest school districts joined forces to coordinate menus in an effort to consolidate buying power from food providers.

The Urban School Food Alliance, comprised of public schools in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Miami-Dade and Orange County, FL, take the issue to a larger scale and turn it into a solution.

These districts combined service approximately 3 million kids in more than 4,500 schools daily; serve 2.8 million meals per year; and purchase \$550 million in food and food supplies annually.

“The goal with the Alliance is to use purchasing power to our advantage,” says Eric Goldstein, chairman of the New York

City-based organization. “With scale and coordinated product specifications, we can drive efficiency and bring value into cafeterias where it doesn’t currently exist.”

Most recently, this was accomplished with disposable plates. In the past, costs for this item were between 12 and 15 cents per plate. The Alliance was able to decrease the price to just 5 cents each.

“By bringing in the other cities, we can make an impact,” says Goldstein. “That’s our strategy, product by product and solution by solution, we can recognize volume savings and make a change for the better.”

Although produce is an important part of the initiative, it also can be more complicated, since there is a local component to consider.

“We are promoting fresh produce consumption in partnership with the United Fresh Produce Association and its salad bar initiatives, so these programs are available to all of our students,” says Goldstein.

“We’re very interested in seeing what procurements happen in this space, and are intent on bringing value and quality to our cafeterias,” says Goldstein.

The Alliance shares the goals of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 to serve healthy, balanced meals to children that includes fresh fruits and vegetables.

It also supports significant investments in farm economies and children by increasing the USDA food dollars spent by school districts.

pb



Grimmway Farms sells 20 percent of its carrots directly to schools.

diced mushrooms in blends for burgers and pasta sauce. Portabellas are popular for vegetarian meal options.

Since 2014, the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council has worked with Kaleidoscope Youth marketing to deliver educational materials with blueberry recipes, nutrition facts and activity sheets to more than 350,000 families via hundreds of elementary schools across the country.

“More than 600 school nutrition managers have received mailers containing school-appropriate recipes and cooking tips, as well as guidance on how to access frozen blueberries through the USDA commodity food program,” says Mark Villata, executive director of the Folsom, CA-based organization.

Post-program surveys revealed the Council’s materials prompted 400-plus schools to serve more blueberries.

In July 2015, the Blueberry Council hosted 15 school foodservice professionals representing 1,320 schools in the largest U.S. districts at a two-day Blueberry Boot Camp.

“This in-depth educational session was geared toward familiarizing attendees with the USDA commodity purchasing process and providing new ways to utilize blueberries across all meal times,” says Villata.

The Council will repeat the program for another 15 school foodservice professionals this summer.

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Encouraging Kids To Snack On Fresh Produce



Pyramid Foods, a Rogersville, MO-based retailer, promotes a Free Fruit for Kids program in store to encourage healthy snack choices.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PYRAMID FOODS

Five ways retailers can make fruits and veggies top of mind.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

The good news is kids are eating more fruit. The bad news is even though fresh vegetable consumption among 2- to 17-year-olds rose 10 percent between 2009 and 2014, vegetable consumption overall is down, according to the State of the Plate: *2015 Study on America's Consumption of Fruit & Vegetables*, released by Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBHF), Hockessin, DE.

At the same time, "Trends In Snacking Among U.S. Children," published in a 2010

issue of *Health Affairs*, shows kids are snacking more than ever — munching on average three times a day between meals. The largest increases are in candy and salty snacks.

An effective way to grow produce consumption one bite at a time is for retailers to tap into this trend by positioning fresh fruits and vegetables as nature's original snack foods.

"Poor eating habits didn't happen overnight," says Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce merchandising and procurement for Roundy's Supermarkets, Inc., a

150-store grocery store chain headquartered in Milwaukee. "If we as an industry can catch this generation now, we can create life-long produce consumers."

Here are five ways retailers can encourage parents to buy and kids to snack on fresh produce.

1. STOCK KID-FRIENDLY PRODUCE

Visibility and convenience are key to promoting fresh fruits and vegetables as snack foods to parents and kids, says Kathy Means,

vice president of industry relations for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), in Newark, DE. “Consumers can have a bowl of fruit on the counter, fresh-cut veggies and dip at eye level in the refrigerator, etc. The easier retailers make it for consumers to use fresh produce as snacks, the more consumers will do so.”

The first step to achieving this is stocking kid-friendly produce. Berries, bananas, apples and oranges — “as is,” not served in meals, fresh-cut or processed — are driving the increase in fruit consumption among this age group, according to the State of the Plate 2015.

“Parents thank us for finally offering kid-sized apples,” says Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, Inc., in Wenatchee, WA. “We’ve always had small apples, but the Lil Snappers package makes that connection and offers an easy grab-and-go solution.”

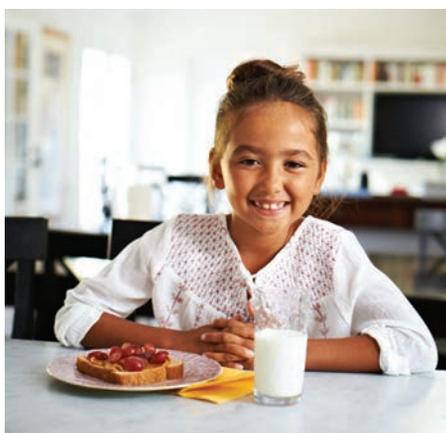
Stemilt introduced its kid-size Lil Snappers line of 3-pound pouch bagged apples to retail in 2011. Sunkist Growers joined the following year, offering a variety of small-sized citrus, including Cara Caras, Mandarins and Moro blood oranges. The same year Stemilt added small pears, including Bartlett, Anjou, red and Bosc, to the line.

This season, Pepperl says the company will launch a complete 9-variety organic apple under its Lil Snappers brand, including best-sellers Gala, Pink Lady and Pinata. Small Tosca pears will be available for the first time in Lil Snapper packaging from Aug. 1 to 31. Pepperl adds Stemilt is looking at adding small peaches and nectarines to the line on a test basis.

“Display and sales contests have taught us the best place to merchandise Lil Snappers is on refrigerated endcaps or side merchandisers off Euro tables. We offer display-ready cartons that can be used to create wing displays on the side of tables,” says Pepperl.

Kids love products that taste great and are easy to eat, while parents focus on health attributes and quality when choosing snacks. This is what makes palm-sized citrus such a hit with the whole family, according to Adam Cooper, vice president of marketing for Wonderful Citrus, the Delano, CA-based growers and marketers of Wonderful Halos brand Mandarins.

“We found that eight out of 10 parents provide snacks for their child’s events, with 50 percent of these parents providing snacks five times or more per year. Among parents who are regular citrus buyers, our research shows Mandarins are the most requested snack by kids,” says Cooper. “Retailers can make the



FIRST AND SECOND PHOTOS BY CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPE COMMISSION; THIRD PHOTO COURTESY OF HY-VEE

most of this by stacking our display-ready, high-graphic packages of Halos in any area of the store or in branded bins. More than 150 of our merchandisers set up Halos displays with bin bases, balloons, signs and posters to serve as billboards for our products in-store.”

“We have multiple offerings that are perfect for a healthy children’s snack including our Grimmway Farms and Bunny-Luv Organic branded Baby Carrot Snack Packs and our Carrot Dippers,” says Jennifer Hayslett, brand manager for Bakersfield, CA-based Grimmway Farms. “Each product is packaged in a convenient single serving making them perfect for school lunches, travel, picnics and other grab-and-go occasions.”

In addition to carrots and Mandarins, grapes and kiwifruit also meet the kid-friendly common denominator of great taste and ease of eating.

“The best way for retailers to promote healthy snacking is to display items like our Cuties Clementines, Air Chief label table grapes and conditioned, ready-to-scoop-and-eat Mighties Kiwi prominently and promote them frequently,” says Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing, based in Pasadena, CA.

DiPiazza says a great out-of-the-box idea for point-of-sale is incorporating 4 inch by 4 inch signs with holders that can be integrated into the space used to display fresh produce snack items. These signs can provide direct comparisons to “junk food.” For example, show a photo of a Mandarin orange alongside a chocolate chip cookie, snack cake or candy bar with comparisons of calories, fat, carb, sugar and vitamins.

“I think this would motivate parents when shopping to have healthier fresh produce snacking items readily available in the household, and less junk,” says DiPiazza.

Grapes are an especially kid-favorite snack.

“Eight-two percent of children eat grapes in households of grocery shoppers with children under 18 years of age,” says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission, Fresno, CA. “Each variety has its own characteristics of taste, color, texture, size, etc.; providing all three colors of grapes gives primary shoppers more purchasing options for everyone in their households, including kids.”

Many suppliers have made it even easier for kids to snack on fresh produce. Some of these include carrots, salad and vegetable juice, as well as peppers, broccoli and spinach — the vegetables 2- to 17-year-olds ate more of during the last five years, according to State

of the Plate 2015.

“There are many great produce items that are appealing to kids, like baby carrots and dip, fruit cups and squeeze fruits,” says Roundy’s Jarzombek.

One example is Foodles, the number one seller from Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak. This product line pairs healthy snack foods like cheese, grapes, sliced apples, carrots and/or pretzels in a Mickey Mouse-shaped tray. The company also features other Disney characters,

as well as Marvel comic and NBA characters, on its packaging to make the produce fun and enticing to kids.

Another example of a kid-friendly snack solution is the Ready Snax line by Ready Pac Foods, Inc., in Irwindale, CA. The line is available in cups and packs, and includes sliced apples, carrots, snap peas, celery, grapes and grape tomatoes paired with cheese, hummus, pretzels and flatbread. The newest addition to the line is Pico Fiesta, a single-serve salsa and



Stemilt introduced its kid-size Lil Snappers line of 3-pound pouch bagged apples to retail in 2011.

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chip pack. Further line extension is planned.

Some retailers like Hy-Vee, Inc., a West Des Moines, IA-headquartered chain with 240-stores located across eight Midwestern states, make fresh-cut fruit and vegetable trays in-house and promote these for snacking.

“As a dietitian, I promote these as great options for kids and adults to snack on while waiting for the main course,” says Stephanie Vande Brake, RD, LD, who works at Hy-Vee in Coralville, IA.

2. CREATE DESTINATION SNACK SETS

The media is a major factor that influences the choices parents make when it comes to choosing snacks for their children.

“Moms and dads understand from the media the importance of providing healthy snacks to their kids. Retailers can make it easier by grouping these products together. For example, in our newer stores — where we have more room — we are able to dedicate a 3- to 4-foot section of our refrigerated value-added case to these products. We sign it as our kid’s section and everything in this section is for snacking,” says Roundy’s Jarzombek.

Tristan Simpson, Ready Pac Foods’ chief marketing officer, agrees. “Today it is difficult to find the fresh convenience products, as they are spread out across the produce department, making it harder for parents to shop.

Building destination set-ups in stores to show the breadth and depth of the different fruit and vegetable snacks available will encourage parents to buy fresh produce. In addition, providing multiple locations in the store, including adjacent to kid's snacks, will build awareness around convenient, fresh produce."

Several companies that make products ideal for this type of promotion have joined the Eat Brighter! movement. This initiative — a partnership between PMA, Sesame Street Workshop and the Partnership for a Healthier America — enables producers, suppliers, distributors and retailers of fresh produce to use Sesame Street characters such as Elmo, Big Bird and Cookie Monster royalty-free on packaging in an effort to get kids, ages 2- to 5, to eat more fresh produce.

"Though we haven't surveyed kids, we do know from our surveys of suppliers there is around a 5 percent increase in sales due to Eat Brighter!," says PMA's Means.

"Our snack packs are a fun, versatile, crunchy and tasty alternative to other snacks," says Grimmway's Hayslett. "You need eye-catching packaging and point of sale material to capture their attention and get them excited about trying new things. The goal should be to help make meal planning stress free by providing healthy lunchbox ideas, easy dinner recipes and snack options the whole family will love."

3. GIVE AWAY FREE PRODUCE

A great way to get kids to eat fresh produce is to let them snack in-store.

"We all know busy parents do their best to juggle work and home life. Sometimes the trip to the grocery store happens during snack time. The good news is the grocery store is the perfect place to find yourself when hungry. As a Hy-Vee registered dietitian, I love when kids associate a trip to the grocery store with getting a free piece of fruit, such as a banana or clementine. Our store usually has three choices of fruit available, so a child has the ability to pick something he/she likes," says Vande Brake.

Pyramid Foods, a Rogersville, MO-based retailer that operates 47 grocery stores in Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas under banners such as Price Cutter, Food Pyramid and Country Mart, has a Free Fruit for Kids program.

"This might be a small apple, banana or pear... whatever our produce manager decides," says registered dietitian Rebekah Allen. "The fruit is placed in a basket at the front of the produce department with signage encouraging kids to take a piece and munch while their

mom's are shopping. We get so much positive feedback about this from our customers."

There's a Fruit of the Month Club at County Market/Niemann Foods, Inc., a 54-store chain that operates in Illinois, Missouri and Indiana, with its corporate office in Quincy, IL.

"We like to offer seasonal items — a Bosc pear, kiwi, baby banana or Cara Cara orange," says Niemann Foods' Hope Danielson, health and wellness advisor. "Kids, ages 12 and under, receive a card in produce, at the customer service desk, during school visits or at community events. The card is good for one year and entitles kids to one free fruit each month. Those that fill up the card have their names entered in a drawing to win a fresh fruit basket. This does a couple of things. It stops kids from bugging Mom for a snack that is perhaps less healthful, and it introduces them to new fruits they may not have tried. Plus, kids like the idea of having their own card."

Demos are another good way to introduce the idea of snacking on produce to kids.

"The produce department is a natural fit for dietitian demos in the store. If the kids like the item being sampled, their parents most often will purchase it. The opportunity is endless for showing our customers how their families can enjoy produce in simple recipes that are delicious to eat," says Hy-Vee's Vande Brake.

"Another great option is produce demos with cheese," she continues. "Research shows kids will eat more fruits and vegetables if cheese is served alongside it. Our cheese and grape cups are a great option for an on-the-go snack."

Out-of-store, Roundy's gives fruit away to kids and parents at fitness events.

"Runs and walks are very popular in the communities we serve. We're a big sponsor of these and donate bananas, apples or oranges to the participants," says Jarzombek.

4. SET UP A HEALTHY CHECKOUT LANE

"Some retailers are introducing healthy checkout lanes and offering snack-type produce items here," says Elizabeth Pivonka, PBH president and chief executive.

One of these is Hy-Vee, which as part of its participation in the community well-being improvement initiative Blue Zones Project, offers fruit, nuts, granola bars and water at a dedicated checkout lane.

Creating secondary displays of ready-to-eat produce at the checkout is a powerful impulse marketing opportunity for suppliers and retailers alike. The fact this is virgin territory for fruits and vegetables was highlighted in a 2014 study of 30 chain stores in the Washington, D.C., area reported in the National



Foodles is the No. 1 seller from Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak. This product line pairs healthy snack foods like cheese, grapes, sliced apples, carrots and/or pretzels in a Mickey Mouse-shaped tray.

Fruit & Vegetable Alliance's National Action Plan's 2015 Report Card. Results of the study showed there were only 33 total facings of fruits and vegetables at checkout (13 facings of fresh fruit, four for dried fruit and 16 of fruit juice) compared to 8,786 food, beverage and merchandise facings, or basically 0 percent.

5. MAKE PRODUCE PART OF IN-STORE EVENTS

Special in-store events can shine a spotlight on fruit and vegetable snacks. For example, County Market/Niemann Foods is one of many nationwide retailers that participate in cause marketing campaign, Produce for Kids. The campaign helps families eat healthier, raises funds for children's charities and helps to increase sales of partners' products, through in-store signage that calls out produce partner's products.

"Many Produce for Kids suppliers are those companies that make great snacks, such as pre-cut apples, mini bell peppers, baby carrots, Mandarins and guacamole dip. We always highlight that fact as part of the campaign," says Niemann Foods' Danielson.

Another good example is Hy-Vee's monthly kid's cooking classes hosted by the company's registered dietitians. Kids, ages 4 to 12, learn cooking basics and kitchen etiquette while preparing kid-friendly recipes.

"We made everything from kale chips, beet cupcakes and burrito bowls with cactus to fruit sushi," says Vande Brake. "While it is common for kids to be picky, there is something about the group setting and watching their peers trying a new food that makes it cool to taste something unique. Sometimes it takes kids several times of trying a new food to develop a liking for it, so a cooking class is a great way to experiment in a relaxed environment." **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPE COMMISSION

Maximizing California Grape Sales

Retailers can benefit from prominent displays with a variety of quality product.

BY LISA WHITE

Just as Georgia is known for its Vidalia onions and Washington for its apples, California has long been identified with its large crop of grapes. Not surprisingly, the continued proliferation of new varieties is also creating additional marketing opportunities for supermarket produce departments to get the most profit from this popular fruit.

There are more than 85 varieties of California grapes available in green, red and black. The growing season for these products is long, spanning from May through January. The top six seedless types include red Scarlet Royal; green Autumn King; red Flame; red Crimson; green Sugraone; and black Autumn Royal.

“California grape varieties and production techniques have been copied worldwide,” says John Pandol, director of special projects at Delano, CA-based Pandol Bros., Inc.

The latest research from the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission shows 80 percent of primary grocery shoppers in the United States purchase grapes and 59 percent eat grapes at least once a week. About two-fifths of shoppers, or 41 percent, report buying grapes at least weekly. This is consistent with past years’ research, where consumers have consistently said they consider grapes a frequent and important purchase. In the United States, a household’s primary shopper

is the one most often eating grapes.

“Recent research shows 94 percent of primary grape shoppers in the United States prefer grapes from California over other origins when grapes are priced the same,” says Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission. “And 69 percent say they still prefer California grapes even if they’re priced higher than grapes from other origins.”

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Today, with multiple new California grape varieties being cultivated, supermarket retailers are looking for unique varieties that will stand out among all the others.

“Cotton Candy, Autumn Crisp and Pristine are examples of three varieties that have been developed and marketed by different growing concerns,” says Nick Dulcich, co-owner and president of Sunlight International Sales, based in McFarland, CA.

And new varieties of table grapes from the state continue to be introduced each year, with different characteristics in terms of flavor, consistency, size and color. Growers emphasize that with this fruit, consistency, rather than a larger size, is the goal.

Bakersfield, CA-based Giumarra Vineyards Corp. is focused on



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PHOTO COURTESY OF BARI PRODUCE

“California grape growers continue to look at high flavor varieties, making sure the sugar is there, as well as seeking more proprietary grapes.”

— Scott Boyajian, Sunview Marketing International

growing its grapes through the company’s ARRA Proprietary Breeding program. “By investing in, and growing these new varieties, we’re trying to maintain a consistent, quality box of fruit,” says Mimi Corsaro-Dorsey, vice president of marketing and director of export sales. “We’re focused on ways to grow the standard USDA varieties for optimal flavor and sugar, rather than just a jumbo size.”

Giumarra Vineyards’ offerings include Sweeties or ARRA 15, jumbo green, mid-season grapes with sugar and crunch; ARRA 29, a very early, large red grape, with a sweet taste and meaty texture; ARRA 28, a late season, large red grape with a vivid pinkish-red color and a distinctive sweet flavor; and ARRA 32, a mid-season, large black seedless grape that features a unique sweet taste. Different combinations of characteristics make each California grape variety unique, with various eating, quality and production characteristics.

Eating characteristics encompass flavor, brix, acid, skin thickness, sterility, interior texture, juice and crunch, while quality characteristics involve the grape’s color as well as the bunch shape and berry size, according to Corsaro-Dorsey. Production characteristics deal with storage and shelf-life issues, limited inputs, low labor, water, size of the yield, rain resistance and the length of the season.

Sunview Marketing International in McFarland, CA, is one of largest growers of organic California grapes, which are now rarely segmented apart from conventional fruit in many produce departments.

“We are continuing to grow in organics because the market continues to expand,” says Scott Boyajian, sales manager at Sunview Marketing International. “Approximately 90 percent of all table grapes grown in the United States are from California, since the sunshine and climate are ideal conditions for growing this fruit.”

For the last couple of years, Sunview

Marketing International has seen growth in its Stella Bella green grape, which is becoming more available this year. The elongated fruit is crisp and juicy. The company also has five red grape varieties.

“California grape growers continue to look at high flavor varieties, making sure the sugar is there, as well as seeking more proprietary grapes,” says Boyajian. “The high quality of this fruit has many of these companies upping their game.”

Madera, CA-based Bari Produce has been marketing its grapes for 60 years. The growing season for its seven varieties begins July 10, and the fruit is harvested in early November.

“Ten to 15 years ago, there was a more limited variety of California grapes; today there are dozens of different types,” says Justin Bedwell, Bari Produce’s president. “Growers want to sell unique varieties for each particular year, but there are only so many PLU numbers to go around.”

When five different shippers/packers are using the same PLU numbers for identical grape varieties, there is the concern that consistency can vary amongst the crops. Yet, there is only a certain amount of SKUs and PLU numbers allocated to grapes that companies can pull from.

Still, many companies like Sunview Marketing are constantly looking at new varieties, testing and putting to trial those with specific attributes.

“These are products that need to be grown and tested over time, not just created,” says Boyajian. “Grape varieties from California are typically known for added sweetness due to the climate and soil quality.”

KEEPING THE QUALITY

Quality is paramount with California grapes. Because consumers buy with their eyes, the fruit on display needs to look fresh and appealing to entice added sales at the retail level. Research shows grapes displayed under refrigeration will retain good quality for 48 hours. It’s important to note grapes on a non-refrigerated display will begin to show shrink within 24 hours.

To better understand this fruit, it helps to be aware of how it’s produced. Grapevines are

farmed in different ways to get different results; and as a result, there is information that can be shared between the growers.

“For example, in fresh grapes we really didn’t have the concept of maximum maturities like some of the processed grapes,” says Pandol of Pandol Bros. “In reality, each variety has a minimum, optimum and maximum maturity and some of the newer varieties have smaller windows for optimum flavor harvest.”

How the flavor and texture is maintained after harvest also is variety-specific, say experts, so storage life is being re-evaluated in this segment. Consequently, there have been new approaches to ensure fresher grapes are offered to the end consumer.

Alternative packaging designs have been created to better manage shelf-life, as well as enhance merchandising and ease of transport.

“Rigid packaging is expensive to produce, and bulk has increased shrink disadvantages,” says Sunlight’s Dulcich. “As a result, stand-up pouch bags have become the all-around solution.”

Shippers stepped up the marketing possibilities for California grapes by embracing the pouch, as this packaging best showcases the product and is easily transportable.

Clamshells also have become more prevalent and are mainly used for branded varieties or varietal mixes, yet handle pouch bags continue to be the most requested type in the United States, according to suppliers, and are becoming more popular overseas. Many tout the clarity of these bags as a boon for merchandising at the retail level.

“Probably more interesting is the use of the GTIN code on bags as opposed to the PLU, which will give the retailer the ability to offer multiple varieties of the same color grape at different price points, track which varieties are successful and increase sales to grow the grape category in their stores,” says Giumarra Vineyards’ Corsaro-Dorsey.

Growers are now experimenting with softer, less rigid plastics for grape packaging.

While the first generation of bags used polymers that tore easily, the next generation of thicker polymers didn’t tear and were too rigid. Today, a new wave of bag materials that are structurally adequate, offer higher clarity

and are more flexible have been introduced.

“Several years ago, manufacturers used high-graphic or glossy bags to appeal to consumers; now we’re seeing more fixed and random weight bags and clamshells for club stores with fixed weight and UPCs,” says Sunview Marketing International’s Boyajian. “The benefit with fixed-weight packaging is these can be in any size, and with clamshells a variety of grape colors can be mixed to add more visual appeal and better differentiate the varying types.”

Unfortunately, suppliers say some retailers are still proposing procurement, distribution and packaging regimes that are less than optimal for grapes.

“For years the industry has been trying to get retailers to not stack grapes, which damages the fruit below,” says Pandol Bros.’ Pandol. “Stack ‘em high and let ‘em fly’ might work for cans and boxes, but it doesn’t work for delicate produce items. The semi-rigid pouch bag has helped. I visited one chain that had a vertical chilled case with shelves designed for one grape bag each, which worked beautifully.”

Bari Produce focuses on consistency, rather than fruit size, in terms of its grape offerings.

“Retailers may get inconsistent quality for a lower price,” says Bari Produce’s Bedwell. “To keep this fruit at peak quality while providing increased visibility, it’s important grapes are kept refrigerated, yet secondary locations can also peak consumer interest.”

PROPER PLACEMENT

The most effective way retailers can capitalize on California grapes is to make sure the displays are clearly visible, eye-catching and well-stocked at all times.

Multiple display locations also are a good way to sell more grapes from this region. Creating primary, secondary, conventional, organic, refrigerated and non-refrigerated

■ CAPTURING A WIDE RANGE OF PREFERENCES

The long growing season in California — May to January — produces more than 85 varieties of fresh California grapes, according to the California Table Grapes Commission, Fresno, CA. Offering multiple varieties can give consumers both familiar options, such as the top 15 varieties, while also providing some new or seasonal choices. In 2015, the top 15 varieties of California table grapes represented 88 percent of the total crop. **pb**

sections helps generate more purchase opportunities, say suppliers.

In terms of location, California grapes are nearly always merchandised with other grapes, especially during multi-color promotions, or with other fruit.

“I’d also like to see these items merchandised with bagged salads and fresh-cut fruit, since grapes are so convenient, and no prep is required aside from washing,” says Corsaro-Dorsey of Giumarra Vineyards.

Promoting usage ideas also can help

increase grape sales. The California Table Grape Commission provides recipes and other marketing tools for retailers.

The Commission offers a variety chart that includes the color and berry shape to help educate produce department staff and consumers about the different California grape characteristics.

Pandol Bros. grows 19 varieties of California grapes, with the characteristics varying, depending on the season and zone from year to year.



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“Sometimes grape quality has to do with the growing and sometimes it has to do with the way the fruit was handled between the farm, store and beyond,” says Pandol. “I always remind consumers that most retailers permit, and even encourage, tasting before purchasing.”

Because a great-looking display is key to selling this fruit, refreshing product is important and should be performed regularly by produce department staff to keep grapes appealing.

“If consumers see older, duller grapes mixed

with brighter, recently arrived grapes, it sends a subliminal message that this is a produce item with a short shelf-life. This can negatively impact the sales of these products,” says Pandol.

ATTRACTING ATTENTION

While almost half of consumers decide to buy grapes once they are in the store, a majority of consumers prefer to make a shopping list in advance and pre-plan specific fruit purchases.

Sampling is always a good way to spur purchase and encourage consumers to try new

■ TOP CALIFORNIA GRAPE SHOPPING RESOURCES

- In-store sales or coupons (55 percent)
- Printed circulars in the mail, newspaper or at grocery store (54 percent)
- Emailed ads, offers or deals from grocery store (27 percent)
- Social media (27 percent)
- Websites (27 percent)
- Mobile phone apps (26 percent)

Source: California Table Grape Commission

California grape varieties. When sampling grapes, retailers should make sure not too many are washed ahead of time, so the fruit will look its best.

When it comes to promoting grapes, offering customers more options can increase sales and keep grapes top-of-mind. The California Table Grape Commission’s research shows promoting multiple varieties of California grapes and front-page ads on fliers can create larger volume lifts.

Bari Produce works with the California Table Grape Commission to do blanket ads in conjunction with retailers, wholesalers and the export market.

“This makes it easy to market our product,” says Bari Produce’s Bedwell. “We can utilize the ad for promoting varieties, sizes and prices of grapes, with the Commission opening the door so we can fine-tune the message for our specific customer base.”

Prominent packaging also has been beneficial to this fruit category.

“Packaging ‘talks’ to the consumer and they learn to recognize brands, colors and logos of excellent products when they are presented consistently at the department level,” says Sunlight International Sales’ Dulcich.

Cross-merchandising, especially for brands with other grape products like jams or juices, can help bring added attention to displays. Decent signage is key.

For optimal merchandising, grapes should be kept refrigerated, displays should remain full and point-of-sale materials should be well placed. Experts recommend merchandising this product between four and six feet of displays, in addition to front-end placement, along with cross-merchandising in the wine and cheese departments.

“Grapes are one of the top five staple produce items, since this is a convenient, easy commodity to consume,” says Bedwell. “In the last two years, we have had record grape crops, and everyone has done a great job marketing this fruit.”

pb

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF J. MARCHINI FARMS

Figs Gain Profitability

New packaging, increased varieties and a curious interest in fresh figs means retailers can see growing profit margins from these sweet treats.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

It's hard to find much fault with a ripe, fresh fig. They're sweet, healthy, exotic, and fun to eat alone or in prepared dishes.

If there is one thing to dislike about fresh figs, it's that they're extremely perishable. However, new advances in packaging make it much easier to store and display figs. That factor also makes it easier for retailers to take a chance on them.

"Figs have a good ring and profit margin simply because of their classification of high shrink in comparison to other fruits," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations

for Los Angeles-based Melissa's/World Variety Produce, adding that new packaging technology is also a contributor in margin success.

"We have seen the demand for fresh figs in grocery stores increase in the past five years," says Francesca Fordice, marketing and sales coordinator for J. Marchini Farms, a family-owned grower/packer/shipper based in Le Grand, CA, focusing on Italian specialty produce.

There are several factors leading to this renewed interest. Consumers want to eat seasonally and sample foods they never tried before. Chefs are using more figs at restaurants, which means a new generation of consumers are learning about them and wanting to cook with them at home. When consumers see quick, easy recipes that include figs in cooking magazines and on social media, they get excited and head for their favorite produce department.

"Recipes like prosciutto-wrapped figs and fig pizzas are all over the place, and I think it's just taken the American public a

little while to catch on to how to use figs," says Maroka Kawamura, produce director for Santa Cruz, CA-based New Leaf Community Markets. The company has seven locations in the northern part of the state. It is among the many stores reintroducing consumers to this once-forgotten delicacy.

TYPES AND AVAILABILITY

Karla Stockli, chief executive of the Fresno-based California Fresh Fig Growers Association and California Fig Advisory Board, says there are six types of figs available to U.S. consumers. The two most popular are Brown Turkey and Black Mission. "Brown Turkey have light purple to black skin and a robust flavor like a Pinot Noir," she says. "Black Mission figs have purple and black skin with deep earthy flavor like a Cabernet."

Brown Turkey figs are the most common type grown in the United States. They're also the variety most likely to be available through the entire growing season.



J. Marchini Farms has seen the demand for fresh figs in grocery stores increase in the past five years. The family-owned grower/packer/shipper based in Le Grand, CA, focuses on Italian specialty produce.

PHOTO COURTESY OF J. MARCHINI FARMS

However, Black Mission figs tend to show superiority in popularity. “Although we tried several different varieties, everyone’s favorite fig seems to be the Black Mission,” says Jesse Cardarelli, produce manager/buyer for East-side Marketplace, a gourmet supermarket in Providence, RI.

“Black Mission are the most consistent for us in flavor and quality, so we’re primarily focused there,” says Kawamura.

Schueller notes that Black Mission figs are bigger and tend to hold up better when packaged and shipped.

Kadota figs are the other variety people may be familiar with. “Kadota figs have creamy amber skin with a light flavor like a Sauvignon Blanc,” says Stockli. Other light-colored figs include Calimyrna, which has pale yellow skin and a buttery, nutty flavor; Sierra, which have light-colored skin and a fresh, sweet flavor; and Tiger, a relatively new variety. It has light yellow skin with dark green stripes. The interior is a bright red-purple and has hints of raspberry and citrus.

The vast majority of figs grown in the United States come from California. “The season starts in May and goes until the first frost in October or November,” says Schueller. Retailers will typically get the best pricing in July, August and early September.

Figs can be imported from Mexico, New Zealand, Chile and other countries from December to April. But imports tend to be inconsistent and very pricey, reports Schueller. “Because the fruit is highly sensitive, it’s air freighted, so it’s pretty expensive.”

PACKAGING ADVANCEMENTS

“Figs are very perishable, so the majority of the production goes to dried figs,” says Sasha LoPresti, director of business development for A.J. Trucco, Inc., an importer and distributor of fresh and dried fruits and nuts based in Bronx, NY. That’s slowly starting to change thanks to advances in packaging that make it easier to ship, store and display fresh figs.

Growers can now package figs in trays with individual cups to cradle each fig. “It’s

like an egg container,” she says. “It prevents the stems from nicking the other figs and keeps the fruit from getting crushed.” There are also 9- and 12-count clamshells with indentations for individual figs. Others growers still put figs in berry baskets.

Beside keeping the fruit from getting damaged, the added benefit of the new packaging is that the fruit is handled less, doesn’t need to be stickered and is easier to ring up.

“Bulk is too messy and too hard to understand at the checkout counter,” says Schueller. “Clamshells are an easy ring with the UPC labels.”

That being said, retailers may want to experiment with how they display figs. “We sell mostly in berry baskets,” says Kawamura of New Leaf Community Markets. “We had some marginal success with clamshells, but the farmers market look of the open pint baskets works well for us.”

“Every retailer and market is different,” says Fordice with J. Marchini Farms. “Some of the old Italian supermarkets like the pints, and some modern stores like the clamshells. It’s just what their customers prefer.”

HOW TO SELL MORE FIGS

Promoting ways to cook with figs can be a great way to increase sales. The California Fresh Fig Growers Association has plenty of recipes on its website. It and the California Fig Advisory Board can help retailers find ways to sell more fruit to customers.

According to Trucco’s LoPresti, even sharing ways consumers can eat figs by themselves can increase sales. “We’re trying to get many consumers to experience this food for the first time, so you don’t want to overwhelm them,” she says. “It’s not like another commodity that’s well known and you’re trying to bring the consumer back to it. Figs are easy to transport to work or in lunchboxes. They’re great for kids. There are a lot of easy ways to include them in a daily routine. Highlighting these ideas at the store level with signs or tear-offs can be very successful.”

Signage can also promote the health bene-

Black Mission Figs



Brown Turkey Figs



Tiger Figs



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELISSA'S/WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE

fits of figs, says LoPresti. The fruit is high in fiber, vitamin B6, potassium and other nutrients. "The other big thing that can increase

fig sales is sampling. Once people try them and see how sweet they are, they really like them," she says.

■ FIGS IN FOODSERVICE

"Figs have always been popular in restaurants, and we continue to see growth in the fig category," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Los Angeles-based Melissa's/World Variety Produce. "They cater to more white-tablecloth venues."

"Any large cities where you have lots of restaurants and a sophisticated food scene is where you'll see more familiarity with figs and more consumption," says Sasha LoPresti, director of business development for Bronx-based A.J. Trucco, Inc.

"Fig season starts the right time for restaurants to spice up their summer menus," says Francesca Fordice, marketing and sales coordinator for J. Marchini Farms. "By the time the fig market peaks, all the summer fruits have been on menus for over a month."

"From savory pizza to indulgent ice cream, there's not a place on the menu

you don't see fresh figs today," says Karla Stockli, chief executive of the Fresno-based California Fresh Fig Growers Association and California Fig Advisory Board. "They continue to be popular as a fresh addition to salads and starters. The latest trends is fresh figs in sauces, salsas, jams and chutneys. People are substituting figs where you traditionally see other fruits like peaches, strawberries and pears."

Figs are terrific in desserts and make a great addition to cheese plates. "All figs pair well with cheeses ranging from Gorgonzola and Cheddar to Manchego and Camembert," says Stockli. "Combine the figs and cheese with honey, nuts, rosemary, apricots or lavender. Some of my favorite combinations are figs smothered in Mascarpone with ginger and vanilla, or creamy Brie drizzled with olive oil and fresh thyme paired with Black Missions." **pb**

"A ripe, syrupy fig is like nothing else, so just getting that trial with customers will drive sales," says Kawamura.

"Offering anyone a taste is simple and effective," says Cardarelli with Eastside Marketplace. "Show them off. Treat them like diamonds, because they really are precious."

Displaying figs in the right place is important. "The new packaging figs come in has made it easier to merchandise them next to strawberries or raspberries for everyone's convenience," says Cardarelli.

"Figs will keep best if they're refrigerated," says Melissa's Schueller. "That's another reason to put them by the berries. It's worth letting consumers know that, like a blueberry or raspberry, the entire fig is edible."

Although the new packaging means more figs will arrive at the store in sellable condition, it's worth knowing how to spot a bad one. "Select plump, fragrant figs that have a little give when touched," says Stockli. "The fruit should be soft and yielding to the touch, but not mushy. Use your nose. Smell the fruit. If it smells slightly sour, it has already begun to ferment. When figs get beyond their prime, they begin to collapse inward and lose their round shape." **pb**



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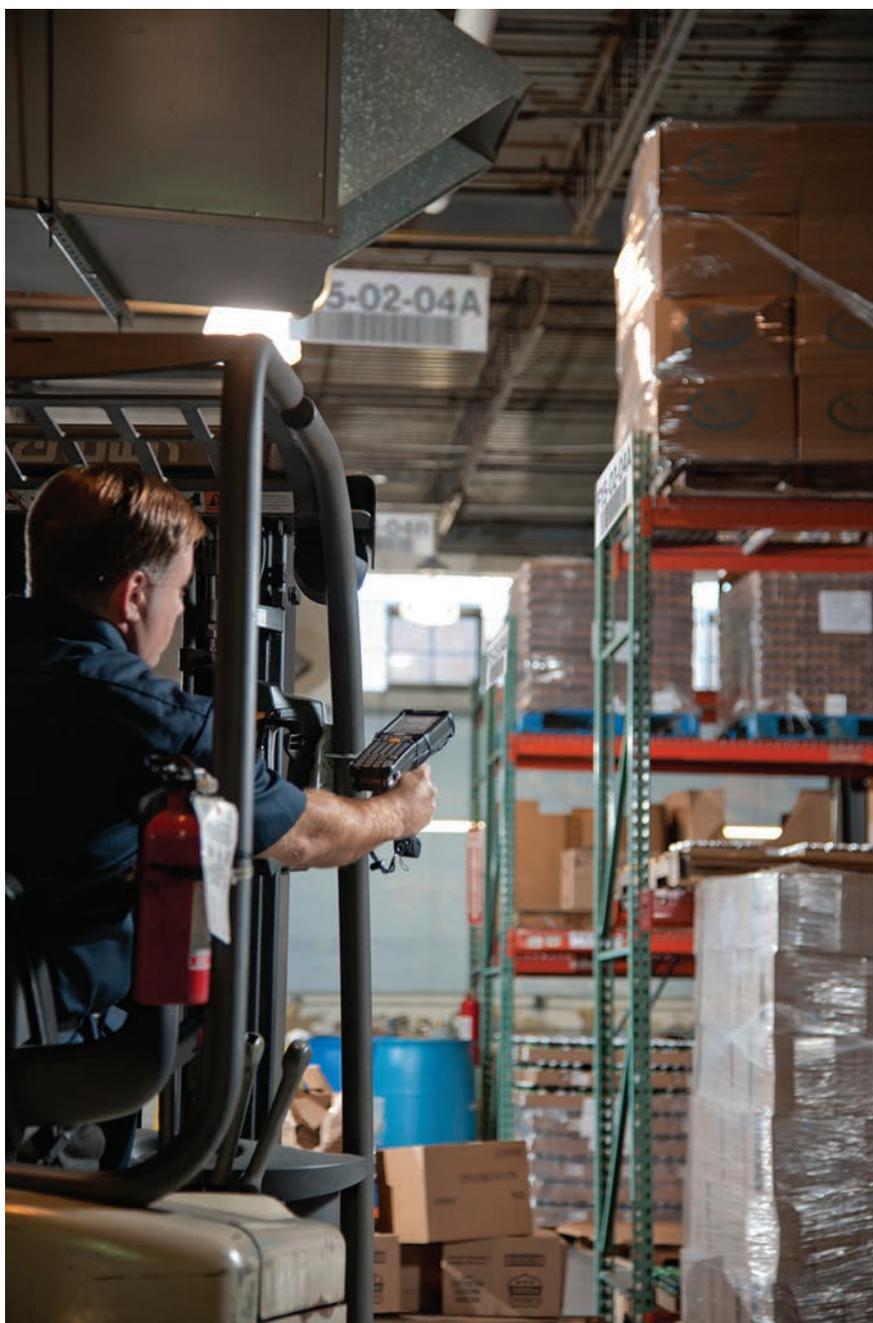
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Produce Distribution Is Entering The Information Age



Mobile technology and hand-held devices will bring transactions and traceability into real-time.

BY BOB JOHNSON

The demand for quick and accurate traceability to contain food safety threats opened the door for greater use of computer technology in produce distribution. With that door ajar, the information revolution is on the verge of bringing change to produce distribution so quickly, it's difficult to estimate the impact technology will have even a few years from now.

"I would be hesitant to make any predictions," says Ron Myers, executive vice president of LinkFresh, Ventura, CA. "Technology moves so fast it's hard to say what will be available in five years, or even in 18 months."

New software is expected to bring greater control over produce inventory, more reliability in filling orders, an increased ability to forecast consumer demand, unprecedented information about how the fruits and vegetables are grown, and the ability to see how all this information fits together.

"There will be better communication between producers, packers, and wholesalers, so they will know the stage of the produce," says Myers. "There will be better whole chain traceability."

But the great change in produce distribution begins with the development and use of portable devices and software that take technology out of the office and into the places where the action really happens — terminal market stalls, distribution centers, sales' smart-

PHOTO COURTESY OF PRODUCE PRO



“Planning what to purchase by studying purchase history and sales information allows companies to know what they need to keep in stock.”

— Charles Waud, Waudware

phones and farmers' fields.

NO LONGER TIED TO A DESK

A new generation of mobile devices promises to put the most sophisticated distribution software in the hands of not just the main office and sales staff but also truck drivers and warehouse workers.

“We’re doing a lot more with warehouse management,” says Dave Donat, president of Produce Pro, Woodridge, IL. “You will see more automated traceability in the warehouse.”

A dazzling assortment of sturdy, user-friendly devices will support entry of high technology into the world of eighteen-wheelers, produce coolers and distribution centers.

“There are scan guns, but there are also wrist-mounted devices and even ring-finger scanners,” says Donat. “Voice activated is also becoming more popular. The devices are getting better. They are more durable and more ergonomic.”

Everyone in the supply chain will be able to access the same information about where you can find how much of a particular produce item, *without* having to go to or call the office.

“You won’t be tied to a desk,” says Donat. “People want to be able to use their phones or tablets. You will see a lot of the new things

in the area of mobility.”

Voice recognition hardware and software, in particular, lend themselves to maintaining up-to-the-second inventory information that is accessible to everyone in the supply chain.

“Voice recognition software is not prevalent in the produce industry,” says Carl Davies, chief executive at Prophet, Bakersfield, CA. “It gives you live, up-to-the-second inventory management.”

Without a system that records changes in inventory as they occur, the information can easily be enough out of date to make a difference.

“We found there are very few live systems,” says Mick Heatherington, vice president for sales and marketing at Prophet. “There might be a one-day lag on the information, or it might even be until the end of the week.”

Mobile technology should allow everyone from farm to fork to record and access information instantaneously, without ever having to print a document.

“Handheld devices allow transactions to be made in real time,” says Charles Waud, president of WaudWare, Brampton, Ontario. “This means users making inquiries have more accurate and up-to-date information. Hence decisions can be made faster, and with more

precise information. Posting transactions after the fact, for example by printing paper forms, filling them out, keying them later when there is time is going to be replaced by real-time data entry because of mobile devices.”

Shippers, wholesalers and distributors are becoming aware that a new world is about to be opened up by portable technology. “People know they need to do it, but they don’t know *what* they need to do, says John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software, Boise, ID. “There will be more use of iPad applications, so sales people will be able to pull up information in the field.”

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR PRODUCE IS?

Traceability in the case of recalls is the most immediate benefit from produce distribution software, but next in line could be easy access to information about inventory, including produce that hasn’t even been harvested.

“Software can help produce companies obtain accurate information on what has been purchased, packed and sold, as well as up-to-the-second inventory information that can be beneficial in many ways,” says Waud.

One advantage from this inventory information should be fewer mistakes filling orders.

“It will pay off in greater accuracy,” says Donat. “You’ll be sending the order to the right place. Inventory flow will be better.”

Not only will produce go to the right place, but distribution should also be in greater synch with consumer demand when shippers, wholesalers, and retailers all have access to the same big data about sales trends.

“Planning what to purchase by studying purchase history and sales information allows companies to know what they need to keep in stock,” says Waud.

Big data might also help distributors know what alternatives consumers are likely to buy when a certain produce item is in short supply.

“Tracking substitutions allows the software to make suggestions when you are low or out of items in demand,” says Waud. “Accurate quantity information allows you to prevent overselling, and to know when to suggest substitutions.”

But distribution software programs will also be integrated with programs that detect subtle changes in consumer preferences.

“We’re going to see more use of big data,” says Myers. “There will be information on what consumers are buying and on the trends.”

This information will help identify the produce items consumers are buying, and in what form, in order to integrate produce distri-



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“The secret weapon is deploying the technology. There is more employment of cloud-based technology. People will buy use of the technology like they do electricity.”

— Ron Myers, LinkFresh

tribution with the entire business plan.

“They will be much more connected to their customers’ needs,” says Carpenter. “They will be able to predict the products, sales trends, and how much [product] will be organic or conventional. There will be a lot more integration of Enterprise Management Programs with the warehouse management systems that have delivery tracking programs.”

Software that helps follow produce from field to fork should also let consumers use their smartphones to know more about where and how their fruits and vegetables are grown.

“There will be more information on outputs from the harvest to the wholesalers or packing lines,” says LinkFresh’s Myers. “We will be able to see the water and fertilizer that was used, the way it was grown.”

The day may not be far off when consumers can gather this information for themselves with their smartphones as they walk through the produce department.

“We will see more wireless connectivity of devices,” says Myers. “We’ll see more smart labels and smart tags.”

Bulk produce will always be more difficult to follow in this way than product that is packaged close to the field.

“I can put a sticker on a box of cucumbers, but when they dump that box of cucumbers into a bin, I can’t follow it,” says Steve Dean, owner of ProWare Services, Plant City, FL. “If you get into packaged products like bagged salads, it’s easier to do. With bulk products it’s not practical. I don’t think we will ever be able to do it, because retailers like to display produce in bulk. A clamshell of strawberries in a cooler works really well, but a clamshell of apples in a cooler isn’t going to go very well.”

The future could still hold the promise, however, of being able to access more information about where and how produce was grown, when it was harvested, and where it has been in transit.

“The biggest thing is going to be following the produce from where it is grown to where it is now,” says Dean. “You have to be able to gather information at the time of harvest that has to be followed from the first handler of

the product. If I had to guess —we’re 10 or 15 years from a simple system that can do that.”

THE PAYOFF MAY BE SURVIVAL

For some mom-and-pop businesses in the produce distribution chain, the efficiency that comes with using the right software could pay off in survival.

There are many third- and fourth-generation family operations in the business of produce distribution with a couple trucks and a modest stall at the terminal market facing the prospect of competing with some of the largest corporations in the world.

“The Amazons and Googles are spending millions on their wholesaling technology,” says Myers. “The small family businesses are seeing increased competition with smaller margins.”

Access to cloud-based technology that is rented by the month, with a financing model the same as with utilities like the electric company or the water and sewer agency, may be the only way these smaller companies will survive.

“The secret weapon is deploying the technology,” says Myers. “There is more employment of cloud-based technology. People will buy use of the technology like they do electricity.”

Because mom-and-pop operations do not have an IT department, or vast sums to invest in distribution software, financing of the technology will have to be suited to use by small businesses.

It is all but impossible to avoid inefficiencies without a modern system of inventory management.

“You might be sending the highest quality product to a customer who doesn’t need it,” says Prophet’s chief executive Davies. “Everyone in the supply chain is finding a more competitive environment. You need to find a good match up of the product and the orders.”

The new age of produce distribution may not have room for the kind of supply chain sloppiness that makes it easy to send produce that is a little riper or of slightly higher quality than a customer needs.

“Ten years ago in the produce industry,



wholesalers were making good enough margins that if inefficiency in inventory management cost them 2 or 3 percent it didn't really matter," says Prophet's Heatherington. "Now, with the squeeze on the margins coming from the retailers, you have to be efficient. With the information available you can make better decisions, and that means better margins. You can add two, three or even five percent to your margin."

Much of tomorrow's distribution software is already available and waiting for shippers and wholesalers to use it.

"There are very few holes in the systems," says Myers. "What is missing is the adoption rate. A lot of the farms are multi-generational family operations."

Even fairly large shippers or wholesalers generally have information systems that were put in place decades ago.

"A lot of produce companies have legacy systems that have been in place a long time," says Heatherington. "When you try to make change it breaks down empires within the company. People's jobs change, or go away. Chief executives try to avoid the disruption. The change must be driven from the executive level."

Pressure on wholesalers and shippers to enter the computer age will probably come from retailers who are concerned about traceability and food safety concerns.

"We think the retailers are going to do what they did in Europe, which is to force traceability and food safety," says Heatherington.

One of the side effects of this European change, according to Heatherington, is that 70 to 80 percent of the produce is packaged, and a similar change could be coming to the United States.

"There are costs involved in adopting the technology; there are disruptions in your system," says Davies. "The payoff time depends on the level of inefficiency you have. We've seen businesses that have paid it off in 12 months."

This can be complex, which makes it essential to know and be able to trust the software provider.

"Anyone who is trying to achieve accurate lot control will need to look at their software and processes," says Waud. "They should look for systems from companies with strong industry knowledge who have worked with other produce companies."

The right system should begin with the ability in recall situations to identify only the lots that are potentially contaminated.

"Recalls are becoming more common, and if you have automated traceability, you can be more targeted," says Produce Pro's Donat.

Produce distribution software has its roots in the need to do recalls quickly and efficiently, but the supplier should be able to guide users to all of the new possibilities.

"Working with technology companies that sell, support, and, of utmost importance, understand computers and software in the produce industry," says Waud, "will play a big role in helping realize these improvements." **pb**

PUBLI NEWS

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'Circle City' Produce Reaches Beyond Its Limits

TOURISM AND LOCAL DEMAND CREATE A VIBRANT MARKET.

By Chris Auman

An estimated 27 million people will visit Indianapolis in 2016, according to the city's official tourism website, visitindy.com. Many of them will arrive at the Indiana International Airport, a thoroughly modern facility, and one of the newest in the country. Others will arrive by the many highways that connect the city to points beyond. Known as the Crossroads of America, Indianapolis is ringed by the Interstate 465 beltway from which four interstate highways branch off like wheel spokes to connect to Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan and Illinois. As the second-largest city in the Midwest, and the capital of the 10th largest agricultural state in the United States, Indianapolis — known affectionately as the "Circle City" — is well positioned to receive and distribute the fruits of its farmers' labors within the city and beyond.

Indianapolis is also a city of neighborhoods. Nearly 100 loosely defined areas spread across it. It is home to the Indianapolis 500, which hosted its 100th running in 2016. The people of Indianapolis are crazy for basketball at all levels, including the NCAA team, Indiana University's Hoosiers and the state's NBA team, the Pacers. The National Football League team, Indianapolis Colts, also finds a home here at the 1.8-million-square-foot Lucas Oil Stadium.

Once a major manufacturing center, Indy is now home to companies in the biotechnology, life sciences and healthcare industries. Tourism and hospitality are also growing. With a population of roughly 853,000 in a metropolitan area of nearly 2 million, and a sports tourism industry that attracts millions of people each year, there is plenty of restaurants and retailers that depend on a thriving wholesale business to provide fresh produce.

The state's agriculture industry contributes more than \$25 billion to its GDP and



creates 245,000 jobs. Thirty-seven thousand acres of vegetables are brought to market from more than 60,000 farms. Demand for locally grown food led the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) to create the *Indiana Grown* program to help the state's farmers increase their marketshare, support food processors and educate consumers on the availability of its products.

Access to local and farm-fresh produce helps area retailers and restaurants thrive. Shapiro's Delicatessen, dubbed by *USA Today* as one of the country's greatest delis, and St. Elmo Steak House, called an American classic by the James Beard Foundation, both have

long histories in the city. Bluebeard is one of several area eateries that bring the farm-to-table concept to Indianapolis.

"Indianapolis is a great city for produce for several reasons," says Greg Corsaro, president of the Indianapolis Fruit Company. "It's ethnically diverse. There is a wide range of lifestyles, allowing for the demand of a variety of options. The youth of the community is driving the introduction and expansion of natural, organic, convenience and other growing categories."

INDY WHOLESALERS

A number of produce wholesalers prosper in Circle City. Their stories are similar. Many



were started with a pushcart decades ago, and then graduated to a truck. From there they bought warehouses; now the third and fourth generations are running things. They have similar challenges and see the same trends in the industry: from the buy local movement to increasing food safety concerns and the technology required to deal with them.

INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT

Food safety is something the Indianapolis Fruit Company takes very seriously. “We monitor the temperature of the trucks and product from the time it is loaded at shipping point until it reaches our receiving dock. Our entire warehousing operation — receiving, storage, rotation, shipping, and delivery — is technology-based, allowing for the tracking of each item at each point in the distribution channel,” says Corsaro.

The company also has the technological ability to track the fleet at all times; customers have access to the information, if they choose.

“We use text and other messaging, as well as various social media to inform our customers of product availability, condition and markets,” says Corsaro.

The company plans to expand its facility gradually in the next five years. It also intends to expand distribution. “We have more than 150 vehicles in our fleet and distribute in excess of a 600-mile radius of our Indianapolis base facility. We currently have a five-year facility expansion plan and are always looking at other ways to expand our geographic footprint,” explains Corsaro.

The company’s fresh-cut division, Garden Cut, is also making good use of digital technology. “We utilize digital marketing campaigns to send urgent updates for quick notification of recalls, including email, direct marketing, SMS and social media,” says Chelsea Mascari, director of Garden Cut. “As soon as our recall team receives notification of a recall, an alert

“We have more than 150 vehicles in our fleet and distribute in excess of a 600-mile radius of our Indianapolis base facility. We currently have a five-year facility expansion plan and are always looking at other ways to expand our geographic footprint.”

— Greg Corsaro, Indianapolis Fruit

is sent through those channels to provide the details of the recalled product.”

PIAZZA PRODUCE

The Piazza Produce story began 46 years ago, when the father and son team of Paul and Pete Piazza began building their produce business. Since 1997, Piazza has operated as a sister company of Indianapolis Fruit Company. “We’re 100 percent foodservice,” says co-owner, Pete. “We do all the national foodservice chains, the local chains, the independents, the white table cloth — we take all comers.”

Piazza distributes in a roughly 250-mile radius around the city. While it has always sold locally sourced produce, the demand for local has prompted the company to be more proactive in getting that message out to its customers. “The truth of the matter is, we always handle local,” Piazza says. “Now we tell our story.”

It’s not just about telling the story; it’s about providing customers with sourcing information — and that involves tracking each commodity

sold. “We use different item codes, that way it’s trackable. If a particular account wants to know what local spend is, now we can tell them because we tracked it. Before, we sold California kale in the winter and Indiana kale in the summer, but we had no way of tracking how much of each one we sold. We’ve also expanded into other local products like honey, cheeses and meat,” says Piazza.

CAITO FOODS

In the 1960s, Caito Foods became the first full-service distributor of fresh produce to retailers in the city and central Indiana. In 1984, the company expanded to a 100,000-square-foot facility with advanced refrigeration, distribution and control systems. Today, Caito Foods has three fresh produce distribution centers in Indianapolis, Newcomerstown, OH, and Lakeland, FL.

Caito Foods’ Indianapolis-based FreshLine facility houses the company’s fresh-cut fruit and vegetable operation used for gift baskets, party trays and its Garden Highway brand.

Caito Foods has seen growth. The company is recruiting talent from within the industry and, according to Matthew Caito, executive vice president, part of the growth is the company’s ability to offer great produce year-round.

“Even in the face of adversity caused by weather or growing conditions, we know the value of reinvesting in the business to sustain growth. We have been pleased with the sustained efforts of our managers to find new ways to help lower costs with better technology, equipment and specialized training programs. During the coming year, our customers and suppliers will continue to see us make continued significant investments in our business, with improved information systems, a new world-class production facility, and our visible commitment to identify and nurture the very best talent in our industry,” says Caito.



RAY & MASCARI, INC.

“Indianapolis is a great place to sell fresh produce,” says Joseph (Rocky) Ray, vice president and co-owner of Ray & Mascari, Inc. “As with much of the country, the people in Indianapolis have become more health-conscious, thus fueling a higher demand for fresh produce.”

In business since 1938, Ray & Macari, Inc. services both retail and foodservice, and is said to be the largest tomato repacker in the state. The company operates from a 92,000-square-foot facility in town. “Most of our operation is

hands-on,” says Ray. “From having eyes on all of our loads at shipping point, to hand packing all of our tomatoes. We keep our customers informed of current market conditions through proactive insights and timely communications.”

Ray & Mascari operates in a 500-mile radius of the city, but also reaches Florida and Atlanta from a facility in Lakeland, FL. “We are finding that we can effectively reach the East Coast with the right kind of volume, all while keeping our customers competitive,” says Ray.

The company is also exploring shipping

opportunities from its Lakeland, FL, to the eastern third of the country as it continues to find new ways to be innovative and create new avenues for growth.

The company has comprehensive food safety policies and technology in place. “Our food safety plan dates back to 2003,” says Ray. “Each year, we have witnessed improvements in our food safety plan, bringing us to our current situation. We have been an SQF 2000 approved facility since 2012. We employ a full-time food safety director. Food safety is on the forefront of everything that we do.”

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CIRCLE CITY PRODUCE

Circle City Produce was founded in 1948 by Joe Corsaro, and since its inception the family-run company has grown its reputation for quality and service as it has expanded its customer base for retail and foodservice throughout the state.

With a growing fleet and regular updates in food safety and technology, Circle City

Produce sources commodities from all over the world while still working with area growers to satisfy the hunger for locally grown products.

“We carry all kinds of exotic fruits from all over the world,” says Toni Corsaro, sales manager. “We pull local when it’s available; we have several farmers that we work with. When the time comes, we’ll go to them for cucumbers, green peppers, yellow squash and

tomatoes. We’re going into Indiana asparagus right now, but we’ll be going into Indiana blueberries soon.”

While Circle City can source with a global reach, Indiana-grown is what customers are demanding.

“They love the local,” says Corsaro. “That’s been increasing over the years. We try buying all the local that we can.”

pb

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Indy Restaurants Old And New

THE CITY OF NEARLY 100 NEIGHBORHOODS OFFERS FOOD EXPERIENCES FOR EVERYONE.

By Chris Auman

Indianapolis provides visitors and locals with a variety of dining options. There's the unique brunch-only concept of Milktooth, which operates in the 2,800-square-foot space of a former auto shop. The Milktooth motto is breakfast isn't just the most important meal of the day, it's the only meal. *Bon Appetite* thought highly enough of this brunch spot to grant it "Best New Restaurant" honors in 2015.

The hand-crafted pizza of Bazbeaux has earned this Indy institution many "Best Pizza in Town" accolades. The pizzeria's legions of loyal customers have supported the original location in the Broad Ripple neighborhood since 1986, and newer spots have since opened downtown and in suburban Carmel.

Shapiro's Delicatessen is keeping the Jewish deli experience alive, even as delis disappear from the Midwest's restaurant landscape. The staff has been yelling out orders at customers since 1905, and the eatery remains an integral part of the city's lively cultural history.

The farm-to-table concept has made its presence felt in the city as well. Located in the historic Lockerbie Square neighborhood, Vida takes the concept one step further with its wall-to-table sourcing, courtesy of an indoor hydroponic grow wall. Here, chefs can harvest herbs and other plants to be used in dishes almost instantly.

BLUEBEARD: DINE FRESH, FEEL DIFFERENT

On the near south side of Indianapolis, you'll find the historic Holy Rosary-Danish Church Historic District. Once an enclave of European immigrants who settled the city in the 19th century, descendants of many Italian families can still be found here. A mix of newer arrivals helps honor old traditions like the Italian street festival, which creates a sense of community that has existed in the neighborhood for generations.

Virginia Avenue cuts diagonally through the District, connecting it to the Fountain Square neighborhood to the southeast and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUEBEARD

Mile Square to the northwest. It is on Virginia Avenue where you'll find the renovated factory warehouse that is home to the farm-to-table concept Bluebeard and the European-style artisan bread shop, Amelia's.

Living in the heart of a state with such a rich agricultural tradition has helped Indianapolis residents embrace Bluebeard's always changing, locally sourced menu. "Farm-to-table is a part of our concept and it's a part of our marketing strategy, but people taste the difference and they feel different," says co-owner Eddie Battista. "There really is a difference between a corporate place that has centralized packaging and production and who are just warming the stuff up. There's a big difference between hot house tomatoes and regular tomatoes, and fresh handmade pasta

versus boxed pasta. All those little details really make our dishes unique."

Battista knows fresh, seasonal ingredients are the key to good cooking, even though he didn't emerge from the culinary world. "I have a law background," he says. "I came across a liquor license by showing up at an auction on a whim."

Battista and long-time friend and Chef Abbi Merriss helped develop the idea for the restaurant. Battista's father came in as a partner. Originally, the plan was only to open Amelia's, the artisan

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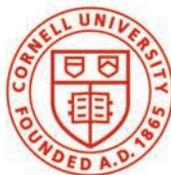
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bakery, but that idea evolved by happenstance. “I had a liquor license, and I had a building that was bigger than I needed for a bakery. We were already doing a buildout, so it all fell together perfectly,” says Battista, who’s background in law kept him focused on facilitating the business side, leaving Merriss free to concentrate on menu creation.

Bluebeard uses more than a dozen local companies for dairy, meat and produce. Local purveyors for produce include Butler

Campus Farms, Fischer Farm, Full Hand Farm, FarmIndy, Big City Farms, Growing Places Indy, South Circle Farm, Harvestland, Broad Ripple Farmer’s Market, Indy Winter Market, as well as the offerings of chef and gardener Josh Horrigan. “We try to use as many local farmers as we can,” says Battista.

The local ingredients help Chef Merriss create what Battista describes as American fusion with Mediterranean influences. “Because we’re in a historic Italian neighborhood, we



The local ingredients help Chef Merriss create what Battista describes as American fusion with Mediterranean influences.

have a lot of fish on the menu that we can’t get locally, but when it comes to most of our protein that has legs, it’s all sourced in Indiana.”

Bluebeard isn’t just the customer of local farmers; those farmers are Bluebeard’s customers as well. “A lot of the farmers are our age. We went to high school with them and now they’ve gotten into urban farming and suburban small plot farming,” says Battista.

Since the menu changes daily, Bluebeard relies on the input of its grower friends to plan the menu. “We ask our farmers what’s in season, what’s going to be the best right now? We base our menu around what is fresh and what is available. A lot of restaurants have a static menu; they’re at the will of nature, or the hot house, for what kind of produce they’re ordering. We’re very agile and flexible, and we’d rather work with what’s great right now than try to make things work that are out of season.”

Toward these ends the kitchen takes advantage of Indiana tomatoes and other seasonal, local delicacies. “We like doing an heirloom tomato plate that’s lightly dressed and lets the tomatoes showcase themselves. Wild ramps are really killer, but there’s a short period where ramps come up,” says Battista.

While fresh and local are vital to the concept, Bluebeard also obtains products through a local wholesaler. “We use Piazza for the mainstay stuff — that consistent onion and basil, things like that; but when it comes to Indiana tomatoes, for example, we get those from our local purveyors. Our back office is really obnoxious because we handle 30 to 40 invoices a day.”

While Amelia’s does sell an assortment of artisan breads, someday that may expand to include produce, too. “We have a small storefront for Amelia’s,” says Battista. “We do want to do some produce, but we really haven’t tested those waters yet.”

pb



“It’s great to finally have an industry specific marketing event! The more, good marketers we have in produce, the better the industry will become.”

Karen Caplan, President & CEO, Frieda’s, Inc.

Hosted by the United Fresh Produce Marketing & Merchandising Council, **BrandStorm™** has been developed to engage green and seasoned marketers in the produce industry looking to enhance their knowledge of brand development, content creation, managing the creative process, segmented marketing channels, tools and much more.

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A Competitive Retail Landscape

MARSH SUPERMARKETS BATTLES FOR A SHARE OF INDY'S DIVERSE CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS.

By Chris Auman

Indiana residents spend \$16 billion per year on food; for those living in Indianapolis, this comes from a mix of big chains, smaller independents and single location retailers. Big players — Safeway, Trader Joe's, Sam's Club, Costco, Kroger and Wal-Mart — exist alongside smaller independents like Carniceria El Ranchito, which serves the Hispanic population; KB International, which caters to the African and Caribbean communities; and Saraga International Market, which sells food from every corner of the globe — from Asia and the Middle East to South America.

Indianapolis is an extremely competitive market for retail grocers, which compete for customers interested in new flavors, organics and locally sourced products. Area retailers must also consider the city's diverse population and the opportunities it presents. After those of European descent, African and African-Americans make up the next largest demographic in the city, representing roughly 27 percent of the population. Hispanics represent 10 percent and Asians represent 2 percent.

According to the *Chain Store Guide's* 2015 Market Share report, Marsh Supermarkets takes more than 12 percent of the Indianapolis market share and places third after Kroger and Wal-Mart, which is substantial when you consider Marsh's total stores and customer demographics.

MARSH SUPERMARKETS: A STRONG LOCAL CHAIN

Marsh Supermarkets has a long history in Indianapolis that dates back to 1931. The company has always been an innovator of new technologies. Marsh was the first grocery store in the world to make use of an electronic scanner. In the 21st century, Marsh continues this tradition, being the first U.S. retailer to utilize beacon technology, which uses geolocation to send coupons directly to customers' smartphones as they shop.

Marsh is also committed to locally sourced



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARSH SUPERMARKETS

products. “Marsh has had an extremely strong local program,” says Dave Rhodes, vice president of produce and floral. “We have been purchasing from Indiana and Ohio growers for more than 30 years.”

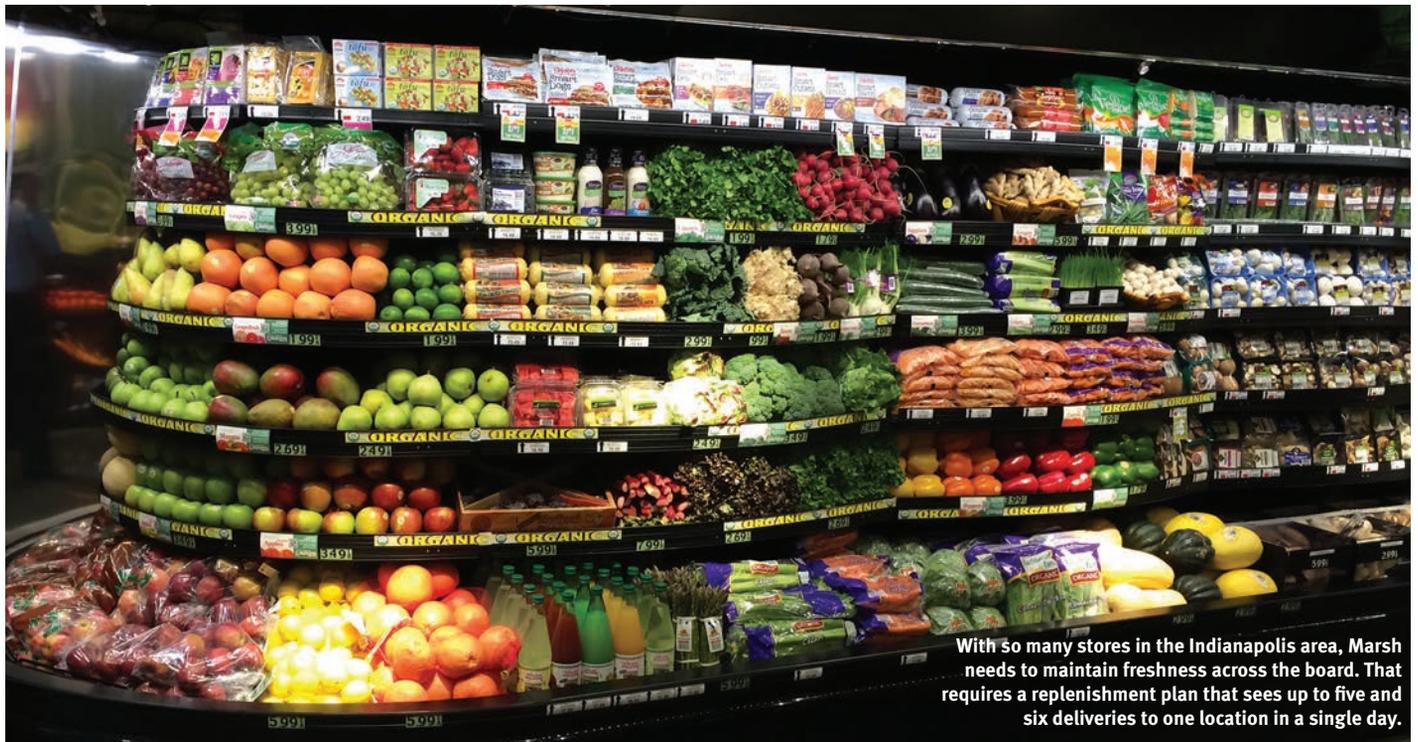
Marsh Supermarkets operates more than 70 Marsh stores and O'Malia's Food Markets in Indiana and Ohio, and delivers to all locations from a single warehouse distribution center. “All fresh produce purchased from local growers goes through our warehouse distribution center and goes through the same inspection process as any other grower. At Marsh we want to make sure our customers only purchase the best quality produce every day,” says Rhodes.

The average size of a Marsh's produce department is around 2,000 square feet. As

Rhodes points out, “Produce has a very strong presence in relation to the total store sales.” To keep all produce managers on the same page, the company has several procedures in place. “Our stores receive a merchandising bulletin each week detailing what goes on display where,” says Rhodes.

Signage is uniform across all locations as well. “We have sign kits that all stores use daily,” says Rhodes. “Our ad signs are made and shipped to our stores weekly. We use stanchion signs to call all categories, special programs and weekend specials; and we use window banners to promote special programs.” Nutritional information is included on the signs that appear in the stores on a daily basis, and recipe cards are also on display.

All retailers believe they offer the best



With 50 many stores in the Indianapolis area, Marsh needs to maintain freshness across the board. That requires a replenishment plan that sees up to five and six deliveries to one location in a single day.



quality produce and Marsh Supermarkets is no exception. The difference, however, is when Marsh offers its customers freshness, quality and variety, its promise is backed by green. “At Marsh we have a ‘Triple your Money’ back guarantee,” says Rhodes, “meaning, if our customers are not happy with their purchase, we will triple their money back. We mean business when we say ‘fresh.’”

People matter at Marsh and it’s the employees who contribute greatly to repeat business from loyal customers. “Our associates make the difference,” says Rhodes. “We have the best produce manager and teams in the area with continuous training programs offered by our human resource teams.”

With so many stores in the Indianapolis area, Marsh needs to maintain freshness across the board. That requires a replenishment plan that sees up to five and six deliveries to one location in a single day. “We want to make sure that they are fresh and in business daily,” adds Rhodes.

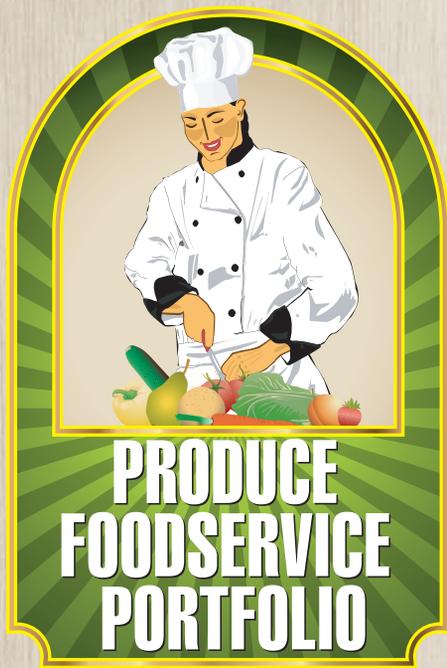
Doing business in such a great transportation hub is ideal for sourcing produce from around Indiana and beyond. “We also have the luxury of two really good wholesalers in Indianapolis. If for any reason we have stores that need product, we can have Caito Foods or Indianapolis Fruit make direct store deliveries,” says Rhodes. Marsh is proud of its history of innovation. It was the first company in the United States to introduce the barcode at retail. “We continue to improvise to be more contextual in our in-store beacon messaging through the smartphone apps to improve customer experience,” says Rhodes.

Marsh uses digital technology to alert customers to new coupons. Exclusive coupons are created for product and uploaded into the digital coupon gallery at Marsh.net. “Customers who have registered their Fresh Idea Card may click and load the coupon savings directly to their card and receive the discount during checkout,” says Rhodes. These

digital coupons are also identified with products in the Marsh circular, which can be viewed digitally and in print.

Marsh uses print to reach consumers through *Dish Magazine*, which features a variety of attractive fresh fruit in season with full-color, full-page ads offering “custom, kitchen-tested” recipes featuring those products. *Dish* is available in-store and digitally on the company’s website. Each featured recipe is added to the Marsh recipe gallery. These recipes and imagery are also included in the store’s “Core Shopper” mailer each month.

A mix of both established and new platforms help Marsh Supermarkets reach shoppers. Social media is a part of the produce marketing plan, too. Facebook is used to post recipes and Twitter is used to alert customers to things like “First of the Season” product availability. All these elements, both human and technology-based, contribute to help the retail chain offer its customers the freshest produce available.



PRODUCE FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

18th Annual

PRODUCE BUSINESS FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

For foodservice distributors and wholesalers, the information that follows — recipes, tips and techniques, product availability, unique attributes, company contact information and much more — is perfectly designed to be passed down to operators.

For retailers, this information is ideal for your own prepared food operations.

Restaurant operations will also find it perfectly on the mark for everyday use.

The Eighteenth Annual PRODUCE BUSINESS Foodservice Portfolio is filled with fresh ideas for using fresh product. Use the portfolio often and wisely, and get valuable, fresh ideas to help make the foodservice market a growing part of your bottomline.



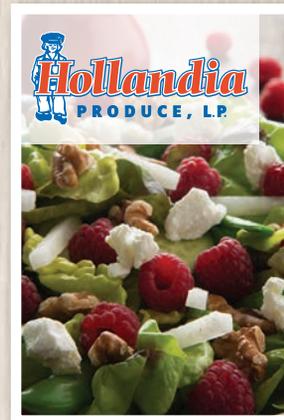
Green Onions
Crab Cakes
with
Pineapple
Salsa

**DEL MONTE FRESH
PRODUCE N.A., INC.**



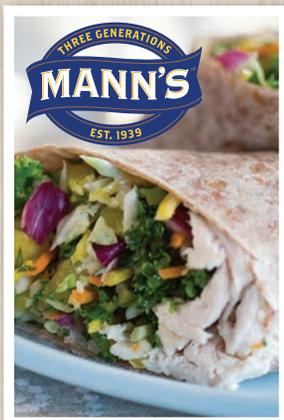
Grimmway
Shredded
Carrot Chili
with Shredded
Carrot and
Cheese
Garnish ...

**GRIMMWAY
FARMS**



Toasted
Walnut
and
Raspberry
Salad
with Goat
Cheese

**HOLLANDIA
PRODUCE, L.P.**



Pineapple
Pesto Chicken
Wrap

**MANN PACKING
COMPANY, INC.**



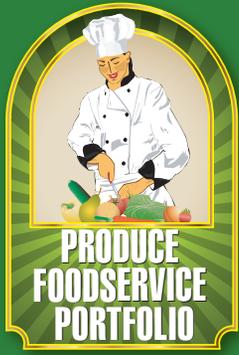
Savory
Blueberry
Pizza

**NATURIBE
FARMS**



Mushrooms
Star
At CIA's
Burger Bash

**PROTEIN
FLIP**



Tips & Techniques:

- Select fruit that is heavy and symmetrical for its size
- Look for crown leaves that are fresh and green
- Ensure that the pineapple is free from soft spots
- Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapples are always picked ripe and ready to eat
- The ideal storage temperature for pineapples is 45.5F



Unique Attributes: Del Monte Fresh Produce was the first company to introduce a new Gold variety of pineapple, and it instantly became a hit! Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple stood out because it was twice as sweet as the traditional pineapple variety and has a beautiful golden flesh. Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple is specifically sought after by discerning consumers because of its consistent quality and great taste.

Product Availability Guide: Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet whole and fresh cut pineapple is available year-round and is found nationwide in select stores as well as from a variety of broad-line distributors and foodservice providers.

Buying Practices: Retailers and restaurant operators should purchase the freshest product available. Buying Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet Pineapple as frequently as possible throughout the week will help keep inventory fresh. It is also important to practice “first in first out” rotation of inventory. Planning ahead for any demand fluctuations based on seasonal availability, weather conditions, and other factors should also be noted.



SERVES
4

GREEN ONION CRAB CAKES WITH PINEAPPLE SALSA

INGREDIENTS

- ½ Pound fresh crabmeat or 2 (6 oz.) cans crabmeat, drained
- ½ Cup fresh breadcrumbs
- 1 Egg, beaten
- 2 Green onions, chopped
- 2 Tbsp nonfat mayonnaise
- 1 Tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- ½ Tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Dash hot pepper sauce
- Black pepper, to taste

FOR THE PINEAPPLE SALSA

- 2 Cups diced Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet Pineapple
- ½ Cup chopped green onion
- ¼ Cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- ⅛ Tsp cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In medium bowl, gently stir together all ingredients except black pepper. Season to taste with black pepper. Cover and chill for 15 minutes.
2. Form crab mixture into eight equal-sized patties.
3. Coat large nonstick skillet with vegetable cooking spray and set over medium-high heat.
4. Sauté crab cakes, turning once, until golden brown on both sides, about 3 minutes per side. Serve with Pineapple Salsa.

FOR THE PINEAPPLE SALSA

1. Combine first five ingredients in medium bowl.
2. Toss to blend.
3. Season with salt and pepper.



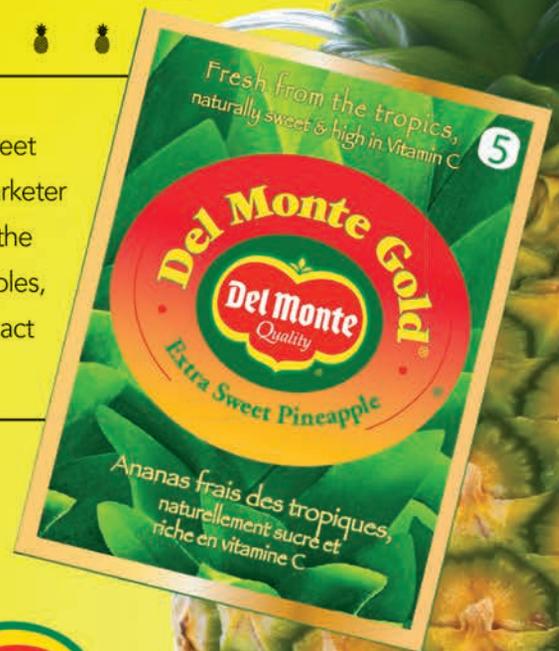
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POWER



#1

First in fresh. With our Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapple, we're the world's leading supplier and marketer of fresh pineapples. And, Del Monte always delivers the highest-quality fresh cut and whole fruits and vegetables, plus value-added offerings, to help you make an impact with your customers.



The Nature of the Best



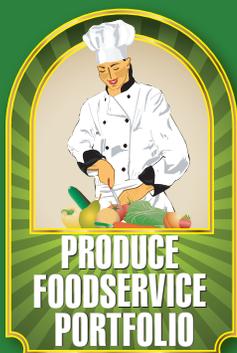
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GRIMMWAY SHREDDED CARROT CHILI WITH SHREDDED CARROT AND CHEESE GARNISH AND GRIMMWAY SHREDDED CARROT CORN BREAD

CHILI INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 lbs beef brisket
- 1 bottle (11.2 oz) stout beer
- 1 28 oz can of crushed tomatoes
- 1 12 oz can tomato paste
- 1 15 oz can white chili beans
- 1 15 oz can red chili beans
- 1 poblano pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 cup beef broth
- ¼ cup cumin
- ¼ cup chile powder
- 2 tsp cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper to taste

GARNISH

- Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots
- Sour cream
- Scallions
- Monterey Jack cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Generously coat the brisket in salt and pepper, heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large skillet and sear the meat.

2. Place the brisket in the slow cooker and add the bottle of stout beer and half of the can of crushed tomatoes.
3. Let it cook for two hours.
4. In a large saucepan, sauté onions, garlic, and poblano peppers for 7-8 minutes.
5. Add the rest of the can of crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, both white and red chili beans, beef broth, cumin, and chile powder. Let simmer for an hour on low, then add 2 cups of Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots. Let this simmer for an additional hour.
6. Take brisket out of the slow cooker and allow to cool slightly. Shred the brisket with two forks.
7. Add the shredded brisket and the contents of the slow cooker into the saucepan and stir.
8. Garnish with Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots, sour cream, scallions and cheese.

CORNBREAD INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots

- 1 ¼ cups yellow cornmeal
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp baking soda
- ⅓ cup whole milk
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 3 eggs, slightly beaten
- 8 tbsp unsalted butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit and place cast iron skillet in center of oven.
2. Whisk together the cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, and baking soda.
3. Without over mixing, add whole milk, eggs, buttermilk, and almost all of the melted butter (reserve about 1 tbsp).
4. Add Grimmway Farms Shredded Carrots.
5. Take skillet out of oven, take remaining butter and coat inside of skillet.
6. Lower your oven temperature to 325 degrees, fill skillet with batter, and bake for 25-30 minutes (or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean).

Storage and Handling:

- Always refrigerate immediately — never break the “cold chain.”
- Ideal storage temperature/atmosphere: 32°F to 36°F, 98 to 100 percent relative humidity.
- Store away from ethylene-producing fruits (apples, avocados and bananas).
- Whitening of peeled baby carrots is due to natural dryness; a quick ice water bath will freshen and restore color.

Add a little CRUNCH to your plate:

- Grimmway’s all-purpose carrot cut complements just about any recipe on your year-round menu.
- Adds color, flavor and texture to any dish.
- Perfect for salads, wraps, soups to main dishes and desserts.
- An excellent source of Vitamin A, and a good source of dietary fiber.



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FOODSERVICE

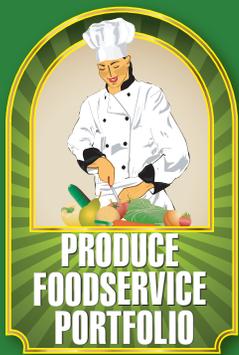
FOODSERVICE



*From our Sunny Fields
to your kitchen in the
cuts and sizes you want most.*



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Unique Attributes: From fine dining to fast casual, it's no surprise Live Gourmet® and certified organic Grower Pete's brands of living butter lettuce from Hollandia Produce are redefining expectations. With its crisp, velvety texture, mildly sweet flavor and stunning hues, this hydroponically greenhouse grown variety delivers unmatched uniformity, superior food safety and customer satisfaction throughout the food service supply chain. Plus, it's more:

Versatile: Living Butter Lettuce can be served as a salad, side, soup, smoothie or entrée.



Nutritious: Rich in vitamins A, C and K, butter lettuce is redefining classic salads like the Cobb and Wedge to give diners more nutritionally rich options.

Fresh: With its roots still attached, our living butter lettuce is literally still alive. This means it lasts longer than pre-cut heads, resulting in less waste and better taste for today's food purveyors.

Product Availability:

Year-Round Availability – Grown in Carpinteria and Oxnard, California, our living butter lettuce is available through a vast network of leading food service providers.

Our protected, greenhouse growing techniques ensure:

Food Safety Compliance – Our products bear many of the industry's most coveted seals



SERVES
4-6

TOASTED WALNUT & RASPBERRY SALAD WITH GOAT CHEESE

PREP TIME 20 MINUTES

INGREDIENTS

RASPBERRY WALNUT VINAIGRETTE

- 1 cup fresh or frozen raspberries, measured after they are pureed and deseeded or 2/3 cup seedless raspberry preserves
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons raspberry vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 cup toasted walnut oil

SALAD

- 2 heads Live Gourmet Red Butter Lettuce, torn into pieces
- 2 Persian cucumbers or 1/2 an English cucumber, thinly sliced
- 1/2 medium jicama, cut into matchstick slices

- 1 cup sugar snap peas, string removed
- 1 cup fresh raspberries
- 1/2 cup goat cheese, crumbled
- 1/2 cup walnuts, toasted

DIRECTIONS

1. Puree raspberries in a blender.
2. Pour into a fine mesh sieve and use the back of a spoon to gently coax the puree through into a measuring cup with a spout.
3. Discard the seeds left in the sieve.
4. If using raspberry preserves, warm in the microwave to liquefy.
5. Add vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper and whisk together. Slowly drizzle in walnut oil while continuing to whisk.
6. Mix all salad ingredients and serve with dressing.

Note: Sugar spiced walnuts are a great alternative to toasted walnuts.

of approval, including GFSI, HACCP and GAP/GMP, and maintain one of the cleanest growing environments in agriculture.

Conventional and Organic – We believe in making everyone happy; we offer both! In addition to being Non-GMO Project verified, our Grower Pete's products are USDA certified organic by CCOF.

Value-Added Flexibility – Through our advanced conservation methods, we reduce our carbon footprint and pass those savings on in the form of year-round stable pricing.

Tips: As an entrée, side or ingredient substitute,

living butter lettuce adds flavor, texture and nutrition to every recipe. Try it as a low calorie, low carbohydrate ingredient replacement.

Tortilla Substitute – As a fajita or wrap, living butter lettuce can cut calories and carbs from many recipe/menu staples.

Bread/Bun Alternative – Living butter lettuce is a great gluten free sandwich option; its tender leaves are pliable, yet strong enough to wrap around a burger, chicken, fish patty, or other sandwich fillers.

Gluten-free Option – Living butter lettuce, can transform recipe favorites into gluten-free and vegan friendly.





Ingredients for Success

Making the right choices is key to a food operation's success. It's not just the ingredients you choose but the relationships you build throughout the supply chain that help deliver masterpieces to the table and results to your bottom line. For unrivaled product quality, consistency and uncompromised customer service, confidently choose Hollandia Produce.

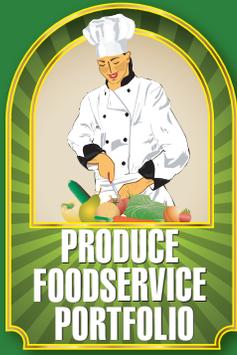
*Hollandia.
The Right Choice.*

*Below Left: A Grower Pete's Organic Living Watercress Salad
Below Right: A Live Gourmet® Living Butter Lettuce Salad*



Live Gourmet





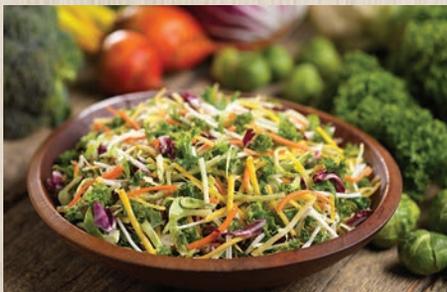
VEGGIE POWER BLEND

Unique Attributes: Mann's Veggie Power Blend™ is a blend of seven “superfoods” in one bag: broccoli, cauliflower, beets, Brussels sprouts, kale, radicchio and carrots. Colorful and nutrient-rich, it offers unprecedented convenience for operators, who would otherwise need to purchase and process a large quantity of different raw products.

Veggie Power Blend is extremely versatile, and can be used raw, pickled or cooked. Include it in a wide variety of menu applications such as appetizers, salads, smoothies or entrees.

Tips and Techniques:

- Sauté until tender for Asian or Italian-inspired sides
- Use as a main ingredient for coleslaw-style salads:
 - Add chopped nuts and dried fruit with a poppy seed dressing
 - Add ginger and green onions and toss with a wasabi vinaigrette
- Great filler for chicken or tuna salads
- Use for added color or crunch for wraps, sandwiches or egg dishes



Product Availability: Fixed pricing and year-round availability allow for reliable food cost planning.



PINEAPPLE PESTO CHICKEN WRAP

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup Mann's Veggie Power Blend
- 2 Tbsp Pineapple Pesto (recipe below)
- 4 ounces rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 2 Tbsp citrus aioli (recipe below)
- 1 12-inch wheat tortilla

PROCEDURE PER WRAP

1. In a small bowl, toss 1 cup of Mann's Veggie Power Blend with 2 tablespoons of pineapple pesto.
2. Spread citrus aioli evenly across tortilla, leaving a half-inch border.
3. Add shredded chicken and dressed Mann's Veggie Power Blend.
4. Like a burrito, fold sides inward, and then roll from top to bottom.
5. Slice in half to serve.

PINEAPPLE PESTO

- 2 Tbsp flat leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 cup diced pineapple
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh basil
- 1 Tbsp minced garlic
- 1/3 cup olive oil

PROCEDURE TO YIELD 1 – 1/2 CUPS

1. In a food processor or robot coupe, combine parsley, pineapple, basil, garlic, olive oil, and Parmesan cheese.
2. Pulse or process to desired consistency.
3. Hold refrigerated, up to 48 hours.

CITRUS AIOLI

- 1 1/2 cups mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp orange juice

PROCEDURE TO YIELD 1 – 1/2 CUPS

1. In a one-quart wok bowl; combine all ingredients, mix thoroughly.
2. Hold refrigerated, up to 48 hours.



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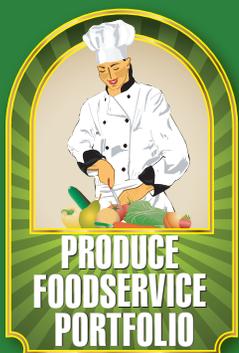
PASSION...for excellence in everything we do

Veggie Power Blend™

Mann Packing's core values of "Honor, Quality, Vision and Passion" have contributed to our rich 77-year history of family farming, sustainability and innovation. We are proud to be a women-owned company focused on providing high quality products to customers throughout North America.



Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA • 800.884.6266 • VeggiesMadeEasy.com



Unique Attributes: Given the multitude of uses, it is no surprise Naturipe berries are making their way onto menus where the use of a fresh berry was previously uncommon. Quick-service and fast-casual dining are showing interest in berries to add freshness, great taste and health to menus.

- Fresh berries are now found as a colorful topping to top-selling entrée salads in quick-service restaurants.

- Ready-to-Eat (RTE) blueberries are also available as a nutritious mix-in for on-the-go oatmeal at national quick-service restaurants and coffee chains.

- The popular parent-pleasing trend in fast-casual restaurants is serving a kid-sized assortment of sweet fresh berries to children upon seating.

- Using berries is easier than ever with Naturipe's RTE extended shelf life blueberries and strawberries. This unique harvest-to-package system extends the shelf life of pre-washed fresh blueberries for up to three weeks and strawberries for up to two weeks (when properly refrigerated). This process ensures the berries are triple-inspected, washed and placed in modified-atmosphere packaging, producing a high-quality berry that is ready to serve. This FRESH line allows more restaurants to offer fresh, health favorable berries — previously thought impossible.

Promotion: Restaurants and foodservice operators can capitalize on the health benefits of berries by promoting dishes to customers:

- Blueberries offer great taste and convenience along with disease-fighting health benefits.
- They are a top source of disease-fighting antioxidants.
- Berries, including blueberries, raspberries,



SERVES
4

SAVORY BLUEBERRY PIZZA

PREP TIME 20 MINUTES
COOK TIME 14 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME 34 MINUTES

Recipe developed by the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC)

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound pizza dough
- 1 - ½ cups grated mozzarella cheese, divided
- ½ cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese
- 4 ounces diced pancetta (can also use bacon or ham if pancetta is not available)
- ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- ¼ cup thinly sliced fresh basil
- Freshly ground black pepper slices

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit
2. Lightly flour a work surface
3. Pat and stretch dough into a 10 x 14-inch oval; place on a large baking sheet
4. With a fork, pierce dough in several places
5. Leaving a 1-inch border, sprinkle dough with half the mozzarella, the gorgonzola, pancetta and red onion
6. Bake until crust is golden brown, 12 to 14 minutes
7. Sprinkle blueberries and remaining mozzarella over pizza; bake until cheese is melted and crust is golden brown, about 2 minutes longer
8. Remove from oven; top with basil and pepper

blackberries and strawberries, give the biggest antioxidant bang for the buck compared to other fruits.

Tips: Fresh berries add color, flavor and texture to any menu item.

Fresh berries will help:

- Increase profits
- Lower food costs
- Simplify BOH operations
- Increase perceived value of menu items
- Offer healthy, desirable menu choices
- Stay current with new menu trends

- Satisfy customer demand
Add berries to the menu year-round. Blueberries are easy to use. There's no cutting, peeling or pitting. Just give them a quick rinse and they're ready.

The versatility of berries goes far beyond snacking as they can be incorporated into any meal. Berries can go sweet or savory — experiment to combine them with different flavor profiles.



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NATURIPE

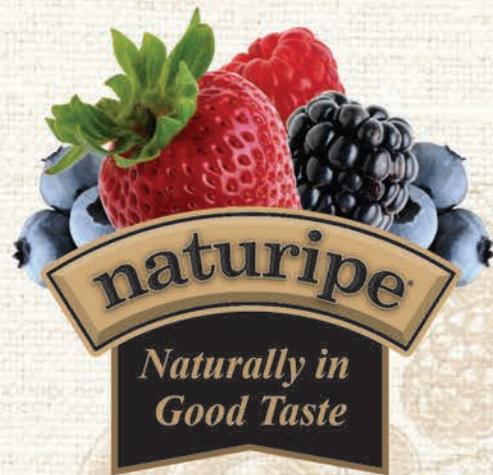
WHERE INNOVATION IS ALWAYS IN SEASON

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Chef Jehangir Mehta, a graduate of the CIA himself and a former contestant on *Iron Chef America*, shows off the finished burgers from 11 CIA student teams that competed against each other in the first annual, Blended Burger Bash.



THE WINNING TEAM:

Back row, left to right: Guest judge, New York chef Jehangir Mehta; Kathleen Preis, marketing manager, Mushroom Council; Joe Caldwell, vice president at Monterey Mushrooms; Steve Solomon, menu strategist, Mushroom Council; Greg Drescher, vice president of strategic initiatives and industry leadership, Culinary Institute of America; and Bart Minor, president and chief executive, Mushroom Council.

Front row, left to right: Joe Caldwell's wife Karen congratulates winning CIA students Cesar Cazares, Isabella Fattorone, Travis Zissu and Ann Molyn So, who called themselves "The Belcher's" and beat out 10 other themed teams in a heated competition for the two top prizes, creating the best beef burger blend and best free-style burger blend. [See their recipes below]

PROTEIN FLIP: MUSHROOMS STAR AT CIA'S BURGER BASH

By Mira Slott

The rules were strict, and the competition fiery at the launch of the annual Culinary Institute of America (CIA) Blended Burger Bash, pitting 11 culinary student teams against each other to innovate "The Blend," a concept whereby mushrooms are rotated into traditional protein recipes, reducing the meat portion and building a healthier meal.

Championed by the Redwood Shores, CA-based Mushroom Council, the goal was to match the texture of ground meat — beef, pork, chicken, turkey (or tofu) — and to exceed expectations of the taste profile of the burger, according to Bart Minor, president and chief executive of the Mushroom Council.

Each team had to create two burgers, a beef and mushroom blend, and a free-style blend using other proteins, but the critical requirement, at least 20 percent of the ingredients had to be mushrooms.

"The Mushroom Council inspired the Burger Blend event and contributed the prize money of some \$5,000," says Kathleen Preis, marketing manager at the Mushroom Council, adding that approximately 350 pounds of mushroom varieties were donated for

the cause from various suppliers.

Teams set up in open air, festive tents across the sprawling campus lawn, grilling, searing, flipping and shamelessly promoting their themed blended burger creations and sides (plenty filled with fresh produce items) to students, friends and families, who could cast a separate vote to determine the most popular burger.

But the coveted prize would have to be earned in a blind tasting by the expert judging panel, including guest chef Jehangir Mehta, owner of restaurants Graffiti, Graffiti Earth and Me and You, based in New York City; Bruce Mattel, C.H.E., associate dean, food production at the CIA; the Mushroom Council executives and Joe and Karen Caldwell of Monterey Mushrooms, based in Watsonville, CA. Entrees were judged with rankings across several categories: "taste and deliciousness, creativity and innovation, appearance and presentation, and on reflectors of Menus of Change principles."

The Mushroom Council has worked closely with the CIA in the past few years to educate new chefs and help facilitate Menus of Change, according to

Greg Drescher, vice president of strategic initiatives and strategic leadership at CIA.

"It's the healthier principle," says Mattel of the inaugural Blended Burger Bash, which was held on Sunday June 26 during a spirited Stars & Stripes event weekend as an early kick off to the July 4 holiday. Mattel acknowledges this healthier principle is one of four long-standing traditional cook-off competitions at CIA: Pizza, Chile and Chowder, all three of which usually veer from the healthy mindset.

Minor points to a surge in college campuses across the U.S. incorporating The Blend into their foodservice menus, noting a daring and tasty 20/80 burger blend at Stanford University, where the protein and mushroom percentages are flipped. At the same time, Minor acknowledges challenges in how to market The Blend. "There is valuation in 100 percent Angus beef being on the menu," for instance, says Drescher.

Just as blended wines and blended coffees are respected, there is potential to develop the concept, says Drescher. The CIA's Burger Bash will now become an annual event.



Ooooh! Mami Burger

Yield: 130 portions

Ingredients

Mushroom Blend	Amount
EVOO	3 ¼ cups
Crimini	8 ½ lbs
Shiitake	8 ½ lbs
Maitake	8 ½ lbs

Burger Blend	Amount
85/15 Ground Beef	26 lbs
Onion, minced	13 lbs
Worcestershire	4 Tbsp
Parsley, chopped	10 oz
Chives, chopped	10 oz
Eggs	26

Garnish	Amount
Blue Cheese	22 lbs
Enoki Mushroom	13 lbs
Buns	130

Side	Amount
Parsnip	55 lbs
Rosemary	15 oz
Kosher Salt	To taste
Black Pepper	To taste

Method

1. Coat crimini, shiitake and maitake blend in olive oil, toss with salt, roast at 450 F for 20 minutes, let cool
2. Blend the mushrooms to coarse consistency, reserve
3. Combine ground beef, mushroom blend, herbs, Worcestershire sauce, onions, pepper - scale into 4 ounce portions
4. Clean, batter, and fry enoki mushrooms - reserve for garnish
5. Spiralize parsnip, toss in EVOO, salt, rosemary, salt and pepper - bake at 350 F until crispy
6. Toast bun, grill burger, finish burger in oven/salamander with blue cheese



Silence of the Lambs Burger

Yield: 130 portions

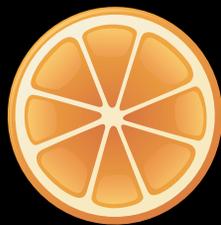
Ingredient	Amount
Lowfat Plain Yogurt	6.5 gallons
Mint Leaves, chopped	6 cups
Garlic Cloves, minced	8 cloves
Lemon Zest	2 Tbsp
Cucumbers	5 lbs
Bulger Wheat	8.5 lbs
Crimini mushroom, chopped	13 lbs
Cumin, ground	3 Tbsp
Coriander, ground	3 Tbsp
Cinnamon	3 Tbsp
Lemon Juice	4 Tbsp
Parsley, chopped	4 Tbsp
Ground Lamb	19.5 lbs

Side	Amount
Parsnip	55 lbs
Ras Al Hanout (includes salt, cumin, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, black pepper, white pepper, coriander, cayenne, allspice, nutmeg and cloves)	8 oz

Method:

1. Combine yogurt, mint leaves, garlic, lemon zest and cucumbers in blender, reserve
2. Cook bulger wheat, reserve
3. Saute mushrooms with cumin, coriander, and cinnamon - cool and reserve
4. Combine lemon juice, parsley, lemon zest, lamb, bulger - mix gently
5. Portion to 4 ounce burgers
6. Spiralize Parsnip
7. Toss in Ras Al Hanout spice
8. Roast mixture

The Magic of Menu



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Ron DeSantis

Director of culinary excellence for Yale Dining



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Three Great Panel Discussions

DISCUSSION PANEL 1:

Consumer Behaviors And The Marketing Of Fresh Produce

Featuring:

Stefano Cordova, vice president food operations and food business development for **Starbucks**

Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications and executive director of **Culinary Visions Panel**

Paul Pszybylski, senior director of culinary development for **California Pizza Kitchen**

Maeve Webster, president of **Menu Matters**

Rafi Taherian, executive director for **Yale Dining**

Panel Moderator: Ellen Koteff, vice president editorial for **PRODUCE BUSINESS**

DISCUSSION PANEL 3:

Getting The All-Important Consumer Buy-In

Featuring:

Jean-Marie Clement, director, food and beverage concept development and international integration for **Walt Disney Parks and Resorts**

Gerry Ludwig, corporate consulting chef at **Gordon Food Service**

Megan McKenna, director of foodservice and marketing for **National Watermelon Promotion Board**

Darryl Mickler, senior director of research and development at **Hard Rock International**

Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the **Idaho Potato Commission**

Michael Sabourin, corporate executive chef for **Windstar Cruises**

Shane Shaibly, corporate chef for **First Watch**

Panel Moderator: Susan Renke, president and founder of **Food Marketing Resources**

DISCUSSION PANEL 2:

Matches Made In Heaven — Partnerships That Sell Produce

Featuring:

Rich Dachman, vice president of produce for **Sysco**

RJ Harvey, corporate executive chef and wellness manager for **Compass Group — Morrison Management**

Peggy McCormick, president of **MMM Marketing**

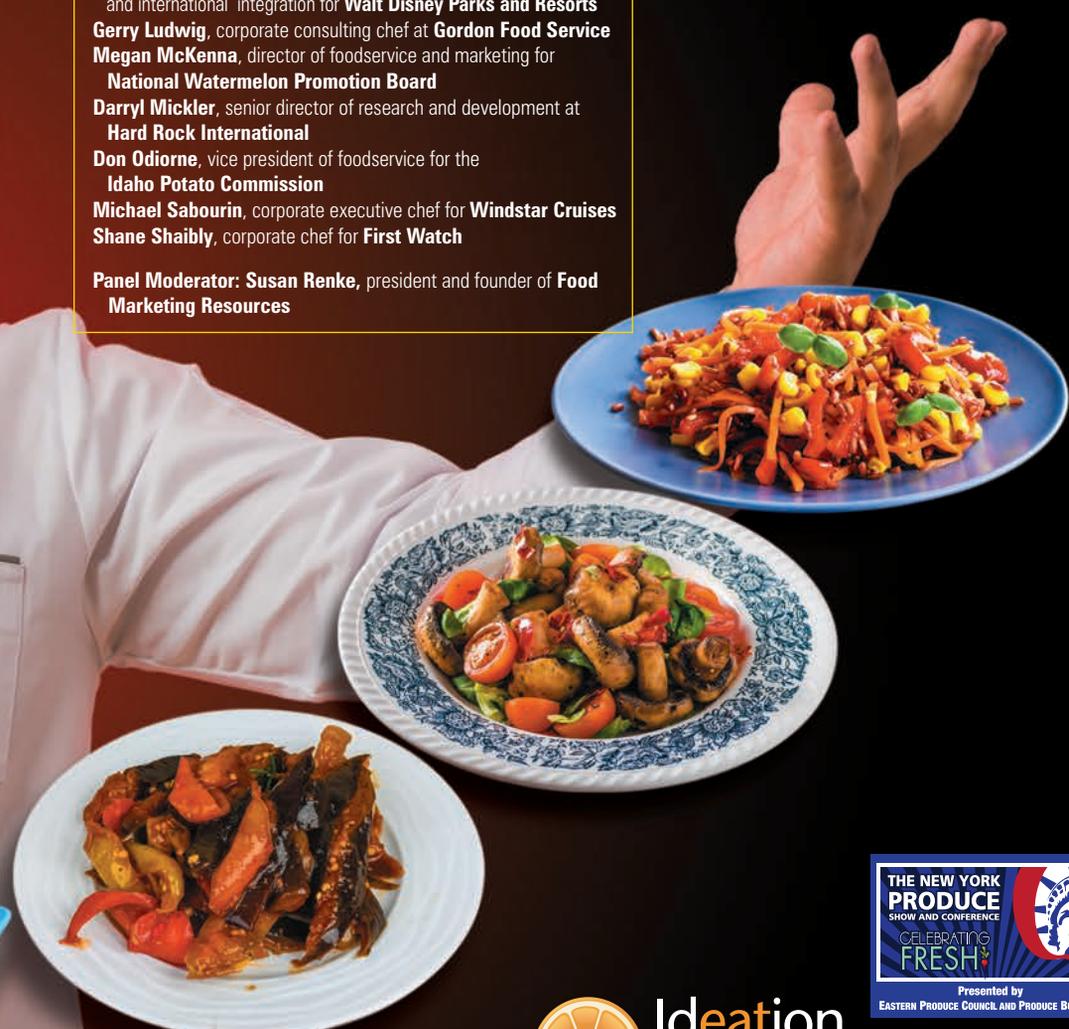
Steve Solomon, culinary director for the **Mushroom Council**

Joe Loiacano, senior manager of fresh produce for **Wendy's**

Robin Fisher, produce category manager for **PF Chang's**

Steve Kenfield, vice president of **HMC Farms**

Panel Moderator: Amy Myrdal Miller, founder and president of **Farmer's Daughter® Consulting**



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The Future IS NOW



PHOTO COURTESY OF FIAMMA PIACENTINI

The Future Is Now

In our annual New York Regional Market profile, we explore the different “avenues” of produce through the wholesale, retail and foodservice outlets.

New York City represents a produce haven for the industry. The region is home to international Michelin star chefs and restaurants, culinary wonders from around the world, fresh produce delivery services, small grocers on most every corner, Green Carts, and more.

Walk the rows of the Hunts Point Produce Market. Within the 50-mile metro radius and five boroughs that nearly 9 million people call home are first-generation immigrants, longtime city dwellers and tourists.

Serving produce to such a diverse crowd is no easy feat. But those who make up the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx get most of the job done. It's the epicenter of produce distribution, and along with other significantly sized distributors throughout New York and the Eastern Seaboard, the needs of every customer can be met.

As the Hunts Point Produce Market approaches its 50th year since inception in 1967, change is all around. Physically, the Market has had a few facelifts, modernizations, and several improvements are in the works — as new world standards and procedures merge with the old world ways of conducting business.

The Market implemented more modern technologies. Better warehousing efficiencies, inventory control and trucking are embraced, EDI (electronic data interchange) for invoicing and

PO's are implemented, and distributors adapted logistics as new-format customers required changes.

Despite strong competition, the volatile nature of the produce business means companies in the New York area continue to collaborate with each other to serve customers.

As produce makes its way to the foodservice and retail arenas, we examine how one restaurant in the Flatiron district defines authentic Mexican cuisine.

Cosme draws heavily from its neighborhood, and the establishment has become a destination restaurant with people coming from all over the city to enjoy its innovative cuisine.

C-Town in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn, harnesses a balance for unique produce offerings, a dynamic customer base and minimal shelf space. The six-aisle C-Town has one aisle dedicated solely to produce, along with an outdoor area for fresh flowers and seasonal produce items. Between the outdoor and indoor space, the store carries anywhere from 300-500 produce items (25 of which are on sale during a typical week).

The produce industry functions at a speed similarly felt by a traveler in Grand Central Station during rush hour. The frenetic energy and importance of getting from point A to point B is critical. Some might say the industry shines brightest in the city that never sleeps.

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Hunts Point Puts Produce On The Plates Of Millions

Customer service is top priority when supplying New York's diverse population.

By Keith Loria

New York City is rich in history, cultural diversity and sophistication. It's a city where the rich and educated shop alongside students, young couples and blue-collar workers. All of them demand the best of everything — especially in produce.

Within a 50-mile metro radius and five

boroughs that nearly 9 million people call home are first-generation immigrants, longtime city dwellers and tourists. Serving produce to such a diverse crowd is no easy feat. But those who make up the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx get the job done. It's the epicenter of produce distribution and along with other signifi-

cantly-sized distributors throughout New York and the Eastern Seaboard. The needs of every type of customer can be filled.

Stefanie Katzman, a manager and fourth-generation worker for S. Katzman Produce Company, says dealing with the melting pot that is New York comes down to simply knowing your customers' needs

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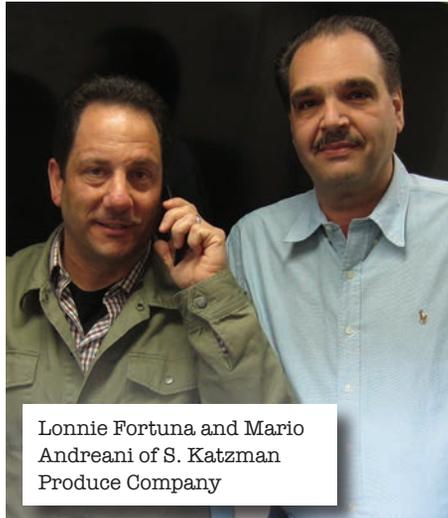
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“Your Direct Link to the Grower”



Chris Hernandez and Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce Company



Lonnie Fortuna and Mario Andreani of S. Katzman Produce Company



Steve Koster of E. Armata Produce



Matthew D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.



Michael D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.



Joel Fierman of Fierman Produce Exchange

and making customer service a top priority. "Every customer is different, especially when you start to cross generations, so the key to selling to a diverse populace is finding out what each of them wants," she says. "I think there is room for every customer, because there are vendors out there producing every product."

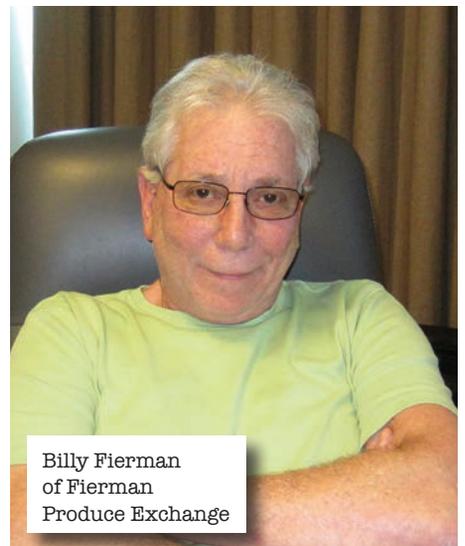
Mario Andreani, general manager for S. Katzman Produce Company, says the key is submersing the company into the various cultures and demographics that make up New York's melting pot.

"Reading, asking and understanding exactly what is important will do wonders," he says. "Most of the time, I find the answers right in my house. I am lucky enough to still have my mom and dad with us, and I look in their refrigerator to see what they buy. Then I look in my refrigerator and see what my daughter brings home. That pretty much helps me understand the three generations we currently serve."

Steve Koster, marketing director at the fourth generation E. Armata Produce, notes Millennials are a dynamic force behind the current healthier-eating trend, which dovetails nicely with the company's philosophy that centers on food safety, unbroken cold chain compliance, and quick turnaround with minimal handling of fresh produce.

"I think the market is doing its due diligence as far as food safety and traceability," says Joel Fierman, co-president of Hunts Point Cooperative Association. "The merchants on this market are well aware of the guidelines and how to move forward."

"We make every effort to supply the diverse population in the metro New York area, bringing in varied produce from throughout the United States and Canada, imports from around the world and locally grown farms," says Koster. "All of our departments enable us to offer a large variety of items that can be picked up at our facility or delivered by our fleet of trucks."



Billy Fierman of Fierman Produce Exchange

"For years, in season, terminal markets, supermarkets, and green grocers have always carried local product," says Fierman, pointing out that the Hunts Point Produce Market has had multi-generational relationships with local growers that go back long before the Market was created.



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Jimmy Corn, Neil Mahadeo, Jason Gelbaum, Jeff Steinberg, Paul Manfre and Lenore Rios of Top Katz Brokers LLC

“Local may have gotten more recognition over the past five years, but that doesn’t mean it’s a novelty and new invention.”

Fierman suggests retailers help educate

the consumer on the definition of local and the time of year it is available for different regions. “Technically domestic farmers from all over the U.S. are farming local

produce ... within our borders. We have to be careful on how we use the word ‘local.’”

Gabriela D’Arrigo, marketing director for D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.,

Transportation Matters

Thanks to a “Tiger Grant” from the Federal Government, additional money was given to Hunts Point by the City of New York to renovate its transportation needs. Myra Gordon, executive administrative director for the Hunts Point Produce Market, says \$22 million dollars was spent on revamping the rail from behind the A, B and C halls, and that it’s had a noticeable affect.

“The rails were sinking. It was dangerous, and there were companies that were paying a lot of money to develop their own plates that were, in my opinion sliding boards. Unloading railcars on that type of unsafe situation was really a hazard,” says Gordon. “The rails were redone and it’s really incredible. They did a perfect job. The rails are now up to the height that they were when the market opened here in 1967.”

Steve Koster, marketing director at the fourth generation E. Armata Produce, notes the company prides itself on delivering the finest quality fruit and produce, properly priced for the end user.

“We employ a dedicated logistics manager to oversee the seamless integration necessary for an uninterrupted supply

chain, developing long-term relationships with sanctioned freight brokers,” he says. “A rigorous inspection procedure of product prior to shipping is mandatory. Continuing with proper food safety handling and cold chain compliance from the warehouse through our refrigerated delivery trucks guarantees the highest quality delivered to our customers.”

Stefanie Katzman, a manager and fourth-generation worker for S. Katzman Produce Company, believes both air and sea travel options for produce will increase, and it’s something the company is definitely keeping a close eye on.

“Communication and timely updates are key,” she says. “The supply chain has to be a well-oiled machine.”

At A.J. Trucco, Inc., there’s a dedicated team that coordinates transportation with its loyal partners, and they too are closely watching the changes in air, rail and sea.

“We make sure all channels of communication work properly and focus on great customer service,” says president and chief executive, Nick Pacia.

Paul Kazan, president and chief executive of Target Interstate Systems, Inc., views his company’s role as a critical link

between customers purchasing produce from the grower, and maximizing selling potential with communication and on time delivery in proper condition.

“We have been in the Hunts Point Market now for 35 years. Naturally, the market has changed dramatically in those years, and so has Target,” he says. “The market shifted from commodity-specific businesses, where the individual firms specialized in the various fruit and produce commodities, to major houses becoming more broadline in the commodities they handle. This was done to accommodate the full needs of customers without having to chase them to a competitor for items they didn’t carry.”

In addition, the majority of the wholesalers now deliver what they sell, where in the past only a handful of merchants offered those services.

“We opened offices in the major growing areas to accommodate the needs of our customers’ expanded product lines. We wanted to service them wherever their needs might be,” says Kazan. “Over the years we either initiated or fostered new ways of doing business in the market and the industry in general.”



Dena Solis of S. Katzman Produce Company



Andrew Brantley of S. Katzman Produce Company



Evan and Paul Kazan of Target Interstate Systems

says listening to the customer is the best way to know what trends are coming and what people are looking for, and how that applies to Millennials.

“Millennials want options and that’s what we try to provide. If you cannot give them that, you’ve lost their interest,” says D’Arrigo. “We bring in a variety of items

from organic to specialty. Millennials are currently the generation that sets the trend in all segments of the industry. We try to be ahead of the curve as much as possible.”

Target Interstate Systems was the first truck broker domiciled in Hunts Point, which presented the company with tremendous opportunities working almost exclusively with the merchants in the market.

“We focused on them as the real customer and solicited our business from the receiver rather than from a shipper or produce broker, which was difficult since they protected each other from firms like ours,” says Kazan. “At that time, all the trucks got paid C.O.D by the Hunts Point receivers.”

Target saw a better way and offered its services to the market. Instead of the drivers clogging up their offices in the morning, they paid the trucks and invoiced the customer and got paid by the end of the week. This was a paradigm shift that has now become standard practice.

Looking ahead, technology is key for faster and more accurate transportation. “Once a load is picked up, communicating the carrier’s location and in transit temperatures is paramount,” says Kazan. “Although we employ a plethora of technologies to get us that information, we can always do better at making sure the information is delivered to the customer

in a timely fashion.”

Loadsmart (a New York City-based technology company specializing in full truckload shipping) provides spot and contracted truckload services to businesses at the Hunts Point market and was developed with input from its customers.

Diego Urrutia, head of sales for the company, notes Loadsmart is the easiest place to manage truckload shipping as its customers can quote and book shipments online within 2 minutes.

“Reliable service is a prerequisite, but simplicity, speed and technology are essential to customer service,” he says. “Efficient communication between buyers, sellers, and transportation providers is essential to make sure nothing falls between the cracks. Always remember to tell us any specific nuances of the shipments. Sometimes our customers don’t want to burden us with too much information, but the more we know, the better we can transport the freight.”

Among the shipment management features Loadsmart provides its customers are real time GPS tracking, appointment scheduling and electronic billing.

“With logistics being an integral part

of a business’s success, more and more people are involved in the shipment process. Having real time information readily available in one place is key,” says Urrutia. “Loadsmart’s platform has evolved to empower all members of an organization to get the information they need: for example, sales members can now quote and book freight on behalf of their customers, and accounting can pull POD’s and other necessary documentations.”

Looking to the future, Joel Fierman, co-owner of Fierman Produce Exchange on the Hunts Point Produce Market, doesn’t see rail as the most reliable source of moving highly perishable produce.

Fierman has been experimenting with alternative delivery methods. “We’ve gone through the jet air era where we would bring in pineapples from Hawaii or peppers from Holland, and all of those products that were novel years ago are more obtainable now. That’s taken away a lot of the air,” says Fierman. “We’re experimenting more with contract carriers, where we have prices set for the year with delivery schedules we both can adhere to. That’s what I believe people will do.”

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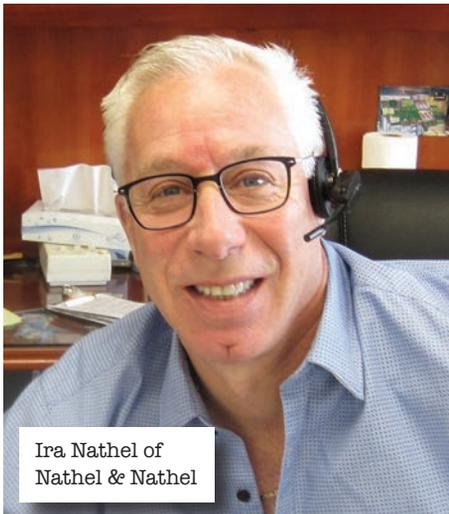
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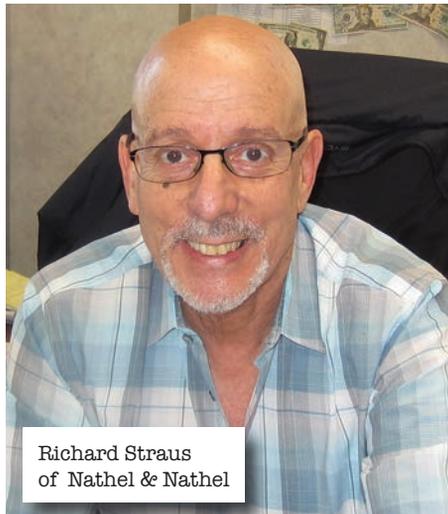
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Ira Nathel of Nathel & Nathel



Richard Straus of Nathel & Nathel



Sheldon Nathel of Nathel & Nathel



Kenny, a buyer on the Market and Joe Fierman of Fierman Produce Exchange



Dana Taback of Fierman Produce Exchange



Harris Mercier and Joe Randone of Fierman Produce Exchange



Angel Helck and Gary Bierman of Nathel & Nathel

Paul Manfre, general manager of buying and sales at Top Katz LLC says New York's ethnically diverse population propelled change, and the product offerings have followed suit.

"There's a lot of new items that weren't offered even 25 years ago, but as people

migrated to the United States, they took their ethnic heritages with them," says Manfre. "When I was a terminal market salesman, we would sell 300 to 400 escarole a night or 25 cilantro. Now you buy 300 cilantro and 100 escarole. It's all changed.

"I used to sell a little mango and avocados 25 to 30 years ago," says Manfre. "They were nowhere as popular as they are today. Why? They started with an ethnic group and now they're mainstream items. Everybody eats them."

Old World Meets New World

As the Hunts Point Produce Market approaches its 50th year since inception in 1967, change is all around. Physically, the Market has had a few facelifts, modernizations, and many improvements are in the works. But changing demographics and rapid technological advancements are both fueling rapid change in the way operators work and function.

With some "houses" on the market still run by the same people who witnessed the move from Washington Street to the South Bronx, and some houses being run by second, third, and even fourth generation family stewards, the adjustment from "old world" standard procedures to "new world" service-based customization can be vexing. However, New Yorkers are known for their resourcefulness and ability to adapt, and when "the future is now," Hunts Point is a great place to see transformations taking place before your very eyes.

"Culture shock" is the way D'Arrigo describes the merger of the new world with the old world of generational teams and customers — especially for those companies that have been in the produce business as long as D'Arrigo Bros.

"I believe both will adopt the positive attributes from each other's 'worlds,'" says D'Arrigo. "Currently we have a relatively even split between the two worlds. There



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Richard Cochran of Robert T. Cochran & Co., Inc.



Bobby Bates, Louie Langone and Mike Cochran of Robert T. Cochran Co., Inc.

is a wide breadth of customers that come through our door along with those that we deliver to. We best serve them by listening to their wants and needs and providing the service they require."

Successful vendors at Hunts Point understand that while you must continue to meet the needs of your old-world customers, if you don't transition and

change to impress the new-world clientele as well, you're going to be left behind.

"If you are big enough to take in straight loads, then fine, but you should always have the market in your back pocket," says Fierman from Fierman Produce Exchange and Hunts Point Co-op Association. "You don't have to buy 500 of something if you only need 200 of something — then

leave the other 300 to a wholesaler on the market to sell it for you so you are not exposed to ordering too much.

"If you're not shopping in this market, then you're probably not making the money you think you're making. This market is the greatest place in America to shop for value, variety and quality. If you're not shopping here, then shame on

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you. You are leaving a lot on the table.”

When Sheldon Nathel, a partner in Nathel & Nathel (along with brother Ira), first started selling at Hunts Point back in the early '80s, his customer base was mainly comprised of Korean grocers.

“They came from Korea, and they were very smart people that didn't have a command of the language, but they were lawyers and doctors, very prominent people who came over to start a life here. These guys worked very hard,” says Nathel.

“My father always said ‘these people might not speak the language very well, or they might not understand you very well, but these people all deserve to be treated with the utmost respect.’ We always respected the Koreans, and I think they really trusted my dad and felt comfortable shopping here.”

But many of those Korean families are no longer in the business — driven out by big chains or lack of interest from the younger generations. That's a change Nathel has noticed.

“As we fast forward to now, the Koreans are not as much in the business,” says Nathel. “Their children grew up, went to very good schools and did not want to get into the produce business. Now we deal with a lot of Turkish people, Russians and Chinese. Just like the Italians and Jews came in during the early 1900s, the new immigrant groups took over this business,” he says.

“These people are coming in and finding opportunity in the produce business. If you work hard and have the right work ethic, you can make a great living,” says Nathel.

The secret to continued success, he says, harkens back to his father's advice — treat everyone with respect.

Generational Business Perspective

A big problem for Mike Cochran, in sales with Robert T. Cochran Company, Inc., is dealing with customers of the

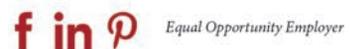
“new world.”

“Some of the new people that come in — and it's a lot of the smaller guys — they just have no idea how to ask for anything, such as ‘how much is the apple?’ At any given time we have several kinds in different sizes from different places. Then we ask them what kind of apple do they want, and they respond, ‘red,’” he says.



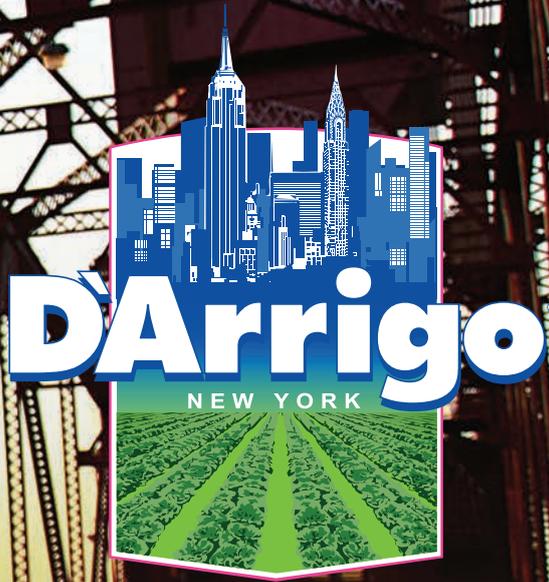
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NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

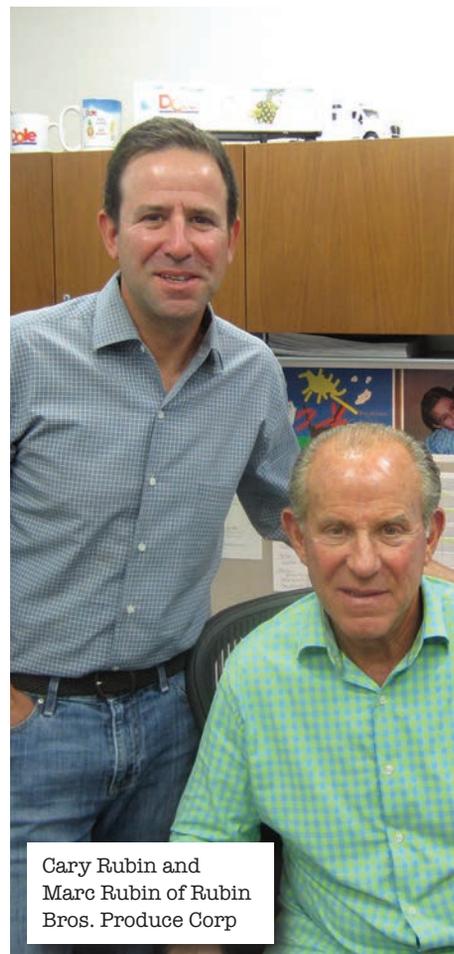
"We have many kinds of red apples. When you're dealing with somebody who has experience it makes it a lot easier. They tell me, 'I need a Red Delicious, 80 size,' so at least we can narrow it down."

Charlie DiMaggio, owner of FresCo LLC, notes regardless of the age of a customer, they all expect top service, price and quality, and they all want clear communication.

"When it comes to the old-world

customers, they don't like change — even if there are systems that benefit them and can save them money in the end. If it's not broken they don't want to fix it, so we keep everything the same," says DiMaggio. "For our new-world customers, they are always looking for better forms of communication and information. They appreciate it and the sales show it."

Thomas M. Tramutola Jr., sales manager and buyer for A&J Produce Corp., which



Cary Rubin and Marc Rubin of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp

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has been part of Hunts Point for 38 years, says the key to appealing to customers of all ages and generations is to carry consistent products every day.

"Each day we try to have all products available to all of our customers," he says, "so even when things change in certain areas, we try to source products from others places to fill the gaps; so we don't have to tell our customers, 'we don't have a certain item today,'" he says.

One of the younger generations on the market, Tramutola has grown up around the family business, and has seen it evolve through the years.

"You may still have some of the old timers who like to come to the market and buy produce for their stores or restaurants; or if they're running a wholesale or purveyor business, they still like to buy for their own group," says Tramutola. "But now, we see a lot of the new generation working from the stores by fax or email ... getting deliveries of the fresh fruits and vegetables, they don't want to be bothered coming to the market as much as some of the old generation owners did."

"A lot of the new owners have buyers

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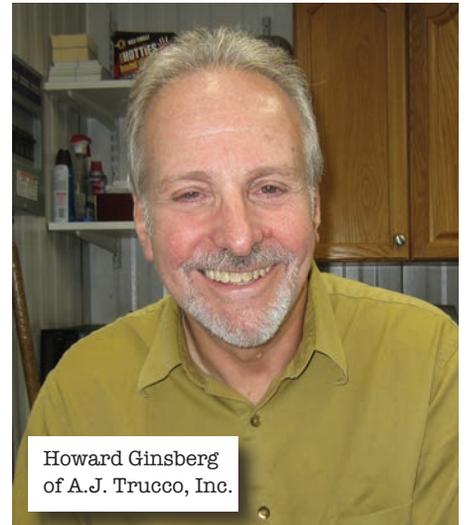
Thomas Tramutola and Thomas M. Tramutola Jr. of A&J Produce Corp.



Simon Pacia, Nick Pacia and Isabella Pacia of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



Leo Fernandez and Junior De La Cruz of Fierman Produce Exchange



Howard Ginsberg of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



Larry Febraro, Seamus Eareckson, Mingo Laboy, Robert Bader of Fierman Produce Exchange

in the market or they have groups that buy for them. The relationships are just different and not customer to vendor like they used to be," says Tramutola.

When it comes to appealing to the new-world customers, especially Millennials, Tramutola notes organic is a big

movement, which is why A&J Produce supplies organic product. That can be tough on the terminal market, though, because the company has to compete price-wise, and organic products tend to cost a lot more than conventional produce.

"Regarding organics in the terminal

market ... we are in a conundrum, because the farmers need a good return for the organic produce, because of the investment they made, and the lower yields they get from the crop; yet we're subject to supply and demand," says Tramutola. "We can't always get back the difference that they might need, but we need to keep a certain amount in stock, because certain people want it, and ask for it, and we want to keep them happy," he says. "We're trying to work it out so we build up enough business where we could have the organics presold, and we don't have to keep it subject to market pricing."

When it comes to creating relationships with shippers, Cary Rubin, vice president of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., says it takes years to cultivate strong partnerships.

"Most of the relationships that we have are long-term, multigenerational," says Rubin. "From a new world perspective, we're always out there trying to build new ones. Obviously, you want to be able to

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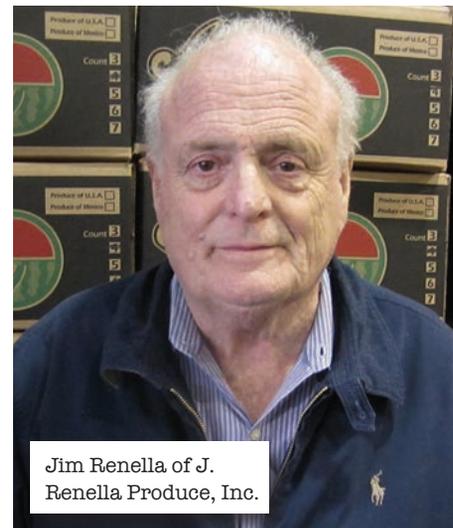
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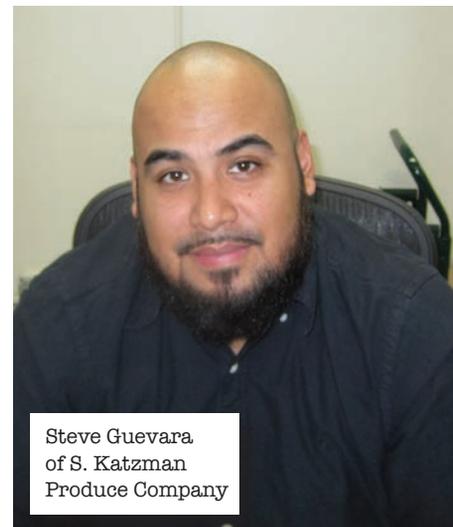
John Stewart and Claudio D'Alimonte of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



Jim Renella of J. Renella Produce, Inc.



Danny Imwalle and Darek Kuras of Top Banana



Steve Guevara of S. Katzman Produce Company

build trust with a shipper where you could have a give-and-take relationship. In this day and age, there's not a ton of people out there to cultivate those relationships with, so it takes time to build up."

Although Rubin has been in the business for more than 20 years, he considers himself part of the new world, and he says it's easy for him to work with multiple generations.

"It's definitely easier for me to work with a younger person in terms of technology and, let's face it, computer systems have really benefited the produce industry," he says. "It's been a lot easier to do more business because I'm just multitasking."

Manfre of Top Katz says the old-world customers still like to have good-ole' conversations and can spare a few minutes to make connections. He prefers that to Facebook, texting and email — where it's very hard to forge a true connection.

"Guys my age are dinosaurs," says Manfre. "I've been doing this for almost 40

“ Our customer base has shifted to more retail and foodservice, and in those areas — as well as the terminals — there are a lot of younger people, and you have to know how to work with them. ”

— Paul Manfre, Top Katz LLC

years, and I've seen a lot of changes come and go. You have to deal with younger guys, and I see how those guys talk — they are texting and using social media on their cell phones. I can still remember when beepers were the new thing," he says.

"Our customer base has shifted to more

retail and foodservice, and in those areas — as well as the terminals — there are a lot of younger people, and you have to know how to work with them."

Jimmy Margiotta, president of J. Margiotta Company LLC, says as customers have been changing from one generation to the next, so have the businesses at Hunts Point.

"What's great about this market is the salesmen, owners, and everyone else treats every customer the same, whether they're buying a trailer load or a box," says Margiotta. "This is a very close circle of people. It's a cool thing actually."

When Myra Gordon, executive administrative director for the Hunts Point Produce Market, first started working there, nobody understood or even owned computers.

"Everything was done on the floor with a large pad detailing all of the items for sale that day and the quantity. As items were sold, workers marked it off on the tags. You would hope that what was left

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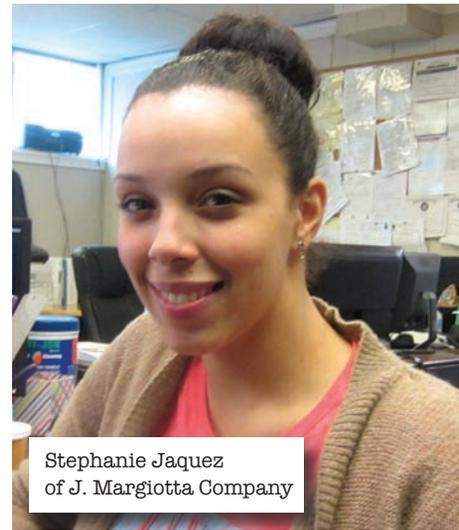
John Acompora, Paul Armata, Chris Armata, Chelsea Armata, Michael Armata and Nicholas Armata of E. Armata Produce



Paul Jaffa of S. Katzman Produce Company



Guy Buonomo of LBD Produce



Stephanie Jaquez of J. Margiotta Company

in the warehouse equaled what was left on the sheet at the end of the day," says Gordon. "Today with the exception of maybe two or three companies, everything is computerized from the floor to the office, so it's instantaneous."

As owner of J. Renella Produce, Inc., Jim Renella, has been specializing in watermelon at Hunts Point since first opening, and while he is known as old school in his dealings — offering no delivery, working with just two porters and accepting only cash — he's not one to sit back when it comes to the success of his business.

Not long ago, Renella started offering his own brand of watermelon, and the company has been thriving in the category ever since.

"My end of the business is just a little different than the rest of the market; I specialize in one item and it really doesn't change," says Renella. "My customers expect the best and that's what I offer. "There's never been a need for me to look

at other product. We sell what we sell, which is the best watermelon in the area, and there's no need for anything else."

The Product Mix

The new world versus old world also applies to the products offered today. As a case in point, Rubin says to consider kale, an item that's been around forever but is being viewed in a new light.

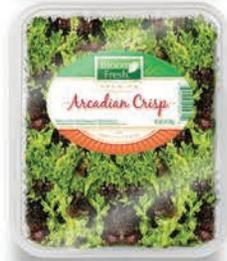
"Originally, when we would sell a trailer load of greens, it would be half a load of collards, quarter load of kale, and maybe an eighth of a load of mustard and turnip tops," says Rubin. "It's an item like kale that grew with the new Millennium, and the superfood movement really shifted that product to a much higher volume.

"So, you take that same load of greens from the same farmer down in Georgia and now it could be a third collards and a third kale, says Rubin. "So, the dynamic has changed and our job is to make sure we follow."

A trend Tramutola notices is an increase of salad shops throughout the tri-state area. "The different greens — kale, salads, Mesclun and Spanish mixes — have become very popular," he says. "Obviously the fight against obesity is a real initiative, so eating healthy has become a lot more prevalent." The same is true of juice bars and restaurants that added juicing, which has led to an increase in tropical products to concoct a variety of drinks from fresh produce.

Nathel says these trends have also influenced packaging. "We're talking a lot of packaged goods, bagged goods, bagged apples, packaged Mesclun and packaged salads. There's just a lot of innovation going toward new types of packaging in the industry," he says.

Cochran notices a change in what the younger generations are buying, and that's affected how his company selects produce each day. "We do a lot of staple items so a lot of it does stay the same; I mean, everybody uses peppers, tomatoes and



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Clockwise Trio: Yolanda Rivera, Robert Kistoo and Bobby Norato of Lexi Logistics
Far Right: Waimon Wong of A&J Produce Corp.



John Paul Tramutola, Thomas M. Tramutola Jr., Mario Traina Sr., Mario Traina Jr. of A&J Produce Corp.

lettuce," he says. "Years ago you used to move pallets of chicory and escarole, where now cilantro is a big item, and there's a lot more tropicals being sold."

At D'Arrigo, the company has a tropical department along with its fruit and vegetable departments, each offering an extensive variety of offerings from generic staples to "upscale" on-trend items. It offers everything from dragon fruit and broccoli rabe to oriental batata. Still, the D'Arrigos wouldn't necessarily categorize specialty items as being "new world."

"Specialty items may take new and different forms, but we have always supplied them," says D'Arrigo. "Our company strives to be a one-stop-shop, and in order to embody that, you have to offer a full and diverse line.

Niche Service From Staples to Exotics

"We're also diversifying the way we do business," says D'Arrigo. "We're looking



Leo Weiler, Doc Bonomolo and Bobby Adhin of A&J Produce Corp.

at different ways to sell items, whether that's value-added or organic. We also had some new blood join our team, and that's helped change things up a bit and bring a different dynamic."

A big change at E. Armata Produce, has been the addition of a potato and onion

department, so it is now able to supply customers with a complete line of produce.

"It was an important complement to our full-line fruit department; western and eastern vegetable departments; specialties, mushroom, and herb department; as well as tomato repacking department,"

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Thomas M. Tramutola Jr., John Thomas Bonomolo and Peter Pelosi of A&J Produce Corp.



Vito Cangialosi, Tony Biondo, Ashley Celestin and Sasha LoPresti of A.J. Trucco, Inc.



Christine Toneatti, Marisol Flores and Valerie DeNardo of A.J. Trucco, Inc.

says Koster. "E. Armata's berry program has also grown consistently with daily arrivals of blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries."

Its specialty produce department has seen an increase with such items as Radicchio, Belgian endive, mâche, Carnival cauliflower, Salad Savoy, Bright Lights Swiss chard, hydro-bibb lettuce, fingerling potatoes, French beans, as well as snow and snap peas.

E. Armata serves many mom-and-pop stores, retail chains and restaurants directly and through wholesale brokers. Koster notes specialty value-added foodservice customers are increasing in the New York area.

"Specialties and staples co-exist in new and old world produce businesses due to the different ethnicities and variety of social backgrounds in this region," he says. "We continue to have a strong market-based business and are developing distribution sales to serve customers outside of the

“ We continue to have a strong market-based business and are developing distribution sales to serve customers outside of the Hunts Point Produce Market. ”

— Steve Koster, E. Armata Produce

Hunts Point Produce Market.”

Katzman says the company has a wide mix of customers, and it services them by bringing in a wide mix of product. The trend, she adds, is definitely increasing toward new world business.

"It's all about big brand names for the major chains and great quality product

with lesser known brands for the smaller mom-and-pops," she says. "We have a lot of special items, some of our top ones are pomegranate arils in a 'grab-and-go' retail cup and super blend Mesclun we call Blooming Greens, which has baby kale in it for an extra boost of nutrition."

A diverse array of products will serve a diverse population, says Nick Pacia, president/chief executive of A.J. Trucco, Inc. He says the company serves a varied range of customers — everything from mom-and-pop operations to major retailers. A.J. Trucco's product offerings include kiwifruit, apples, blueberries, garlic, fresh and dried figs, chestnuts, dates and various organic items.

"Offer everything from staple items to exotics. Also offer a variety of different pack styles so that you can meet the needs of various end consumers — those who are interested in bulk versus those who are interested in consumer packs, etc.," says Pacia.

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"We are sometimes asked to carry certain brands, or products from specific sourcing regions by some customers," says Pacia. "Those looking for a certain spec or type of quality make these requests."

The Rise Of Branding

Branded produce associated with widely recognized names has always been

important to those operating at Hunts Point, and many work with shippers and growers to bring in the highest quality brands and develop their own branded products.

"Branding has become increasingly important to us," says Pacia. "We value the quality of our items, and in addition to our KiwiStar brand, we created our TruStar

brand, which we expanded across a variety of items including: blueberries, tomatoes, figs and organic Clementines. We will also soon be launching a line of TruStar pineapples (including organic pineapples)."

Calling himself "a branding guy for a long time," Nathel notes if you have a good brand — and it's a consistent brand — it's very easy for people to keep buying

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Most occurrences of SCA in youth occur in public places. The increased availability of publicly accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools and school-sponsored athletic events will dramatically increase the probability that youth and adults alike will survive a sudden cardiac arrest. Knowing and properly executing the critically time-urgent links of the Cardiac Chain-of-Survival can help save the life of someone in SCA.

Along with increased accessible AEDs, implementing Emergency Action planning protocols, preparedness will be greatly improved. www.anyonecansavealife.org

In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 91 lives have been saved as a direct result of this law in New York public schools. Each time a vibrant, seemingly healthy child suffers a Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA), the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation mission of protecting youth from SCA and preventable Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) becomes even more critical. We know it happens and we need to collectively assure others realize it by sharing our Mission and Vision.

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Amanda Gordon,
Harold Gordon and
Myra Gordon of
Hunts Point Market



Gabriela D'Arrigo and Leigh
Ann D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo
Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.

According to Myra Gordon, executive administrative director for the Hunts Point Produce Market, the terminal market generates \$2.4 billion in sales annually, employs more than 10,000 workers and helps to feed more than 25 million in the bustling Tri-state area, thanks to more than 210 million crates of fruits and vegetables heading out the doors each year.

The people at Hunts Point also do their

part to help the community. "It doesn't matter whether it was when we first opened the market or whether it's today and it's a new population of people, we continue to donate daily to City Harvest," says Gordon. "In 2015 this market donated 3 million pounds of produce, and it's going to a much wider group of people."

Immediately before Thanksgiving, the Hunts Point companies banded together for a "Give Back" event, where employees

filled 2,000 bags with enough produce in each to feed a family of four for the holidays. Following the event, several letters were received from the recipients expressing gratitude and love.

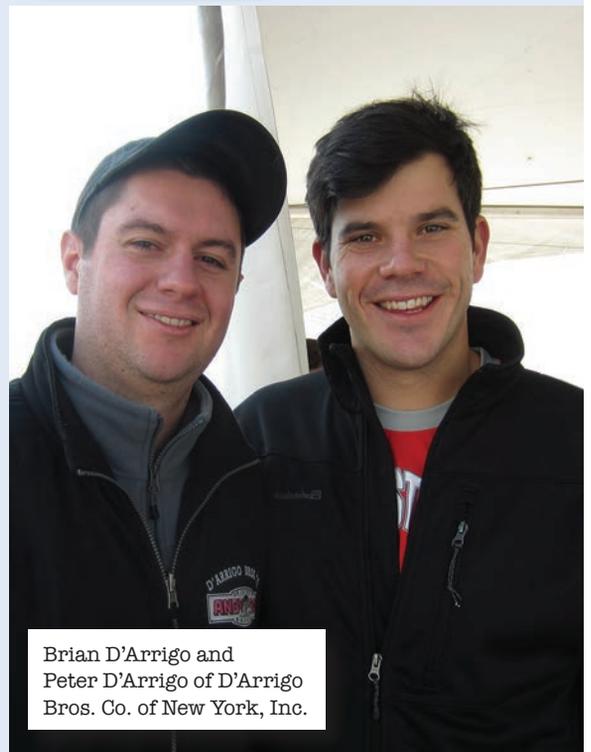
Behind the scenes at Hunts Point, Gordon is working with Sasha LoPresti, of A.J. Trucco who is very astute in building websites, to revamp the Hunts Point Terminal website so that it will be easily viewable from an iPhone. Soon, Hunts



Officer James Poole
of Hunts Point
Market Security



Don Hoffman of Hunts Point Public
Relations; Cathy Hunt and
Jake Hunt of D.M. Rothman Co., Inc.



Brian D'Arrigo and
Peter D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo
Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.

Point will be on LinkedIn, linked with the USDA, and making other changes that will further thrust it into the 21st century.

"We did need a new website for the new generation. We do because everybody's using iPhones today to look at websites, and we need our website to be able to fill the borders of an iPhone," says Gordon. "In the last couple of months I've been doing all of the emails attached to the website called 'Info at Hunts Point,' and

it's really interesting how many people are going on that site on a regular basis asking questions."

For example, two recent emails were from people opening stores in Manhattan inquiring about how they can come into the market and how to use it.

"Interestingly enough, that is on our website, and we will keep it on our website. They have chosen either not to view it, or if they did view it, they've chosen to ask the

question anyway, maybe just to confirm what they've read," says Gordon. "It's all part of becoming part of the 'new world.'"

In 2016, Hunts Point will be participating in an honors day with the New York City Police Department's 41st Precinct, and for the first time will be hanging its banner so everyone can see that they are part of the family of donors that have helped pay for this event — just another way all those involved give back to the community. **pb**

“

We also offer other major brands that drive shoppers to purchase from D'Arrigo New York. This industry is unique in that brands can carry a company for a very long time.

”

— Gabriela D'Arrigo,
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.



Claire Sahko
of Global Bloom



Stefanie Katzman and
Andrew Roy of S. Katzman
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the same label.

For example, Nathel says if he offers great cherries and the trade says, "Wow that's a beautiful brand of cherries," and a week later they come back and that brand of cherries is beautiful again, by the third week, they just start giving him the order.

"Just look at the Andy Boy brand and Driscoll's Sycamore honeydews. These are

just labels, and once you tell people, 'I have this brand,' they immediately know that it's quality," he says. "Once you establish a brand reputation, and once you have the customers demanding a brand, then you can raise the price."

D'Arrigo agrees about the importance of branding. "The Andy Boy brand was started by my great grandfather and his

brother, so Andy Boy and D'Arrigo go hand-in-hand," she says. "We also offer other major brands that drive shoppers to purchase from D'Arrigo New York. This industry is unique in that brands can carry a company for a very long time."

Manfre of Top Katz says companies are looking to do their own branding nowadays. "We do it, and I get it, because if it's



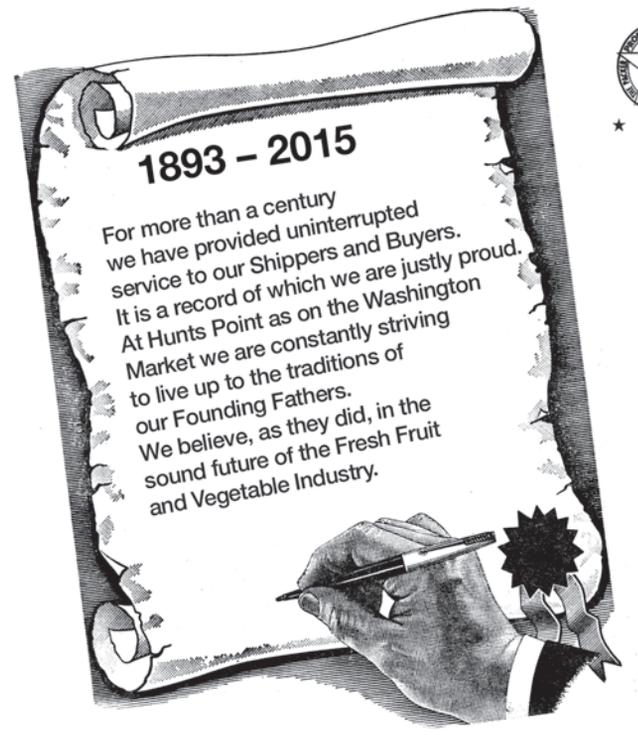
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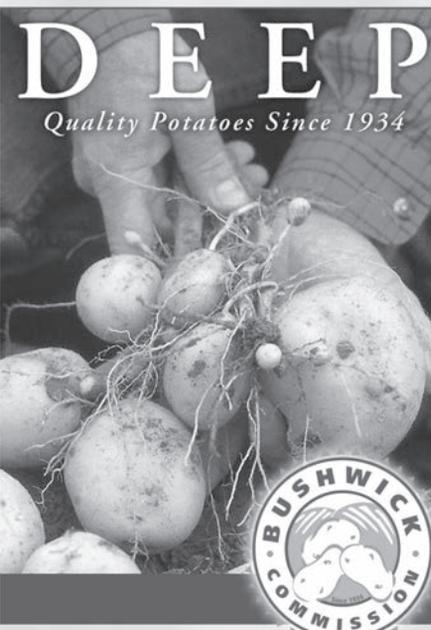
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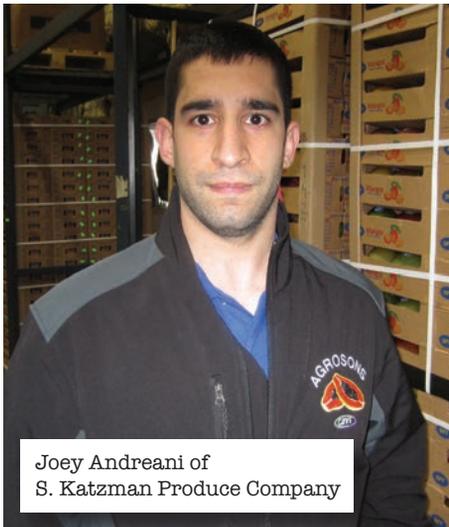
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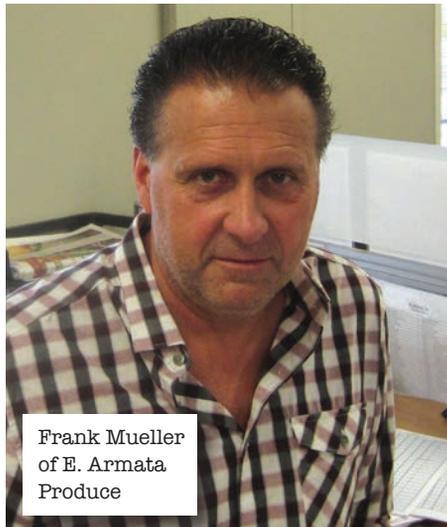
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Joey Andreani of S. Katzman Produce Company



Frank Mueller of E. Armata Produce



Frank Schembri and Mike Marrello of E. Armata Produce



Larry Schembri and Tom Linaris of S. Katzman Produce Company



Nick Buonomo and Alexander DeMarco of LBD Produce

your own brand, the price structure is more favorable," he says. "From our perspective, we can control the quality, and we try to build a superior brand. People get to know that you have a superior brand and you can market it accordingly."

Delivery Versus Pickup

One of the biggest changes Nathel has experienced in his 30-plus years in the business is the increase in deliveries, citing the rise in trucks, drivers and the desire of new world customers to have a quick, one-stop shop.

"The old guys wanted to come in and load their own truck. They don't want to do that anymore," says Nathel. "Nobody wants to really unload their own truck these days. They want to get it delivered. It's changed the business tremendously in terms of transportation costs."

One customer may come in and buy a single package while another might order a thousand, which has increased deliveries

“ In operations, we have to just be careful we’re rotating product and keeping it fresh to the point where the customers are happy and there’s no returns.

— Thomas M. Tramutola Jr., A&J Produce Corp.

in certain areas.

"We've seen way more deliveries than we used to handle, so that means more trucks," says A&J Produce's Tramutola. "Now we need more drivers, and it's a bigger expense to the company. Operations are a little different now even though we charge accordingly for delivered product. We ask a little bit more to run a

truck, because of expenses such as tolls, insurance and a union employees. It's not cheap to run a truck in the tri state area."

It also requires additional time for the wholesaler's workers, as they need to be more selective on the produce they choose to send, whereas before a customer would come in and choose what they wanted. That process is quickly becoming archaic.

"In operations, we have to be careful with rotating product and keeping it fresh to the point where the customers are happy and there's no returns or complaints," says Tramutola.

Rubin agrees the trend favors deliveries. "Years past, you wouldn't deliver to a customer unless they ordered a large amount of product. Now that's not the

IN MEMORIAM

Angelo E. Porricelli

September 21, 1922 – March 25, 2016



ANGELO PORRICELLI was born in The Bronx to Concetto & Ciro (Jerry) Porricelli. Angelo started his long career in the produce business at a very young age. He was born into it.

Angelo went to serve his country in the United States Army during WWII and returned with a Purple Heart.

His family had a business — Jerry Porricelli Produce — on The Washington Street Market, but his career really started when he opened his retail store, Angelo's, with his partner Angelo Christianello in The Bronx on White Plains Road.

Angelo's sold produce, wine grapes and Christmas trees.

Jerry Porricelli was planning to retire, so Angelo decided to sell the store and leave to help his father and take over the business.

In March, 1967 Angelo moved Jerry Porricelli Produce as one of the original merchants on the brand new Hunts Point Market in the Bronx.

Angelo took great pride and joy from the beautiful displays he created and he became known on the Market as "The Showman."

Years later, Angelo decided to retire and he sold his unit.

But a few years later, the legacy continued. Angelo's son Ciro and daughter Angela, who were working on the Market elsewhere, decided to buy back the unit.

Jerry Porricelli Produce is now in its 18th year on the Market.

Untill this day, buyers and workers on the Market appreciate that if it were not for Angelo, they would "not have been in this business."

Angelo's love of family, helping people and the produce business will be fondly remembered.

Angelo is survived by his wife of 65 years, Carmella, his children Ciro, Angela and JulieAnn, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.





Craig, Lori Hirsch DeMarco, Alexander DeMarco of LBD Produce



Rick Romano of S. Katzman Produce Company



Osman Ozkan, Amin Panjwani and Felix LaManna of S. Katzman Produce Company



Stefanie Katzman and Tom Cignarella of S. Katzman Produce Company

case. Many of the companies here are acting like purveyors," he says. "We'll deliver up to a trailer load or we'll deliver up to a couple of skids at a time. That's where the business is going."

During Gordon's decades in the business, Hunts Point has become more of a distribution center. "The larger companies have upwards of 100 vehicles from the smaller 22-foot trucks to the trailer and the jockey. They really do deliver very far afield of the market," she says. "That's been a huge change through the years."

A.J. Trucco, Inc. is one of the rare companies that still has more produce being picked up rather than being delivered, although it does offer delivery.

The 21ST Century Customer

When it comes to discussing the new way of thinking, it's not as simple as black and white. There are plenty of younger companies that are technologically savvy and embody what some would consider

“ You’ve got to walk the market. That’s the only way you’re going to learn. Walk the market, see the difference, the quality, why does it cost more, why does it cost less? They just don’t want to do it, believe me, they don’t want to do it. ”

—Jim Renella, J. Renella Produce, Inc.

“new world” characteristics that still send trucks for pick up, and some “old world” customers who have embraced technology, and are now asking for deliveries.

For S. Katzman’s Andreani, today’s customer is a much more educated consumer, more technologically driven and

always on the run amidst the social media boom.

“I attended many seminars to teach myself what makes a Millennial tick, and I have hired many from that generation to understand their needs, likes and shopping patterns,” he says. “Millennials are more interested in social responsibility, community, being green, and they are interested in the next ‘new fad’ health-wise.”

For younger customers coming to the market today, Renella says they should be taking a lesson from the days of yesteryear.

“What they have to do is come down like we used to do years ago,” he says. “You’ve got to walk the market. That’s the

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only way you're going to learn. Walk the market, see the difference, the quality, why does it cost more, why does it cost less? They just don't want to do it, believe me, they don't want to do it."

Rubin says there are customers that are still old school in that they haven't caught up with technology, and so the company

still serves them via the phones and fax machine.

"These guys are walking around putting their hands on the product and seeing everything they want to buy, which is good. You know, that's the old school mentality," he says. "The new school mentality is basically 'do everything from your office. Do your buying through emails,' and frankly, it's the ones that actually do a little bit of both, in my opinion, that are more successful."

A.J. Trucco's Pacia says Millennials are very interested in the back-story of an item — where it comes from, how it's grown, etc., and that's something customers back in the day weren't that concerned about.

"For Millennials, we try to build a story around our items and include information on our packaging that serves this purpose," he says. "These customers are asking more and more about organics and non-GMO products, and you need to keep them happy."

“ For Millennials, we try to build a story around our items and include information on our packaging that serves this purpose. These customers are asking more and more about organics and non-GMO products, and you need to keep them happy. ”

— Nick Pacia, A.J. Trucco, Inc.

Over the decades, Fierman Produce Exchange has grown from just 50 SKUs to 350 SKUs, but Fierman knows the larger amount doesn't allow much hands-on care.

"I think we lose some of the specialty expertise in the overall scheme of things now," he says. "It all comes down to your staff, but there's definitely been a change for all involved."

In Fierman's mind, a smart retailer is someone who looks at all aspects of the business, follows trends and knows what houses are looking out for their business.

Some even believe Hunts Point has become a lot friendlier in recent years. "There's no more of the gruff and hard selling and 'if you don't take this you're not going to get this.' All that has gone out the window and now we're seeing more treating the customers with respect," says Nathel. "They come in and my guys downstairs get along with the buyers, which is very important. They understand their



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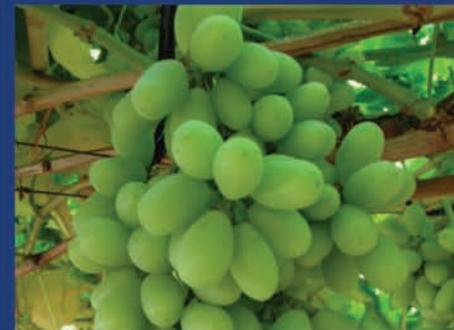
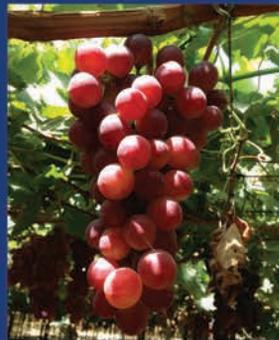
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“ There are a lot more items finding their way to this market a lot more of the year. We’re not as much a seasonal business as we are a full-year business. You can get pretty much anything from anywhere during the year.

— Jimmy Margiotta, J. Margiotta Company LLC

routines, understand what they like and what they don’t.”

D’Arrigo says the standard of service has been taken up a few notches and attributes it to two things: the technological advancements and the influx of a new generation.

The Market’s Gordon says the ideal customer exhibits two important character-

istics. “One who comes in consistently and that a merchant can rely on, and someone who has the ability to pay the bills,” she says. “I think it’s what’s important today in any business, that there’s consistency and sound pay practices.”

Since a lot of chains have their own warehouses now — especially the larger ones, Cochran notes they’re not shopping on the market as much as they used to.

“If they’re a decent customer looking for a decent package at the right price and they pay their bills, that’s half the battle for us,” he says. “There are certain people who are brand-conscious, but just the same it’s produce. They need to look in the box at what they’re actually buying because if it’s the best label — there can still be off times. They need to understand the business.”

As a broker, Manfre of Top Katz understands his job is to balance the needs of his constituency.

“If you’re on the growers’ side, ‘I don’t want something that’s too cheap.’ On the customers’ side, ‘I don’t want something too expensive.’ I try to find the point where everyone can be happy,” says Manfre. “For

me, a good customer or good supplier, embodies consistency. He has the item, or orders the item, week in and week out.”

To be a successful customer, Cochran suggests they have a willingness to work and a good head on their shoulders. “There’s a lot of buyers, who don’t even look at what they’re buying anymore. They just want to fill orders off a sheet, but a true retailer is going to look for bargains and look what’s in a package,” he says.

Margiotta says it’s important to remember Hunts Point is a year-round business. “There are a lot more items finding their way to this market a lot more of the year. We’re not as much a seasonal business as we are a full-year business. You can get pretty much anything from anywhere during the year,” he says. “You have to tackle each season and each variety at a time. You have to really be concentrating on what’s in front of you, but also keep that eye on what’s coming in next week.”

The Importance Of Hunts Point

Walk around the market and there are plenty of people working there, or

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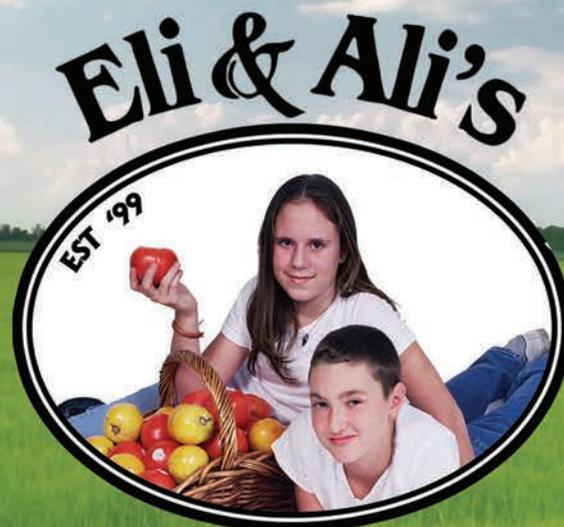
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NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

customers buying. They're doing the same thing people did almost 50 years ago when the Hunts Point Produce Market first opened. And if it's not the same folks, it's a lot of their kids or even their kids, as the produce industry is one of the most family-centric businesses today.

"You do see some people who are following in their parents' footsteps, but for some of these older retailers and older customers who did pretty well in their life-

time, their kids are getting educations in great schools across the country and becoming doctors or lawyers, and not all of them are returning to the family business," says Tramutola.

The 113-acre South Bronx distribution center, which revolutionized the East Coast produce industry, has grown from 102 wholesalers providing produce for maybe 1,000 or so retailers, to a major international business, with produce arriving from





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"We only sell the best of what's available across the board, and the competition in here keeps the best of what's available, always available at that level," says Gordon. "If the customer fails, there are several reasons — a lack of refrigeration, lack of knowing how to sort through existing produce and calling out that which is no longer in, or no longer has a shelf life. I think everyone in the industry understands that produce begins its dying process once it leaves the mother plant."

Currently, there are 36 companies operating at Hunts Point. With 880,000 square feet in total, 550,000 of which is cold storage, the companies of Hunts Point are ready for any produce that comes their way. Consider that in 2015, more than 2,200 railcars, 130,000 trailers and a million overnight buyers with vans and small trucks paid a visit to Hunts Point.

"New York City and its boroughs have a very particular customer audience," says Margiotta. "There's the micro-neighborhoods and how people shop on their block, and I think that still helps New York to stay mom-and-pop friendly."

And the people who come to and work at Hunts Point represent a melting pot of their own, with possibly a dozen different languages being spoken on any day.

"Hunts Point is vital, because we attract shippers and farmers from all over the world looking to send high volumes, and that means the best price points on produce, which get passed down to retailers and consumers," says DiMaggio of FresCo.



CLASS OF 2016 Young And Smart Leaders On The Rise



PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Eleventh Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of June 1, 2017 (People born after June 1, 1977).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 14, 2017, and fax back to 561-994-1610 or go to our website at producebusiness.com and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

Once nominated, the candidate will be interviewed by one of our editors, and will receive forms to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

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Nominee's Professional Achievements:

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In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

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Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

Looking ahead, Hunts Point will continue to evolve and improve, and Gordon notes some changes will be coming fast and furious.

"There are upgrades going on; we're changing lighting on the platform, which I think has been needed for a long time. We're changing lighting in the hallways. It's amazing what these new LED lights look like. It's sunlight all the time," she says. "Rather than changing them with existing

lighting, we're putting in new lighting and you can certainly see the difference. It's very obvious."

The companies of Hunts Point continue to make changes as well. E. Armata Produce will soon be adding Unit 110 on Row A to become a fully renovated part of its cold-chain-compliant warehouse, adding additional space to handle the products more efficiently.

One thing all the Hunts Point vendors

“ Whether it’s doing more deliveries, or catering to the guy who still wants to come in and hand-stack his own pallet, or the guy who doesn’t want to do anything but email an order and have you deliver it, there’s just two sides of the spectrum and you have to be able to cater to both.

”
— Cary Rubin, Rubin Bros. Produce Corp.

agree on is trying to expand customer lists by getting more people in and keeping them happy.

"Things happen fast around here. I've seen other businesses and other industries, and the way they operate. This place keeps up a furious pace. So if you're one of the guys that want to be busy and running around, you've found the right business. It's a lot of energy," says Margiotta. "

When thinking of how things used to be, Manfre of Top Katz laments, "We're never going back. We can only go forward. Yeah, I would like retailers to be how retailers used to be because we could sell more volume. You had supermarkets do a million dollars in the produce department versus \$40,000," he says. "Not only chains, but I wish large retailers would sell stuff the way they did long ago. I think if we merchandised the new way with a little bit of the old mentality, we'd all be better off."

At Rubin Brothers, Marc Rubin has been in business for more than 50 years. Cary Rubin brings in a different dynamic in terms of understanding technology and the new world ways. The younger Rubin says the key is to adapt quickly and turn on a dime.

"Whether it's doing more deliveries, or catering to the guy who still wants to come in and hand-stack his own pallet, or the guy who doesn't want to do anything but email an order and have you deliver it, there's just two sides of the spectrum and you have to be able to cater to both. It's a really good dynamic for us being that we typically do represent the old, and the new school. I mean, we are the epitome of it."

pb

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In Memoriam

Ralph Comunale

June 12, 1953 – December 25, 2015



The produce industry lost a true gentleman and well-respected figure within the Hunt's Point Market on the morning of December 25th, 2015.

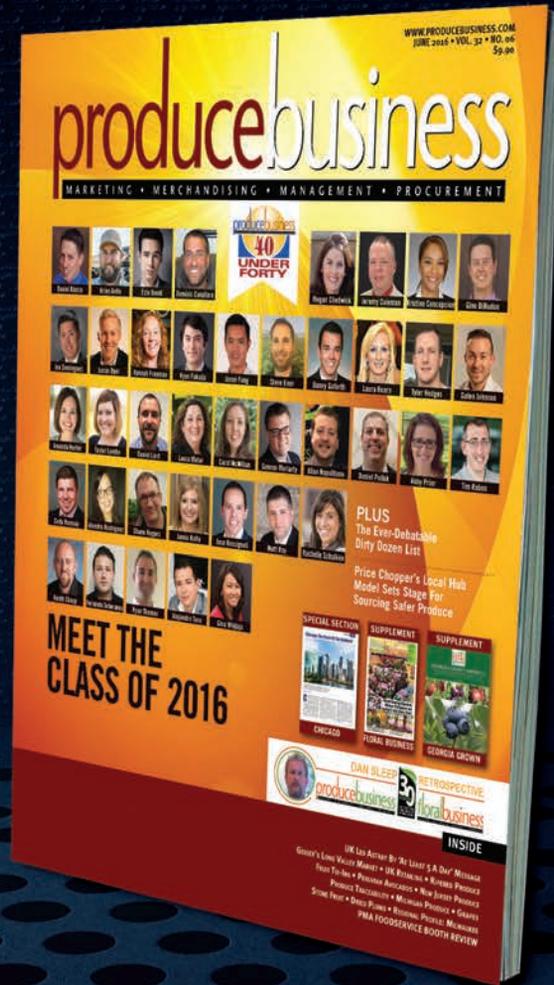
Ralph Comunale started his career at "R&C" Comunale, his family's watermelon and wine grape business over 48 years ago at the age of 14. He worked side-by-side with his father and mentor Cono Comunale and became a full-time partner at the age of 18. While he was at "R&C" the Ralph's Best label named after his grandfather was developed and became a brand name in the market that continued in the family's wholesale business for over 26 years. The label continues on at E. Armata Fruit & Produce where Ralph was a senior sales manager for over 20 years. During his time in the market he specialized in the buying and selling of watermelons and fruit. He eventually sold the full line-up of all fruit, vegetable and specialty items to his many customers both inside and outside the market.

Ralphie was a people person and truly loved to sell, just like his grandfather Ralph. He had a philosophy that you should have fun at work and made it fun for all who had the privilege of working with him. Ralph had a way about him that made customers feel important and special. They always left with a smile and came back eager to buy from him.

Ralph Comunale leaves behind his wife, Roseann; son Joseph, 29; daughters Lisa, 35 and Jennifer, 33; father Cono Comunale; mother Ann Comunale; sisters, Karen Parrotta and Vivian Flood; brother Rich Comunale; and 3 grandchildren.

"Ralph was a true market personality with a gift for sales and establishing "true" long lasting relationships. It was pleasure to have worked with him for so many years, he will be greatly missed by all at E. Armata and the entire produce industry." — Paul Armata

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US Foods Holding Corp. GOES PUBLIC



Main Street to Wall Street, US Foods' executive team puts independent restaurant owners and chefs front and center on the company's first day of trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

BY MIRA SLOTT

In a brief, reflective moment of ironic calm in the early morning of May 26, 2016, *PRODUCE BUSINESS* finds Pietro Satriano, president and chief executive of Rosemont, Ill.-based US Foods Holding Corp., inconspicuously standing solo across from the New York Stock Exchange.

He is observing the star-studded chefs representing US Foods' independent restaurant customers hurriedly prepping menus along the 50-foot line restaurant kitchen it recreated beneath the NYSE facade draped in a huge US Foods banner.

Not long from this time, Satriano would be ringing the opening bell to thunderous applause on the trading floor for the company's initial public offering, which raised \$1.02 billion in proceeds.





Steven Grostick, restaurant operations consultant for US Foods, worked the financial district crowd describing the tasty nuances of crispy crumb cod over a corn and jalapeno slaw with cilantro lime dressing.



Outside, the celebration heats up. The hand-selected independent restaurant owners/chefs representing different parts of the country cook up just as much action as the traders inside. Partnering with a cadre of US Foods culinary experts, they dish out their signature bites to enthusiastic onlookers, replenishing fresh ingredients from fully stocked US Foods trucks onsite.

US Foods wanted to showcase its primary commitment to independent restaurants, a challenged, under-resourced sector, with a majority going out of business within the first year. "US Foods helps these entrepreneurs get on their feet in a comprehensive way from inspiring menu development to back-of-the-kitchen equipment and labor flow to accomplish their goals," says Jeffrey Schlissel, division chef at US Foods.

"All our markets have specialists, and produce is a strong category of dedicated producers, buyers and managers," says Food Fanatics Chef Perry Canestraro, one of US Foods many designated culinary authorities working with chefs and restaurateurs to help their businesses thrive.

Chef Cristy Nolton, culinary director, Yeah Burger, Atlanta, agrees, as she whips up servings of her grass-fed beef slider with fig jam, caramelized onions and goat cheese on a brioche roll: "It was challenging to find broadline distributors to source our organic ingredients. US Foods came through for us, bringing in organic onions and sweet potatoes by the truckload. US Foods is a true partner, whether supporting our sourcing requirements, costing or menu planning," she says, adding,



(L-R) Robert Danko, Steve Mercer and Kenneth Danko

"When shopping from different vendors, it's difficult to get consistencies."

Chef Brian Ellis, vice president executive chef for New York City-based Corner Table Restaurants, went vegetarian with an offering of herb-infused toasted ricotta gnocchi in white truffle cream. He oversees culinary operations for The Smith restaurant, with four locations throughout Manhattan. He says he works closely with local farmers and purveyors to channel seasonal menu items.

"US Foods has been supplying my restaurants for a few years now with top quality products and very competitive pricing," he says, praising the company's reliability in filling shorts when demand outstrips his supply.

Steven Grostick, restaurant operations consultant for US Foods, worked the financial district crowd for Chef Donna Lee of Chica-

go-based Brown Bag Seafood, describing the tasty nuances of her fresh crispy crumb cod over a corn and jalapeno slaw with cilantro lime dressing.

Meanwhile, Chef Taion McElveen of Eschelon Experiences restaurants based in Raleigh, NC, created a stir with Pork Belly al Pastor, Smoky Stone Ground Grits, Guajillo Chili Sauce, and Jicama Chow Chow.

Robert Danko and his son Kenneth of Devilicious in San Diego, gained food celebrity stardom for their food truck empire and newly opened brick-and-mortar restaurant. Robert Danko, a former attorney turned chef, credits US Foods in many ways for helping to build their food truck concept and execute their vision. The Danko's lobster rumble with a shallot tarragon aioli took off at the opening bell, a fitting sign of US Foods' IPO success. **pb**

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The Next Evolution Of New York Distributors



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESHPRO FOOD DISTRIBUTORS

These companies plunge into the new world combining old world values and experience with innovation.

By Jodean Robbins

British philosopher Alan W. Watts said: “The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.” New York area produce companies have certainly seen and experienced plenty of change in past decades, and many have embraced the dance — evolving from the old world into the new.

New York wholesalers attribute much of the change they faced to consumer

evolution dating back almost half a century. “The old world consumer immigrated here and grew up in a world where they went shopping every day because of the environment and culture of their village,” explains Michael Muzyk, president of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc. in Bronx, NY. “They attempted to maintain this but then the industry and world changed with television and TV dinners. Thus began the era of the supermarket, the advent of frozen

foods, and microwaves.”

However, Muzyk believes the bell curve has peaked. “We’re now on the other side,” he says. “Today’s educated consumer has returned to the old school, but differently. They’re doing fresh, to-order shopping but from online services such as FreshDirect, Blue Apron or Plated.”

While old world business may have formed the foundation for the last century, companies look to “new world” businesses

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Ronnie Cohen, George Uribe, Raul Millan, Henry Kreices and Allan Napolitano of Vision Import Group



Paul Auerbach, Josh Auerbach, Ian Zimmerman and Bruce Klein of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.

for future growth. "If you stay totally in the old world, you're not going to be in business," says Joe Granata, director of produce sales for FreshPro Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ. "Growth is in the new-world aspects of the business — such as organics and home delivery. It's amazing how operations such as Blue Apron or Hello Fresh have grown."

FreshPro does business with customers from online delivery, convenience stores and airports. "About 12 to 15 percent of our business is with new produce outlets from Internet purveyors to home delivery services," reports Floyd Avillo, president and chief operating officer. "At this point, they may not be big business individually but when you add them up, it's significant."

Vision Import Group LLC in Hackensack, NJ, reports its business is about 60 percent traditional and 40 percent new format customers. "People aren't shopping the way they used to," says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales. "The old world is

changing and you need to continuously evolve to meet the needs of the future."

While more traditional formats continue to represent a big piece of the business for Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. in Secaucus, NJ, the company sees change. "Our business is split three different ways now," shares Bruce Klein, director of marketing. "We have big retailer business, big foodservice business and then 'all others' including terminal markets and meal solutions businesses. There are more diverse players including more independents."

Caraveo Papaya Inc. in Bronx, NY, estimates more than half of the business is changing to the new world and reports the change is affecting its operations. "It used to be simple," relates Edgar Millan, chief operating officer. "Customers would call you and you would send it. Now with systems and technology, everything is changing. It's more complex. New buyers are more focused on food safety, tracking and other aspects in addition to quality."

“ Growth is in the new-world aspects of the business — such as organics and home delivery. It's amazing how operations such as Blue Apron or Hello Fresh have grown. ”

— Joe Granata, FreshPro Food Distributors

Creating A New Dance

New York companies look to bring old partners to this new dance, servicing customers with an old world tailored approach to help them compete in the new world environment. RBest Produce Inc. (El Sol Brands) in Port Washington, NY, counts "old world" traditional retailers



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*Packaged Facts. (2015). Nutrition Labeling and Clean Labels in the U.S.: Future of Food Retailing



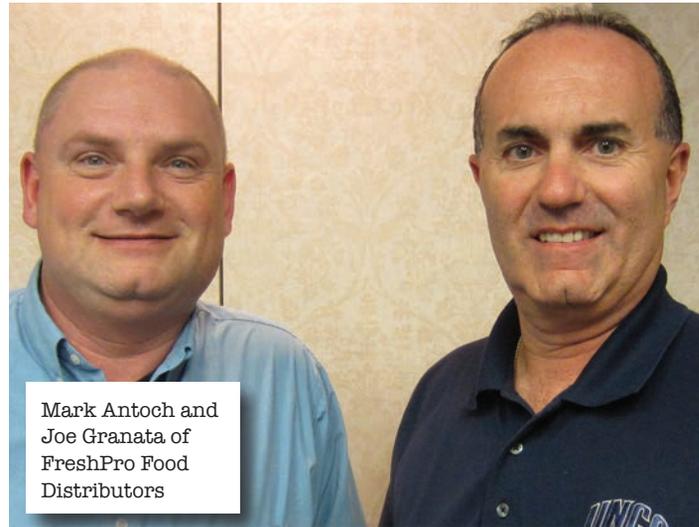
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Joe Granata of
FreshPro Food
Distributors



Alan Marcelli, Linda
Marcelli, Lucky Lee
and Josh Wanless of
Lucky's Real Tomatoes



Abigail Woughter,
Rafael Goldberg and
Michela Calabrese of
Interruption Fair Trade

as its main customer base. "We pride ourselves on customer service and look at each customer as an individual," says Jasmine Hines, director of marketing and advertising. "We do our best to contour our mode of operation to satisfy each customer."

Eli & Ali's Organic & Specialty Produce in Brooklyn, NY, considers its customer base a combination of new and old world - from food trucks to mom-and-pops to traditional retailers. Yet, on the sales end, the company operates in a traditional style. "We're still picking up the phone and

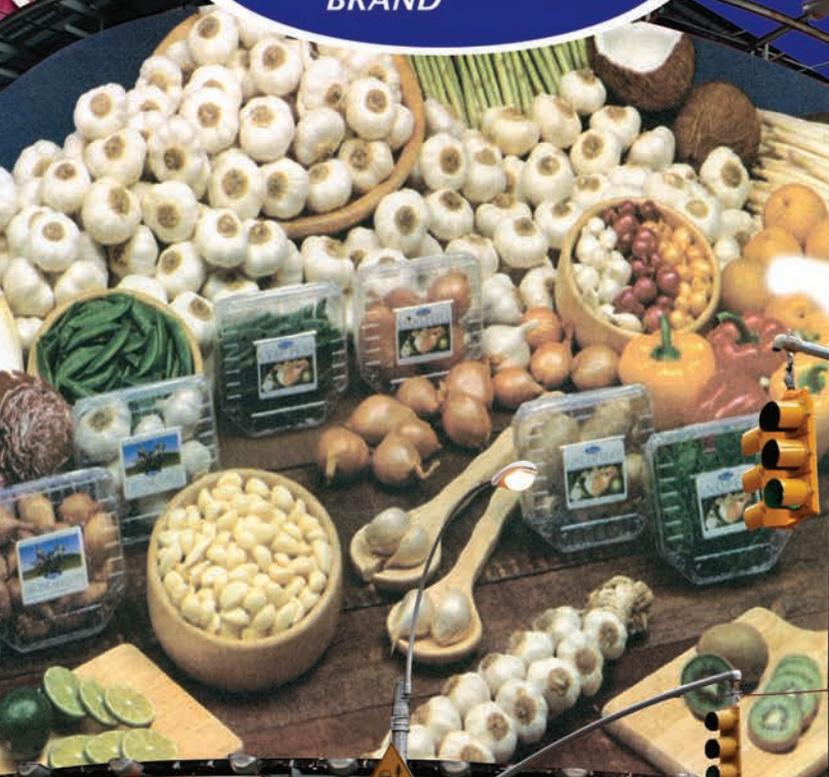
doing a lot of personal face-to-face with our customers," describes Elijah Booth Ornstein, chief operating officer. "We want to know what our customers are doing so we can better collaborate."

Companies such as FreshPro report witnessing non-traditional transformations among traditional customers. "A lot of bodegas and mom-and-pops are buying organic and more unique products," reports Pat Mele III, executive vice president and chief financial officer. "Corner stores may have started as a bodega, but now they are diversified grocery stores, selling a wide variety of produce items and offering [in-store] juicing as well as grab-n-go products."

Ornstein agrees many old world businesses now operate with a new world model. "A great example of this includes food trucks," he explains. "These trucks as well as some mom-and-pop shops are doing very innovative things. They see changing habits, the way people consume, and they are evolving to meet



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The Unyielding Bedrock Of Quality And Service

The roots of the produce industry still provide a crucial foundation even if the fruit is different.

by Jodean Robbins

Despite a plethora of innovation in recent decades, the centuries-long produce values of relationship and service still serve as fundamentals for a successful business. "Some things never get old," says Mark Antoch, manager of produce retail sales for FreshPro in West Caldwell, NJ. "These industry values are still relevant."

At Eli & Ali in Brooklyn, NY, old world values remain a vital part of business. "The business still revolves around quality," says Jeff Ornstein, co-owner at Eli & Ali. "You have to be fair with people. This company was founded on these values, and we continue to live up to them."

Quality and great service will never go out of style at Lucky's Real Tomatoes in Brooklyn, NY. "These are just as important now as in the past," says Josh Wanless, vice-president of business development for Lucky's Fresh in North Carolina. "Today's new world will one day be someone's old world, so being consistent and doing right by our customers will always be timeless."

Despite strong competition, the volatile nature of the produce business means companies in the New York area continue to collaborate with each other to serve customers. "Business between wholesalers is the same as it has always been," says Floyd Avillo, FreshPro's president and chief operating officer. "Someone always has shorts or someone's always long."

Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales at Vision Import Group in Hackensack, NJ, emphasizes the need to be a good neighbor in business. "Every item is always bigger than you," he says. "So, being a good neighbor and good trader helps you cope with changes beyond your control."

Hunts Point Produce Market still plays a pivotal role for New York area businesses. FreshPro reports using Hunts Point daily. "It's 5 to 10 percent of our business," says Avillo. "We use Hunts Point mostly

for shorts and always keep a piece of our business there. It's a valuable outlet."

EXP taps Hunts Point to extend its customer reach. "Hunts Point serves retail, so we rely on them to reach customers we can't," comments Serafino. "We envision working more with the wholesale markets to better serve old world customers like the mom-and-pops."

Ami Ben-Dror, owner and chief executive for BDA Marketing/Dorot Farm, uses Hunts Point to access customers his company can't service directly.

Hunts Point also opens additional doors for Caraveo Papaya Inc. "Hunts Point puts mixed loads together and consolidates, so it opens up a segment of clients we wouldn't service directly," explains Edgar Millan, chief operating officer.

Ronnie Cohen gives credit for Vision Import Group's success to his being a graduate of the university of Hunts Point. "It's played a critical role in the education of our team and our staff," he notes. "We need more education for customer and supplier alike, and especially to focus on understanding the side of the business you're not on."

Another old world produce attribute carried into the new world is its people. Eli & Ali credits employees and partners as making all the difference. "You're only as good as the people you have working with you," says Jeff Ornstein. "That is old world and will never change."

Just as each generation has done before, the new generation is posed to meet future challenges. "Having fourth generation Josh Auerbach in the business now brings some young blood with new ideas," says Bruce Klein, director of marketing for Maurice A. Auerbach Inc. in Secaucus, NJ. "That is valuable and will ensure our business is sustainable as we continue at the forefront of going after new developments." **pb**



Michael Muzyk
of Baldor
Specialty Foods



T.J. Murphy
of Baldor
Specialty Foods

these changes and harness social media."

FreshPro's Avillo explains many companies look to fill a niche to remain competitive. "The market is evolving to everyone having a special niche," he says.

BDA Marketing in Melville, NY, built a unique niche handling particular produce items from Israel.

"As the No. 1 exporter for North America region of fresh and sweet carrots, we try to tailor our offerings to each customer," says Ami Ben-Dror, owner/chief executive of BDA Marketing/Dorot Farm. "There are a lot of niches in the market now as each customer requires differentiation. We work with many different channels, both old and new, because they all have something to offer in the market."

Riviera Produce of Englewood, NJ, developed a niche serving small operations. "We have always worked with mom-and-pop type restaurants or a disciple of a four-star chef who decided



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to go on his/her own," says Ben Friedman, president. "These types of customers want price, quality and service to be equal. We consider ourselves at the forefront of the small-format businesses, because they need the attention to detail we offer."

Maria Suarez, vice president of Bronx-based Agrosos, says, "Our customers are the most important part of our business. My mother opened the business in 2001, and we are dedicated to serving customers on the Hunts Point Market, which are still

the same customers (such as Top Banana, Mendez International, Georgallas Tomato and Produce, and Best Tropical Produce).

New World Consumers

New world businesses thrive as people look for solutions and customer service according to Vision's Cohen. "People are more focused on saving time and having convenience," he says. "They still want to cook but don't want to invest much effort or time to get the ingredients. New

“
People are more focused on saving time and having convenience. They still want to cook but don't want to invest much effort or time to get the ingredients.
 ”

— Ronnie Cohen, Vision Import Group

world services meet the needs of those customers."

Baldor's Muzyk observes new world trends are impacting many areas including real estate. "The Internet-driven business translates into changes in lifestyle," he says. "A great example is how FreshDirect is impacting New York development where new buildings in Manhattan are now adding small walk-in coolers to accommodate tenant deliveries."

Health remains another driver for new world consumers according to New York distributors. "From the smallest stores to the biggest chains, everyone is merchandising health benefits," says Millan. "It's helping our business since papaya has a lot of health benefits and everybody's looking to buy more."

Values represent another essential component of new world business as evidenced by the growth at Interruption Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY. "Today's consumers are looking to have a positive impact on the environment and want products without chemicals or GMOs," says Michela Calabrese, vice president of business development East Coast. "They seek an understanding of origin and are concerned about safety and fairness."

Interruption chief executive Rafael Goldberg adds how the Millennial generation wants the entire package. "They seek meaning and impact as well as value and convenience," he explains. "Having it all is the future trend. We as suppliers, and as an industry, are going to have to provide healthy, nutritious safe products that also create meaning for shoppers."

Interruption sought to create healthy, high quality produce that also works well for workers, the environment and communities where the company does

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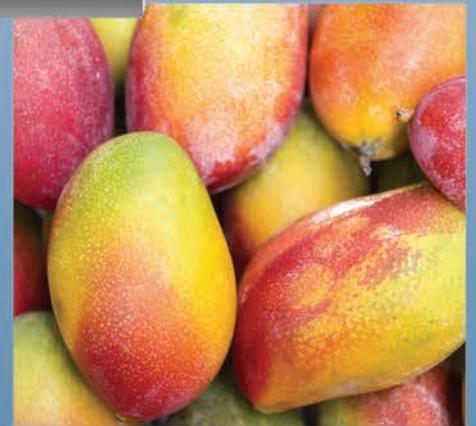
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business. "Our work in the marketplace empowers traditional retailers as well as new distribution models to appeal to and communicate with shoppers and create a level of transparency and information," asserts Goldberg. "This allows customers to connect to what's going on behind the product itself — generating meaning, a story, participation and an experience. This allows customers to connect to what's going on behind the product itself — generating meaning, value, a story and

an experience."

Changing consumers' shopping habits driven by convenience and values increasingly affect the supply and marketing chain. "Shoppers are buying fresher product and what they need instead of buying bigger sizes and throwing product out," says Auerbach's Klein. "The industry will need to adapt to fulfill these changing habits."

To address food waste, Baldor developed a comprehensive plan to eliminate all organic waste destined for the

landfill. The initiative's cornerstone is the SparCs program which offers trim, tops and peelings from the company's processing facility to chefs and manufacturers. "The SparCs program is a three tiered approach," describes Muzyk. "It focuses first on human consumption, then on animal feed and finally anaerobic digestion. One interesting product resulting from this program is a seasoning blend made from our repurposed, dehydrated trimmings. It's becoming popular with trendy food retailers."

Changing Product Mix

Companies have engaged the dance of change by tailoring a changing product mix. "Our area is a melting pot and continues to change," says Cohen of Vision Import Group. "We have new immigrants from different countries and we see product mix evolving to reflect it."

"Over the years, we changed a lot," says Agrososn's Suarez. "When my mom started the business, she was more focused on Mexican vegetables and papayas. My brother and I kept the Papaya Cavi brand, which made our company one of the top papaya distributors in New York area. Today, we bring straight loads of papayas from Mexico to New York and distribute mostly to our Hunts Point customers — giving them fresh papayas daily."

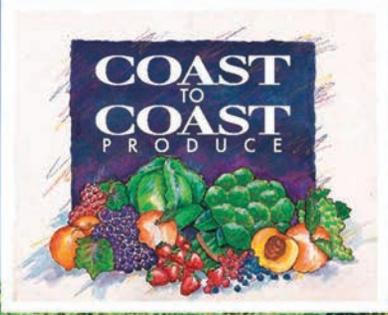
Baldor notes the mix of products demanded from consumers has been affected by several trends. "The Food Network has had a tremendous impact on the consumer," says Muzyk. "Today, consumers are going to their retailer with a list of gourmet ingredients. Also, the diversity of immigration has affected the ingredients being used and asked for."

Staple items are still fundamental to the mix, but according to Auerbach, specialties are a growing category. "As the population changes, food requirements are different," says Klein. "We see this resulting in a wider variety of products."

Due to these trends, items previously considered specialty now sell in high volume. "Items that 20 years ago were considered specialty (such as Clementines) are now mainstream," says Mark Antoch, FreshPro, manager of produce retail sales.

Vision's headliner items (mango and limes) fit this bill. "Mangos and limes were a specialty when I started," relates Cohen. "Consumption of both items has now increased dramatically and continues

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to grow.”

EXP Group LLC in North Bergen, NJ, has consciously decided to focus on specific segments of products. “We are selling niche, tropical produce including sour oranges, aloe vera, sweet lemon, hot peppers and dried coconuts,” says Anthony Serafino, vice president of public relations. “Yuca is big now. We’re also focusing on traditional floor fruit like bananas and plantains. We market our line as niche products with an old

world foundation.”

Products From The Old World

Lucky’s Real Tomatoes in Brooklyn, NY, perceives the evolving product offerings as positioning old world products in the new market. “R&D has provided an abundance of flavors, colors and varieties of specialty produce,” says Josh Wanless, vice-president of business development for Lucky’s Fresh in North Carolina. “The famous Tasti-Lee Tomatoes, from Bejo Seeds,

is a perfect example. Lucky’s became a licensed grower of Tasti-Lee because this tomato is a product of years of R&D to develop a flavorful, field-grown tomato for retail. It is truly an ‘old world’ tomato in the ‘new world’ culture of retail and it’s a winner in both arenas.”

Serafino agrees old world products fit well with new world demographics. “Old world products will never go away, and we see an opportunity for these products in the new world markets — including immigrants, but also foodies,” he explains.

Organics and tropical both represent a blending of old and new worlds and RBest has experienced strong expansion of its organic line as well as quick growth of its tropical import division (El Sol Brands). “The influx of organic products as an everyday item has made this division a staple in our portfolio,” says Hines. “Organics have skyrocketed as a major section of our industry.”

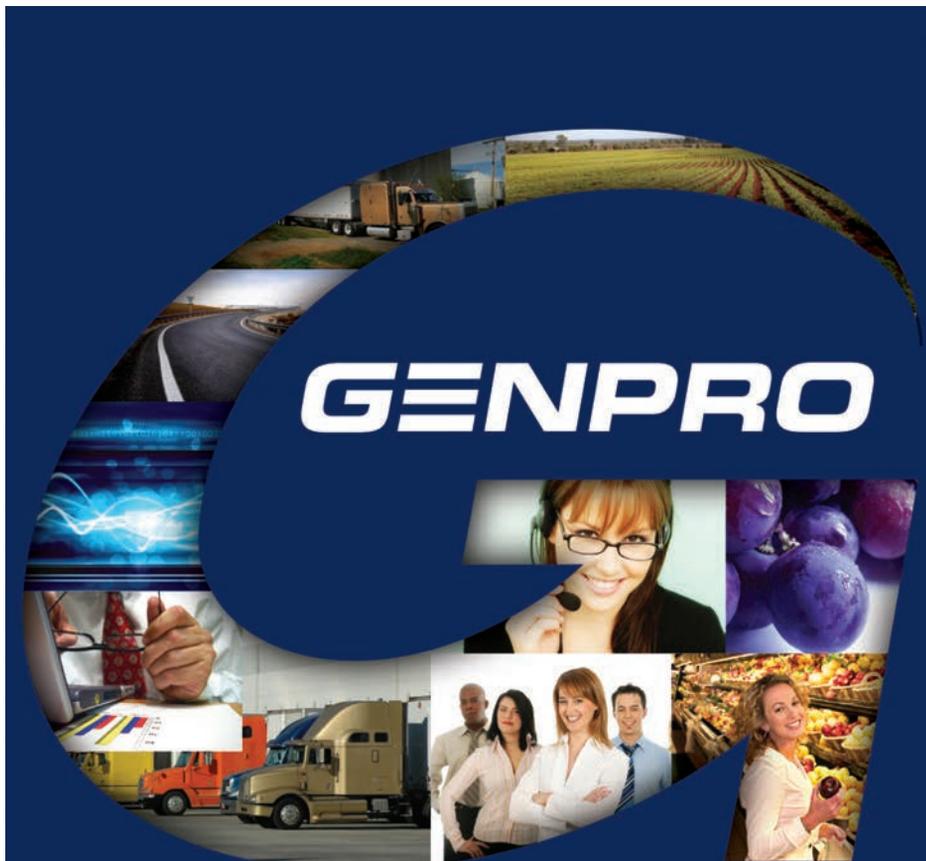
Eli & Ali sees growth in organic, conventional and local. “We have strong demand for all these segments,” says Jeff Ornstein, co-owner at Eli & Ali. “We expect continued growth in both local and organic.”

Local — once the only way to source product and now returning as a “new world trend” — has been and continues to be a mutually beneficial aspect of RBest’s operation. “Not only is it important to support our local growers, but buying locally is cost effective and benefits our customers,” explains Hines.

Riviera estimates 10 percent of its total gross volume is local. “It increases every year,” says Riviera’s Friedman. “Ten years ago, it was probably half that. A significant part of local’s future growth will be farm- and technology-driven entrepreneurs founding businesses that may be local but might not necessarily be traditional ways of farming.”

FreshPro, which moves about 20 percent of its volume in local products, points to an existing example of technology-driven local production. “A unique development is the availability of packaged salads grown locally in greenhouses such as BrightFarms,” says Avillo.

Baldor empowers its customers to prioritize local, allowing them to make the “local pledge” on its website. “It’s not a financial pledge,” explains Muzyk. “It’s a pledge to say they want to buy local if possible. If a customer makes the local pledge, our software steers them toward



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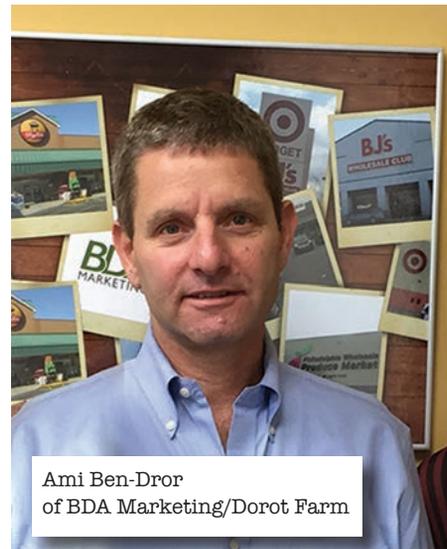
a local option automatically, even though they might not have specified a specific local item in the order.”

As value-driven demand developed, Interrupcion implemented several initiatives aimed at radically growing its supply in various locations. “We continue to increase our vertical integration and owned production,” reports Goldberg. “Our farming hubs serve as centers for research and development and providers of services to our associated growers. We’re doing this

in Argentina, Chile and Peru, and most recently in California.”

Positioning In Both Worlds

Whether old or new world, the business of branding remains a key tool for differentiating business even if methods change. “It’s not an old versus new issue, it’s just important — period,” states EXP’s Serafino. “What is changing with branding is how you can evolve online. It’s not just about billboards or newspapers anymore;



Ami Ben-Dror
of BDA Marketing/Dorot Farm



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Lucky’s Wanless believes branding was important historically because the consumer placed a great degree of trust in the brands they bought. “It was a large part of marketing and advertising,” he states. “Today, trust is even more important due to higher standards of food safety, traceability and good growing practices. The Lucky’s brand continues to be a leader because of our more than 35-year history of excellence.”

Branding is growing in importance on the producer side as well, according to Avillo. “It’s how they differentiate themselves,” he says. “A lot of producers are carving out their niche with their brand. It’s not just trying to sell 80 percent of your crop to one company anymore. Producers now want to pick and choose and maximize their margins.”

BDA Marketing uses its Dorot Farm brand to differentiate its product. “Branding gives the customer more confidence and adds more value if you put the right content in the brand,” says Ben-Dror.

“For example, our customers know what they’re getting as far as quality, consistently and food safety,” he explains. “With our carrot, the customers want to know where it comes from or what is behind it as far as production standards. Our mission statement is to provide our customers with fresh and sweet carrots that meet the highest of production standards.

Emphasizing what a brand stands for is a crucial part of Vision’s strategy. “Calling something a brand is a far cry from having a brand that actually delivers what it promises,” explains Cohen. “Most people like



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brands with consistent quality, which takes time to build. But, once people know it, they don't think about it, they just pick it up."

Eli & Ali considers itself one of the first to see the branding opportunity for organic produce. "We have a large recognition of our brand," says Eli & Ali's Elijah Ornstein. "Our brand has a long history and it's evolving outside the tri-state area. Now it's a matter of growing our production process to adequately meet the demand."

Technology's Impact

Perhaps the greatest driver moving the old world to the new has been the explosion of technology in recent decades. Klein observes the product may look the same but its handling has been revolutionized. "Food safety, recordkeeping and traceability are light-years ahead of where we were two decades ago," he says. "Refrigeration and order-taking also all revolve around new technology."

New York leaders such as Baldor view

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New world businesses are revolutionizing how we ripen, deliver and logistically handle the product. Supply chain innovation is really changing how we do business.

— Anthony Serafino, EXP Group LLC

food safety as having had one of the greatest impacts on business. "As food safety has revolutionized the business, companies had to change or go out of business," says Muzyk.

From a food safety standpoint, Baldor made significant investments including adding its own lab. "We are the only company in our area operating a catch and hold for products notorious for food safety issues," explains Muzyk. "We test everything going out, but we wanted to be sure things coming in were okay."

BDA Marketing recently invested in machinery with digital cameras to ensure food safety standards. "We employ a lot of technology to monitor tracking and temperature on shipping containers," adds Ben-Dror.

In 2014, RBest achieved PrimusGFS certification rendering them certified and fully equipped to service both "old" and "new" world clientele. "More clientele are requiring industry certifications to determine and verify quality and control of product," says Hines. "With our Primus-GFS certification we are confident we meet our customer's safety standards and are qualified to service a wider range of new customers."

EXP reports customer demand influences technology throughout the supply chain. "New world businesses are revolutionizing how we ripen, deliver and logistically handle the product," says Serafino. "Supply chain innovation is really changing how we do business."

Technologies in terms of better warehousing techniques, inventory control and trucking were embraced at Riveria. "We are still old school when taking care of the customer but more sophisticated behind the scenes," says Ben Friedman.

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EDI (electronic data interchange) for invoicing and PO's has been implemented at Caraveo. "We also put extensive systems into place to ensure PTI compliance," reports Millan. "We must be ready and overly compliant so when a buyer needs something, we're already prepared to meet their needs."

Electronic information exchange presents new opportunities in marketing. "Since more of our orders are transmitted electronically, it allows us to concentrate more on marketing over the phone and less phone order taking," explains Avillo.

Mele agrees FreshPro's priority for phone communication has changed from just taking orders and views it as an opportunity for customers as well. "Now, our sales staff can have a quality conversation resulting in value for customers — to help our customers grow and implement new things," he says.

Distinguishing Value

New York businesses continue to distinguish the value they offer customers. Choice is a key point of differentiation for FreshPro. "We don't dictate what the customer has to choose from," says Mele. "They tell us what they need us to carry for them."

Avillo explains FreshPro customers can set up their own sourcing and order details and the company even warehouses non-produce items as a value-added service for some customers. "We implement and distribute their arrangements for them," he says. "We provide the support so our customers can differentiate themselves as well."

BDA's service starts with marketing. "We investigate what our customers need," says Ben-Dror. "Then we take what they tell us into the field. We specifically seed what our customers ask for. We work directly with everyone to ensure our customers get exactly what they need and know what they're getting. We believe in long-term relationships with all our customers for successful partnership."

EXP looks to new logistical ventures to expand the clients they serve. Serafino says the company is assessing ways to deliver produce to one person, and then that customer can make the smaller deliveries. "We are trying to bring the traditional [elements] of the old world into the new world marketplace," he says. "So instead of letting the mom-and-pops

go out of business because no one can deliver to them or because they have to pay exorbitant delivery fees, we're trying to implement a system for them. This way everyone can make money, and no one gets the short end of the stick."

Distributors also adapt logistics, as new-format customers require changes. "Traditionally, we delivered to one store or warehouse, and the customer delivered it themselves within their organization," explains Serafino. "Now, new accounts

are evolving where it's still one account with one order, but they want delivery to multiple stores. We are adapting to these requests, because businesses that grasp how the new world works will remain successful."

Baldor continues to expand facilities to serve its clients. "We are adding 100,000 square feet to our New York facility and adding new jobs," reports Muzyk.

Businesses increasingly look to tailor service to individual customer needs. "We

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Abe Friedman, Ben Friedman and Johnny Messina of Riviera Produce

evolved to serve a variety of needs," says Ben Friedman. "Many of our customers may need to stagger a delivery or place orders during off-times of the day. We use technology to serve those who prefer to order online but also have the flexibility to provide personal attention to those who prefer a highly personal level of service."

Serving as a link between buyer and supplier continues to be a crucial function for New York distributors. FreshPro provides an opportunity for smaller retailers to link with bigger farms they might not otherwise be able to work with directly. "Our retailers love talking to and working with the farmers, and the farmers love talking to the retailers," says Avillo. "We enable and support that connection."

Vision counts itself as a crucial connection to help flexible buyers deal with market issues. "We help our smaller, more flexible independent customers adapt to market changes," states Cohen. "For example, we recently had lower volume in mangos, which resulted in lower quality

but higher price. Though many big retailers still focused on a price-based buy, the smaller guys refocused their purchasing to look for alternatives so they could still offer a good product."

Cohen underscores the value Vision adds in these cases. "The key is to communicate with your buyers and help them, in turn, communicate with their customers," he explains. "One way to resolve the mango fluctuation is to sell by the pound. That helps retail adapt to changing sizes and dynamics in the market."

Education of customers is a crucial role distributors continue to fill perhaps even more so as things change. "As systems and technology change, we have to help our customers understand the difference between how things used to be done versus how they should be done now," says Abe Friedman, operations coordinator at Riviera Produce.

"As per the every-day market changes, we work together with the shippers ... so we are always on top of the prices," says

“ In the future, I see a more demanding consumer with respect to the foods they eat and the information and processes behind it ... in the future, we'll see an increase in the importance of nontraditional buying criteria, an evolution in what is valued.

— Rafael Goldberg, Interrupcion Fair Trade

Agrosón's Suarez. "We know first-hand when prices go up or down, and we let our customers know so they can be prepared for it and be competitive."

An Expanding Stage

As the old and new worlds collide, it provides opportunity for an expanding business arena among many New York area companies. Twenty years ago, FreshPro did not have the geographic radius it has today. "We now go 250 miles each way, about a 500 mile radius," says Avillo. "Demand from customers has driven our expansion."

Auerbach reaches as far north as Canada, goes as far south as Florida, and as far west as Chicago, according to Klein.

Riviera has grown its geographic reach further into Pennsylvania, and Ben Friedman estimates it now serves a 250 to a 350 square mile radius.

Due to its expanding sales area, EXP started EXP Logistics about a year ago to address future growth. "We are as good



Andres Lopez and Maria Jose Lopez of Agrosos

as our logistics company can geographically take us," says Serafino. "We currently deliver as far as Philadelphia and Boston. The issue with perishables is always successfully handling logistics. Having an in-house logistics company is a huge benefit. We continue to explore how to expand so our growth doesn't plateau."

Companies also look to expand business by combining old and new world aspects. FreshPro envisions increasing development of alternative formats with particular emphasis on produce and new world management of old world businesses. "As mom-and-pops elevate to a higher level, it falls perfectly into what we do well," explains Mele. "Also, as new generations come into the management of traditional businesses, they make new adaptations."

Even seemingly limited old world businesses such as farm stands are entering a new era. "Farm stands are selling year round now and need a reliable, quality supplier," says Avillo. "Actively serving them is another way for us to expand our value to unique formats."

FreshPro considers it crucial to help these old-world businesses compete in the new-world market. "Our company has the versatility to bring the old world into the new by introducing them to items doing well in the wider marketplace," adds Granata.

Changes in production promise a new future as well. Interrupcion believes its future holds opportunity for increasing biodynamic farming. "Until now, there has been lots of discussion about what *NOT* to use in production," clarifies Calabrese. "Now through biodynamics, we are focusing on what to use."

Biodynamic agriculture deals with the application of natural fertilizers and the philosophy of treating the farm as part of a dynamic ecosystem, according to Goldberg. "In the future, I see a more demanding consumer with respect to the foods they eat and the information and processes behind it," he suggests. "Currently, much of the market still focuses on the traditional buying criteria; but in the future, we'll see an increase in the importance of nontraditional buying criteria, an

evolution in what is valued."

Baldor's Muzyk views mechanization in the industry as the next revolution. "The labor pool is diminishing, and it will be harder to find enough labor to harvest crops," he explains. "We will need more mechanization in our production systems."

Adapting to the new world while still serving the old is a recipe for success at Serafino. "We need to adapt our business both ways to carry us into the future and give us longevity," he says. **pb**

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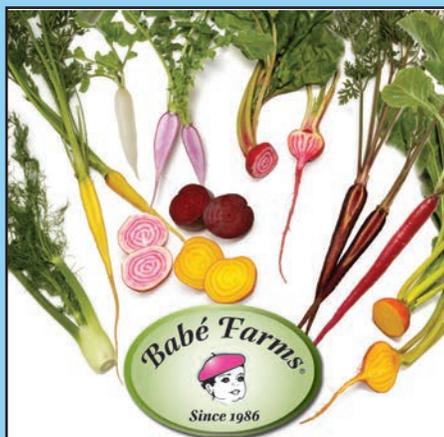


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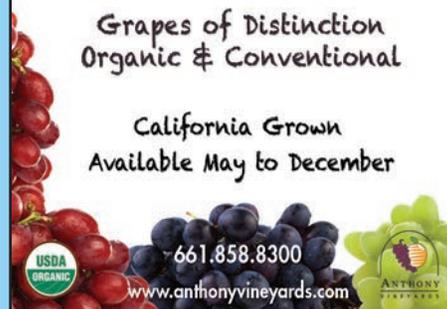
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Defining Authentic Mexican Cuisine

by Larry Bernstein

Cosme, an authentic Mexican restaurant that seats 140, is located in the Flatiron district of Manhattan. The restaurant is open for lunch and dinner but closes in between the two meals. Yet, the door remains open because, “we want the restaurant to be an extension of your living room,” says co-owner Santiago Gomez.

Gomez, along with one of his four co-owners, Santiago Perez, was eating out one night at an Italian restaurant in Lower Manhattan. During the meal, they got to talking to the waiter and came to realize that there wasn’t one good authentic Mexican restaurant in New York. They joked that they should open one. When Gomez awoke the next morning, the thought of opening a restaurant remained.

Gomez and Perez, both of whom had been in banking, recruited top Mexican Chef Enrique Olivera of the world-renowned Pujol restaurant in Mexico City along with architect Alonso de Garay, and Cosme opened in October of 2014.

So, what makes Cosme an authentic Mexican restaurant? Firstly, Gomez says, “When Americans think of Mexican food, they think of TexMex.” That’s not what you will find at Cosme.

Gomez notes most Mexicans who come to the restaurant say they finally found authentic Mexican cuisine. The cuisine can be attributed to Olivera. The chef draws a crowd as foodies come to sample his food. In fact, even though Cosme draws heavily from the neighborhood, the establishment has become a destination restaurant with people coming from all over the city. Cosme has other touches of Mexico besides its cuisine. The plants come from the country, the architecture is influenced by the culture, and the tables were designed by a Mexican artist.

Cosme is located just a few blocks from Union Square Park, which hosts a farmers market. The market is open four days a week throughout the entire year. Daniela Soto-Innes, the chef de cuisine at Cosme who along with Mariana Villegas, kitchen manager, runs the kitchen and does all the ordering, says they purchase upwards of 50 percent of their produce at the Union Square Market.

Soto-Innes, who comes from a long line of women who love food and cooking, appreciates that the market uses local individual farmers, in addition to its convenience. Cosme is proud to use seasonal ingredients from the Hudson Valley and



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surrounding region.

The restaurant has a number of other produce partners in addition to the market. These include Riviera Produce, Baldor Produce, Manhattan Fruit Exchange, Chef's Garden, Agri Exotic Trading, SOS Chefs, and Lucky's Tomatoes.

Soto-Innes is happy to have formed relationships with so many different purveyors and foragers. "Each company has certain things we like," says Soto-Innes. Ultimately, the multiple produce partners enable Cosme to get the best quality produce for its customers."

Mexican techniques are used when preparing the food at Cosme. This includes burning some foods, drying chiles, utilizing all different types of corn, creating sauces, and using many kinds of beans.

While Cosme is always focused on authentic traditional Mexican cuisine that is cooked in a modern way, the menu changes based on the season. The menu's seasonality forces Cosme to change.

According to Soto-Innes, Cosme tends to use more seafood, limes, and cilantro during the winter. In the summer, they use a

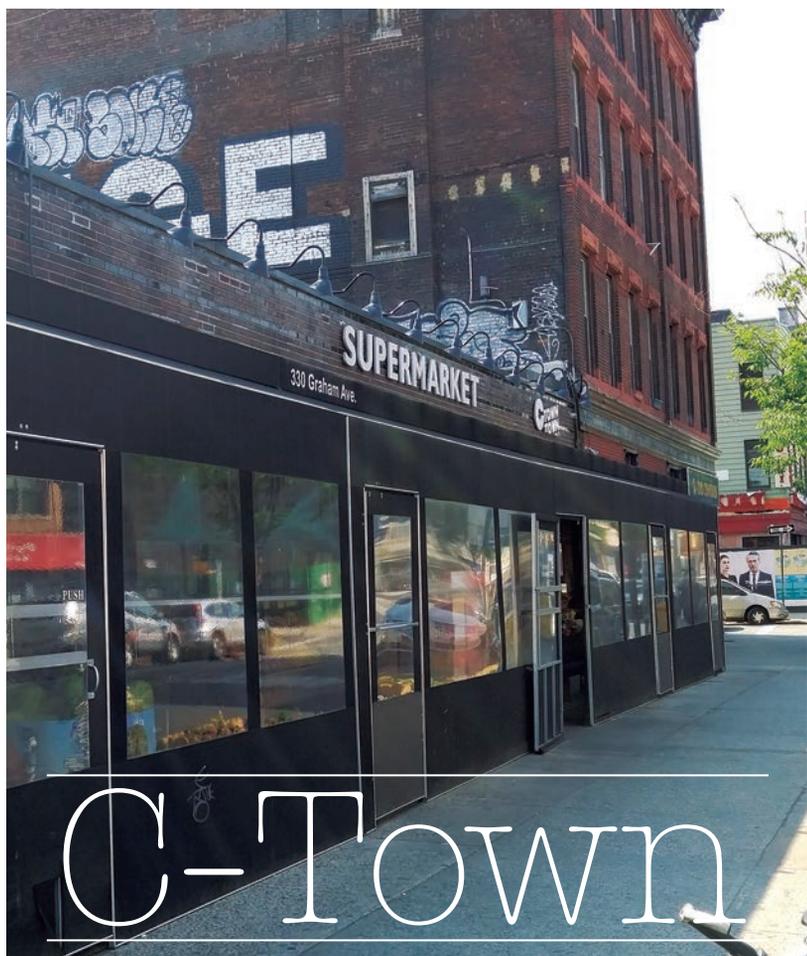
lot more vegetables including heirloom tomatoes. "If we don't have them, we do another dish," says Soto-Innes.

One menu item at Cosme that relies heavily on produce and is particularly popular is Tlayuda. Soto-Innes describes Tlayuda as "a soft tostada — basically a corn tortilla that is toasted on a flat top — with greens and green tomatoes."

Some of the desserts served at Cosme also make use of produce. According to Soto-Innes, the restaurant serves a rhubarb dessert and a corn dessert. The corn dessert makes use of corn husks. It includes sweet cream corn and vanilla. Desserts, like the rest of the menu, change depending on seasons.

Cosme makes an exhorted effort to use every element of food to avoid waste. One example is dehydrating the skin of limes. The chef uses the black limes in a number of different ways. Soto-Innes says they burn the skin of onion, which is good for salsa. She suggests people try this at home. Cosme also burns the seeds of a chile, rings them out, and uses the seeds in a mole (sauce).

Cosme dominates fresh produce, which helped establish its reputation as a premier, authentic Mexican restaurant. **pb**



C-Town

This retailer harnesses a balance for unique produce offerings, a dynamic customer base and minimal shelf space.

by Larry Bernstein

Nestled in the East Williamsburg section of Brooklyn is one of the 200 independently owned and operated C-Town Supermarkets. The dynamic East Williamsburg neighborhood is part of a crowded urban area with constant activity. The C-Town supermarket, which is owned by Anthony Diaz, is just steps from the L train's Graham Street stop.

The C-Town chain, which is headquartered in Westchester, NY, has stores in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. C-Town stores first opened in the mid-1970s and are associated with Alpha 1 Marketing (a full-service merchandising and marketing company), which works with the retailer on in-store promotional support, negotiating costs with distributors (such as Krasdale Foods), and sends merchandisers to stores to offer advice on store design, layout, and more.

Unlike a big stand-alone suburban supermarket situated on multiple acres, the East Williamsburg C-Town is in the middle of a row of stores. The store's owners source produce for two of their neighboring stores, Grass Roots juice bar and AWOL Restaurant. Because of its location, the supermarket is relatively small, covering approximately 5,000 square feet.

Design For Challenging Spaces

The six-aisle C-Town has one aisle dedicated solely to produce,

along with an outdoor area for fresh flowers and seasonal produce items. Between the outdoor and indoor space, the store carries anywhere from 300 to 500 produce items (25 of which are on sale during a typical week).

According to Jose Padilla of Alpha 1 Marketing, produce sales account for anywhere from 10 to 13 percent of sales depending on the season. The summer months have particularly strong sales with the abundance of fruit (peaches, strawberries, nectarines) and local vegetables like corn, broccoli and leafy greens.

C-Town finds a way to use all of its space as the produce manager merchandises every inch of the department. Padilla says, "The lack of space is very challenging. We try to use every space that we can, and we understand how to make things convenient."

Despite the jam-packed feel of the store and neighborhood, the produce is laid out nicely. The bright colors of C-Town's produce department make it clear the merchandise is fresh, well rotated, and damaged goods are removed.

Customer Profile

Over the course of the past few years, the demographics of East Williamsburg have changed. According to Juan Vasquez of Alpha 1 Marketing, the neighborhood contains a mix of people including American, Spanish, Italian, Czech, Puerto Rican and



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African American. C-Town has altered its produce offerings in an attempt to cater to the changing customer mix, which is always looking for diverse foods, tastes, experiences and creative new takes on traditional dishes.

Padilla says, “Many Millennials and young professionals have moved into the area over the last few years, which has caused a huge demand for organic produce.” At this point, 50 percent of the items offered at C-Town are organic.

Vasquez adds that C-Town has a separate area for organic produce in order to meet the demands of its customers. “Customers will not buy organic produce if it is mixed in the same area as regular produce,” says Vasquez.

C-Town’s on-the-go customers demand convenience. One way the supermarket accommodates this need is to categorize everything. Categories include citrus, salad stuff, and organic. Vasquez says, “This allows the customer to come in and easily find what they want.”

Produce Offerings

Another way to accommodate customers is by responding to requests. Benito Gonzalez, the produce department manager who has been with C-Town for three years, says, “The customers know they can come in and request anything.”

Some of the more unique items the store offers include orange and purple cauliflower, eggplant varieties such as Indian, Thai, and Japanese, and berries that extend far beyond the few commonly grown or found in grocery stores (such as currants, gooseberries, golden raspberries and huckleberries).

Because of the dynamics of the neighborhood, some customers visit C-Town every day and few of them buy in bulk. In order to service customers, the store carries a variety of fresh-cut fruit and vegetables, as well as fresh-squeezed juice. These grab-and-go options save shoppers time on food preparation and help the store decrease shrink and maximize profit.

The store also prepares fajita mix, veggie kebobs, broccoli and cauliflower mixes and vegetable stir fries.

C-Town’s primary produce suppliers are Four Seasons Produce, Procacci Brothers, and RBest. “C-Town partnered with Four Seasons because they represent the organic business,” says Padilla. “They brought in more organic offerings including red Russian kale, eastern radishes, and organic packaged herbs.”

Procacci Brothers supplies C-Town with more of the traditional items, and RBest supplies all categories of produce.

This small supermarket offers a wide variety for everyone and is proud to be part of an area known as a foodie paradise. Padilla promises, “No matter what you are looking for, you’ll find it.” **pb**

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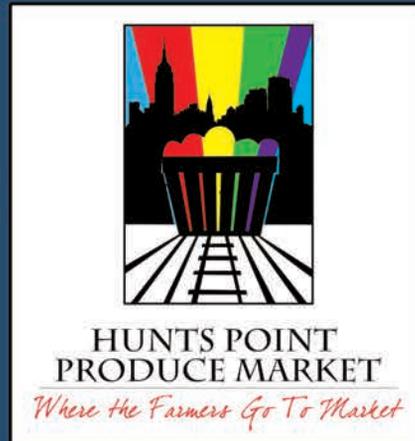
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Highlighting The Bulb



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER RANCH

Garlic enjoys mainstream success, but retailers shouldn't take it for granted.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

The list of health benefits associated with eating garlic is long. It's an antioxidant and can boost the immune system; it's good for the heart and can help lower inflammation; some people even believe garlic rubbed on the skin repels mosquitos. Regardless of its effectiveness as a bug deterrent, or fictional use as a vampire repellent, garlic has been used both medicinally and as a cooking ingredient across both the Mediterranean region and Asia for centuries.

While many consumers are aware of the health aspects of garlic, retailers run the risk that this versatile plant may get taken for granted if not properly merchandised. As simple as garlic is as an ingredient, and as easy as it is to cook with, so are the methods used to display and promote it in produce departments.

"I get daily Google news briefs on garlic," says Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce, based in Kelton, PA. "Not a day goes by that there is not a feature story about garlic, including some of its health benefits. It would be very

easy for retailers to point their consumers to some of this information."

The information concerning these benefits is indeed out there, as Michael Layous, sales and marketing representative for The Garlic Company, based in Bakersfield, CA, points out. "The media as a whole is definitely communicating the healthy aspects of garlic," he says. "Garlic has cardiovascular benefits, and it can lower cholesterol and help to fight off the common cold or flu. On a more day-to-day level, garlic is a common substitute for consumers who are trying to eat less salt."

"Garlic has many, many health attributes, and anything they [produce managers] do in that department to educate consumers on some of these benefits is of tremendous value," says Louis Hymel, vice president of procurement



and operations for Orlando, FL-based Spice World.

METHODS OF MERCHANDISING

Looks are everything when it comes to displaying garlic. It is perhaps the single biggest factor in getting bulbs and braids into shopping baskets. The bigger the display, the better, of course; but retail space is usually limited. Produce managers should focus on stocking a great-looking, clean product in whatever space is allotted.

"Cleanliness is probably the most important," says Paul Auerbach, president of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. and the Auerpak Brand, based in Secaucus, NJ. "A bright, clean white is what really gets the consumers."

While the appearance of individual bulbs is key for bulk displays, variety also grabs attention. Auerbach's advice? "Make sure the display features several different types of garlic, such as elephant garlic, peeled garlic, and garlic braids. That bulk box of loose, fresh garlic is going to be the mainstay."

"Cross-merchandising has always been a real attribute to increasing incremental sales," says Hymel. "Not just for the garlic category, but to many of the other ingredients that go along with merchandising for different recipes. It's always good to try and understand some of the cross-merchandising benefits. Whether

it's putting garlic around pasta or the bakery department with fresh bread, there are huge benefits."

"Retailers seem to have garlic merchandising figured out pretty well now," says Provost, who recognizes garlic's ascent from a specialty product to a staple shopping list item. "I have seen retailers merchandise successfully in various locations in the produce department, including the onion section, the fresh tomato section, a stand-alone garlic center and even spread out, depending on the product in the category — fresh, peeled, organic or jarred garlic."

Patsy S. Ross, marketing director for Christopher Ranch, headquartered in Gilroy, CA, has also seen produce managers have success with these display strategies. "Over the years I have seen two successful ways to merchandise garlic in the produce department," she says. "One way is to have a garlic center."

She suggests retailers use a rack or table to display all garlic items, from packaged and jarred to fresh bulk, and even dried varieties.

"Setting up a garlic center creates a one-stop shopping opportunity for consumers," says Ross. "Another way is to merchandise with the tomatoes and the avocados. Think the Italian Flag. This display really highlights the cleanliness and brightness of the garlic, and helps it jump out at shoppers. This is a better approach than placing garlic displays along with the usual suspects. When garlic is merchandised with onions and potatoes, it gets a little camouflaged."

Auerbach has seen garlic pair well in other departments, too. "In addition to being in produce, we've taken garlic, lemon, tomato and placed them in a round basket in the fish department — that works," he says.

With so many items competing for the attention of busy shoppers, space comes at a premium. Auerbach recognizes garlic's acceptance as a mainstream grocery item, but points out, "It's still not peaches, it's not apples, it's not bananas — sometimes with these items [like garlic] you're not just fighting for shelf space, you're fighting for ad space."

While this is certainly true, prudent produce managers know the value of giving garlic its space. "It's a high-dollar item," says Auerbach. "While I realize space is limited, the more types of garlic they can shelve, the better for the whole category."

According to Layouts at The Garlic Company, proper placement drives sales. "Some retailers develop stand-alone stands to display the different packs of non-refrigerated garlic, including individual bulk garlic, small bags of

"In addition to being in produce, we've taken garlic, lemon, tomato and placed them in a round basket in the fish department — that works."

— Paul Auerbach, Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GARLIC COMPANY

garlic and jarred product."

Layouts recommends retailers hang smaller-sized bags of whole bulbs next to pasta and display peeled garlic with fresh-cut vegetables. "Garlic is a popular ingredient for dips — think guacamole, salsas and hummus. Accordingly, retailers can take advantage of increased garlic sales opportunities for the Super Bowl, Cinco de Mayo and the Fourth of July. The garlic can be positioned closer to the entrance of the store, along with tomatoes, avocados, onions and tortilla chips. If shoppers aren't already thinking about making guacamole or salsa, their brain will certainly be tempted."

DOMESTIC VERSUS IMPORT

Country of origin matters to many customers. The "buy local" movement extends beyond cities and outside of state lines when certain commodities are unavailable closer to home. For the consumer in the Midwest, California is going to be as local as they can get for garlic. "We found most retailers and consumers that we talk with would prefer domestic garlic to imported garlic," says Ross. She recommends signage that calls out the country of origin, as appearance alone may not be enough for the average consumer to differentiate.

Auerbach follows the garlic growing cycles around the world so consumers always have access to fresh product. "Right now I have

garlic in-house from four countries of origin," he says.

Auerbach knows retailer preference reflects the demands of customers. "Certain retail accounts have a preference for garlic grown in the United States," he says. "Other accounts want product from certain countries and not others. Some accounts want seasonality, so they have new product available three times a year: the Californian, then the Argentinian and then the Mexican. It varies by retailers and price points."

Sasha LoPresti, director of business development for the Bronx, NY-based distributor A. J. Trucco Inc., has noticed this preference as well. "We have garlic from Spain, Mexico, Argentina and California," she says. "Domestic California is always preferred."

According to Layouts, domestic garlic sales increased in recent years due in part to the locally grown movement. While this certainly has appeal to many consumers, that isn't the only reason for choosing U.S.-grown garlic.

"It is commonly thought garlic grown in California is superior in three specific areas: flavor, food safety and consistent, reliable supply," says Layouts.

Food safety is a hot-button issue in produce and throughout the foodservice industry, as it should be, and this gives domestic garlic an edge.

"The Garlic Company's vertically integrated structure allows for simple product tracking and enforcement of proper treatments and processes," says Layouts. "Whereas compared to competitors overseas, the garlic can be sourced from multiple small farms. Consumers have expressed concerns ranging from basic plant sanitation to the pesticides implemented in farming practices."

"Traceability out of California is superb," says Anthony Sharrino, president and owner of Eaton & Eustis headquartered in Chelsea, MA. "Everything is tracked — from the field it came from and the day it was picked." This isn't the case in countries such as China, which is the largest grower of garlic in the world and a sometimes tough competitor. While global competition has leveled off a bit recently, Sharrino explains the difficulty of competing in a global market: "There was competition from China because they were giving it away. You can't compete with people who are giving it away."

Ultimately, it's the consumer who will make the choice, and right now imported garlic sales are strong. According to I Love Produce's Provost, "Sales indicate imported garlic currently has about a 60 percent market share in the

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United States, comprising a combination of Chinese, Spanish, Argentinian and Mexican product. There are some retailers that have a preference for domestic garlic.

“My personal philosophy is, give the consumers what they want. Bud Light is the best-selling beer in America, but that should not preclude a store from handling a good imported stout or lager. We encourage our customers to carry domestic bulk or loose garlic, and Chinese packaged or sleeve garlic. This is the best combination to grow the category and maximize sales,” he says.

PACKAGING AND EATING TRENDS

“Garlic seems to be a product that stays on trend,” says Ross. “It is popular with the low-fat, no-fat type of cooking. It is great for low sodium or salt-free since it adds so much flavor, and it can be a versatile flavor as well, depending on how it’s cooked.”

According to Ross, cooking garlic at different temperatures and for different lengths of time produces different flavors. Slow and long heating produces a sweet flavor. Short, high heat reveals a bitter, sharper flavor.

Consumers have several options for purchasing garlic. Fresh garlic bulbs are the choice for many on the retail side and peeled garlic is preferred by foodservice. For some busy shoppers, peeled has appeal as well. “Peeled garlic is a great product that is gaining momentum in some markets,” says Ross. “It is a refrigerated item that is available in a stand-up pouch, ready to use — no waste and no labor.”

“Whole bulbs of garlic offer the truest, freshest garlic flavor for any recipe,” says Layous, but he also sees customers opting for the convenience of peeled garlic. “Roasted garlic is also gaining in popularity. The roasted option allows garlic to be included in a dish in a smooth, mellow way. The shopper doesn’t



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need to be as concerned with the lingering smell long after the meal.”

“Many customers want garlic already peeled so they can save time,” says LoPresti at A.J. Trucco Inc. “We offer 5-pound jars of Spanish peeled. We also sell retail five-bulb sleeved garlic from Spain.”

Provost of I Love Produce sees growth of peeled garlic at the retail level, and multi-bulb packs are gaining popularity as well. The demand for organics also remains strong. “Organic garlic is an important part of the category,” says Provost.

For Hymel at Spice World, packaging should meet the demands of consumers. “We always try to be cutting-edge with our packaging for our customers,” he says. “At the same

time, we always try to fill whatever needs they might have. We’re as eco-friendly as we can possibly be.”

ETHNIC COOKING

For many consumers, garlic has a strong association with Italian cuisine, but it is used in cooking throughout the world. “Everyone thinks of garlic and Italian food, but other European cultures use a lot of garlic as well — France, Germany and Spain, to name a few,” says Ross. “Mexico uses a lot of garlic in its cooking and so does the Middle East. It’s almost easier to name the cultures that don’t use garlic in their cooking.”

“Garlic is very heavily used in Asian cuisines,” says Provost. “I am seeing peeled garlic

used in meal kits that combine all the ingredients for a consumer to prepare a specialty meal — like Thai, Chinese or Vietnamese dishes.”

Layous has also seen the rise of garlic-centric ethnic cuisine in the United States. “The popularity of ethnic cuisines like Chinese, Italian, Mexican, Indian and Thai continue to increase, and garlic is an integral ingredient in many of the dishes. It is not only desired for its stand-alone flavor, but also how it complements the flavor of other ingredients in a dish, especially other vegetables.”

Retailers who dedicate adequate space to clean, bright bulbs and who employ a few simple merchandising methods, will see this high-dollar bulb pay dividends at the checkout. **pb**

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Don't Underestimate The Power Of Fresh Herbs



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHENANDOAH GROWERS

A magnet for produce, they have tremendous potential for increased sales.

BY BARRY SPARKS

Fresh herbs account for only 2 to 5 percent of produce sales, according to Chick Goodman of Christiansted, Virgin Islands-based Coosemans Worldwide, Inc., but that figure belies their importance.

"Fresh herbs are a first-destination item," adds Goodman. "Fresh herbs are on the top of the list for home chefs and cooks. To cook fresh, you need herbs. And, that type of consumer will select a store based on its herbs."

Goodman says if a store doesn't have fresh herbs, it will lose customers who will go to other stores. Besides herbs, they may also purchase other produce and meats there. "Fresh herbs are a magnet for produce," he asserts.

Michele Henning, vice president key account sales of Shenandoah Growers, located in Harrisonburg, VA, believes fresh herbs make a statement about the freshness of other produce.

"Herbs drive the overall perception of freshness," she says. "If consumers are forced to go

to another store for fresh herbs, they may not buy their canned foods there, but they may buy the ingredients for that night's meal. Either way, it's lost revenue."

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Farm, a Vernon, CA-based company, says freshness is key. "Chefs always focus on fresh, not dry, herbs," he says. "Consumers want freshness, and they're willing to seek it out and pay for it."

The demand for fresh herbs continues to grow. According to Goodman, sales have recorded double-digit increases each year for the past decade.

BASIL IS MOST POPULAR

While consumers are discovering more varieties of fresh herbs, basil is by far the most popular. It accounts for 40 to 45 percent of herb sales, according to Goodman.

"Basil is an entry-level herb," he says. "It's easy to use, flavorful and goes well with a lot of foods."

Basil is commonly used to make pesto, soups, Italian dishes and salads. "Basil and tomato are a marriage made in heaven," says Goodman.

While basil is the dominant herb, other popular herbs include thyme, rosemary, oregano, sage, Italian parsley, chives, marjoram,

cilantro, dill and tarragon.

The potential for increased use of culinary herbs is tremendous, according to Henning of Shenandoah Growers. "The United States is extraordinarily underdeveloped when it comes to the use of culinary herbs," she says. "We are, however, becoming more sophisticated."

Micki Dirtzu of North Shore Greenhouses Inc., a greenhouse grower located in Thermal, CA, says consumers are expanding culturally and preparing more ethnic foods. As evidence, she points to the double-digit growth of the slightly spicy Thai basil, which is used in South East Asia dishes, and increased sales of different varieties of mint.

INFLUENTIAL COOKING SHOWS

Several factors contributed to the growing popularity of culinary herbs. Chief among them is the influence of cable television cooking shows.

"This is the first generation that has grown up watching celebrity cooks such as Martha Stewart and Rachel Ray, as well as cooking shows such as *Top Chef* and *Chopped*," says Goodman. "We couldn't have purchased advertising that was as influential and effective."

Other factors include health concerns about the alarming increase in the incidences of diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure and

increasingly, popular meal kit subscriptions.

"Herbs are a healthier way to eat and enhance flavor without adding salt, sugar or fat," says Dirtzu.

Meal kit subscriptions make it more convenient for consumers to cook healthy meals at home. Subscribers receive all the ingredients for a meal, and herbs are an essential part of most meals.

Matt Salzberg, co-founder of New York City-based Blue Apron, a popular meal subscription service, says part of his company's mission is to teach people about new ingredients.

While consumers are increasing their knowledge of herbs and their use, one thing is clear: they value freshness.

"Consumers are interested in fresh, crisp flavor," stresses Goodman.

According to Dirtzu, "Consumers want herbs grown as close to their backyards as possible. Being locally grown is the most important attribute to consumers."

Because of advances in technology, a greater percentage of herbs sold in the United States are domestic. During the winter months, however, herbs may be imported. For example, mint may be imported from Columbia; basil from Mexico and Peru; and sage from Mexico.



PHOTO COURTESY OF COOSEMANS WORLDWIDE

Consumers do not generally seek imported herbs, according to Goodman. "Availability and freshness trump the country of origin," he says. "For most consumers, it doesn't matter where the herbs come from. The country of origin doesn't add value."

"Consumers are more concerned with quality and availability," says Jonathan Roussel, sales director of Rock Garden South, a Miami-based company. "They don't pay attention to the country of origin, unless there are food safety issues in a particular country."

While fresh herbs sell year-round, they are in highest demand from Thanksgiving through Christmas. That's the most logical time to promote fresh herbs, particularly blend mixes. Special occasions and family get-togethers bring out the best in home cooks, and they

want to serve flavorful meats and vegetables.

A VARIETY OF PACKAGING

The importance of freshness and quality play major roles in the packaging of fresh herbs. While herbs in bunches are the most inexpensive, they are fragile and easily damaged. Handling also wears down the oils, decreasing the herb's flavor. Bunches also experience the highest shrinkage.

Clamshell packaging, which dates back more than a decade, is the most common. It protects the herb and extends its shelf life. Consumers are accustomed to it, and clamshell-packaged herbs are easy to display. Clamshell packaging acts like a mini-greenhouse since the product is still living inside, according to Dirtzu.

Melissa's Schueller recommends clamshell packaged herbs be displayed in a refrigerated area, away from the water spray. Water can ruin the packaging and the product.

Breathable bag technology uses 75 percent less plastic than clamshell packaging, extends the shelf life of herbs and is sustainable.

"We are always looking for innovative, sustainable packaging," says Dirtzu. "It's important to keep the shelf life and the quality of the product in mind."

ORGANIC HERBS GROWING IN POPULARITY

By Barry Sparks

Organic herbs experienced double-digit growth in sales over the past several years, according to Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa's/World Variety Produce.

"Organic herbs aren't as popular as conventional herbs yet," says Schueller. "But, I expect to see continued growth. The growth is particularly impressive, considering organic herbs barely existed a decade or so ago."

Schueller estimates organic herbs make up 10 to 20 percent of herb sales.

"Organic herbs are definitely gaining traction," concurs Micki Dirtzu of North Shore Greenhouses.

The growth of organic herbs reflects the booming United States organic industry. The Organic Trade Association's 2016 Organic Industry Survey reports total organic product sales hit a record \$43.3 billion in 2015, up 11 percent from the previous year's record level.

Consumers' concerns about genetically

modified organisms (GMO) and pesticides have fueled the increased popularity of organic herbs, as well as fruits and vegetables.

"Organics are growing because of consumer demand," says Jonathan Roussel of Rock Garden. "We are seeing organics in more supermarkets, which seem to be more in touch with consumer concerns than foodservice."

Chick Goodman of Coosemans Worldwide Inc. says consumers are much more educated about what's in their food and how it's grown.

"The NOSH (natural, organic, specialty and healthy) crowd is very concerned about what's in their food," he says. "Organic, by definition, means it has no GMOs."

According to Goodman, the switch to organic herbs began more than 10 years ago. While stores could stock both organic and non-organic fruits because sales justified it, the same wasn't true for herbs.

Because of sales volume and space,

many stores switched to organic herbs since the traditional shopper would buy organic herbs, if the price wasn't significantly higher than non-organic herbs. Consumers looking for organic herbs, however, typically would not buy non-organic herbs.

While organic herbs, fruits and vegetables are becoming more commonplace, the supply has not been able to meet the incessant demand.

"Growth of organics is limited by the ability of growers to convert their fields from traditional to organic," says Michele Henning of Shenandoah Growers. "That process can take nearly three years."

Despite the challenges, the popularity of organics is expected to continue its unparalleled growth.

"In the future, stores will be all organic," predicts Roussel.

Goodman agrees the future of organics looks bright. "The organic trend is unstoppable."

pb

Living herbs is a trend that continues to grow. They are sold in a container with the roots attached in an organic growing mixture. A plastic sleeve protects them.

“It creates a farmers market feel,” says Dirtzu of North Shore Greenhouses. “Additionally, a living herb lasts up to three times longer than a fresh-cut herb.”

Henning of Shenandoah Growers says sales data indicates adding an assortment of living herbs to a selection of packaged herbs can increase sales 20 to 40 percent, with little or no cannibalization of packaged herb sales.

“The addition of living herbs strengthens a retailer’s herb category,” she says. “The smaller amounts help consumers. Another plus is the great aroma they produce in the kitchen once taken home.”

CELEBRITY CHEFS LOVE MICRO HERBS

Although herbs traditionally were used to flavor meats and vegetables, their use is expanding. Micro herbs, a darling of celebrity chefs, are starting to appear in more recipes. Micro herbs are tiny, tender herbs that pack a wallop of flavor and visual appeal. They are typically used as a garnish or as a component in a small salad or sandwich. Micro herbs include

“The addition of living herbs strengthens a retailer’s herb category,” she says. “The smaller amounts help consumers. Another plus is the great aroma they produce in the kitchen once they are taken home.”

— Michele Henning, Shenandoah Growers

basil, parsley, dill, mint and more.

Micro herbs are often included in the microgreens category, which features kale, arugula, beets, radish, chard and more than 50 other varieties.

Schueller of Melissa’s says micro herbs and microgreens have been around a long time in foodservice, but are relatively new to retail.

“They are a high-end foodservice item, used mainly at upper-tier restaurants. Retailers



PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTH SHORE GREENHOUSES

that carry more varieties of herbs tend to be the ones most interested in micro herbs and microgreens,” he says.

Roussel of Rock Garden says micro herbs and microgreens are becoming more popular due to their increased use by celebrity television chefs. “They are where herbs were 20 years ago,” he says. “But, in a few years, everyone will be buying them.”

Goodman of Coosemans suggests the best way to merchandise micro herbs is to display them with higher-priced items such as herbs, mushrooms and shallots. Even though packaged salad mix is a high-volume produce item, he discourages placing micro herbs in the same section.

“Micro herbs are a high-end item, and they appeal to a particular type of consumer — one who values freshness and flavor and sees themselves as a home cook or chef,” he says.

Herbs also are being used more in smoothies, iced tea, cocktails and desserts. A raspberry rosemary smoothie, licorice mint iced tea, blueberry Thai basil mojito, and apple sage cake are among the growing list of herb-related recipes available online.

A RECESSION BUSTER

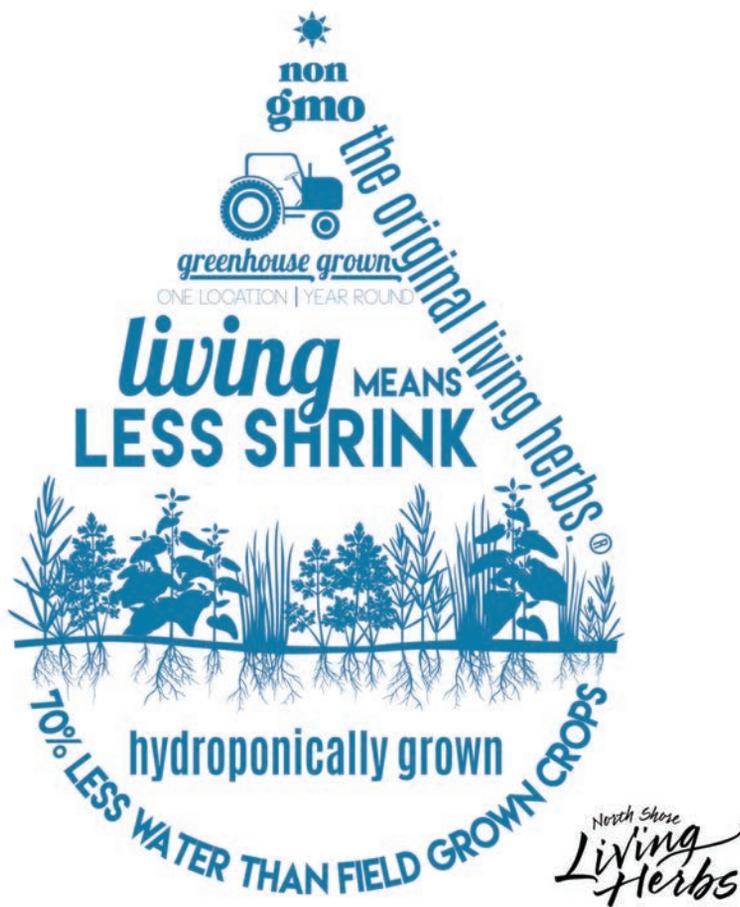
Despite the rosy outlook for culinary herbs, some economists and financial gurus are predicting a possible recession this summer. What impact could it have on the sale of herbs? And, what steps can retailers take to negate or minimize those effects?

Goodman points out herb sales did well during the 2008 recession. “During a recession, people go back to basics. That means they tend to nest at home and enjoy comfort foods. Even though more people may stay at home, they still want to eat restaurant-quality food, and herbs help them do that.”

Henning says a weak economy may drive more people to cook with herbs. “A poorer economy could be a positive,” she says. “Herbs are not expensive, plus they’re nutritional and flavorful. I think people who have grown accustomed to cooking with them will continue.”

Goodman agrees: “Herbs are a recession-buster.”

pb



Steps To Increase Date And Dried Fig Sales



Use these 8 tips to increase date and dried fig sales year-round.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

The days when a consumer seeks out dates and dried figs primarily for Thanksgiving and Christmas baking are over.

“Consumers are looking for dates year-round,” says Erin Hanagan-Muths, director of marketing for Yuma, AZ-based Natural Delights, one of the largest grower/packer/shippers of dates in North America. “They’re really a healthy snack, and we know that’s something people are looking for year-round.”

“Date sales have seen steady growth year over year for the past five seasons,” says Ben Antongiovanni, vice president of sales for Atlas Produce/Caramel Naturel, a grower/packer/shipper based in Bakersfield, CA. “More

consumers are using dates every day. They are snacking on them, using them in protein shakes and adding them to meals. Our retail partners that merchandise big displays year-round have seen great results.”

Holiday shoppers are also buying dates and dried figs for a wider variety of celebrations. “Both dried figs and dates have a large audience for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah,” says Linda Cain, vice president of marketing and retail sales at Valley Fig Growers, a grower-owned cooperative in Fresno, CA. Date sales may go up around Easter as well.

Medjool are the most popular date variety. They’re great for snacking, cooking and stuffing. “Deglet Noor dates are a strong holiday item, because they’re used in baking,” says Hanagan-Muths. “They’re drier, so they’re not a snacking date. They’re more of a cooking date.”

Dates and dried figs require little maintenance, which means they’re easy to merchandise. “Dried figs are hands-off; you don’t have to rotate them like berries,” says Cain. “There’s no shrink and a two-year sell-by date.” That

means these fruits can turn a tidy profit for the produce department.

Below are eight tips for produce managers looking to sell more dates and dried figs in every season.

ACTION PLAN FOR INCREASING DATE AND DRIED FIG SALES

1. DISPLAY PROMINENTLY
“Dates are a great impulse item,” says Tom Williams, director of produce and floral for St. Cloud, MN-based Coborn’s, which operates 54 grocery stores and 70 convenience, liquor and other stores throughout the Midwest.

For that reason, it’s important to make sure dates and dried figs are prominently displayed. “That’s where the shippers really come in handy,” says Williams. Natural Delights and others can make secondary displays available to interested stores.

“Utilizing secondary displays is a means to put Medjool dates front and center in the produce department,” says Hanagan-Muths. “We found these secondary displays to be very

dried fruits & nuts ► dates & dried figs

supportive of getting people to come across the product.”

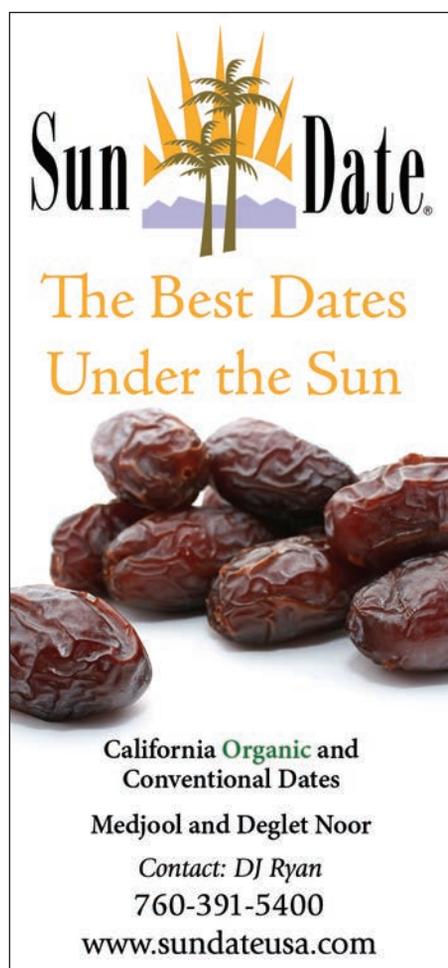
For people who want more permanent displays, Hanagan-Muths recommends putting them on racks or endcaps. “We received some feedback from consumers who say their biggest challenge is actually finding the dates. Sometimes products are not merchandised correctly. We’re under the banana racks or in the bottom corner of a shelf. Put them on top of a table or where they’re more eye level; they will sell more.”

“Dates are best merchandised with bananas,” says Antongiovanni with Caramel Naturel. They also do well next to the tropical fruits, oranges and in-shell nuts.

2. OFFER VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

“Almond date rolls and coconut date rolls do fairly well for snacking,” says Vinnie Latessa, produce director for Heinen’s Grocery Stores, a Cleveland-based chain of family-owned stores that serves northern Ohio and the greater Chicago area. He’s referring to dates rolled in almonds or coconut from Caramel Naturel.

Heinen’s has good luck merchandising these



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“A sampling program will increase movement and sales. That’s especially true for the almond and coconut date rolls. When people try them, they go, ‘Wow, these aren’t bad.’”

— Vinnie Latessa, Heinen’s Grocery Stores

treats in produce departments. “People will buy them throughout the year as a snacking item you can serve on a tray or as an appetizer,” says Latessa.

3. EMPHASIZE NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

“As people get more health-conscious, they’re looking for sweet snacks that are also healthy,” says Latessa. Both dates and dried figs fit the bill. Dates are high in potassium and fiber. They have no fat, cholesterol, sodium or gluten.

“Nutritionally, dried figs are fantastic,” says Cain. “They have more calcium than milk and more potassium than bananas. They have no added sugar and are non-GMO.”

4. SHARE BAKING, GIFT IDEAS

Dates and dried figs will always be popular for holiday baking. But there are other ways to play them up during the holiday season.

“Use shippers to incorporate dates into your holiday gift centers and incremental displays where you have fancier gift baskets and upscale chocolates,” says Coborn’s Williams.

“The best strategy for dates during the fall holidays is to build big displays in the middle of the bananas, and then have secondary date displays with the baking and dried fruit sections,” says Antongiovanni.

5. HIGHLIGHT NON-HOLIDAY OPTIONS

Latessa says he sells lots of dates to consumers interested in stuffing them. They’re delicious filled with goat cheese, blue cheese, Mascarpone or a cheese/nut combination. Dates are also great wrapped in bacon.

“Dried figs can be incorporated into smoothies, beverages and ice cream,” says Cain. “The 2-ounce bag is great size for snacking

after biking or running.”

Natural Delights and Caramel Naturel have dozens of date recipe suggestions on their websites. They include protein shakes, muffins and biscuits, ravioli, poppers, salads and chocolate truffles. Valley Fig Growers also makes recipes for dishes like empanadas, Boston brown bread, chutneys and cakes available on its website.

6. CROSS-MERCHANDISE

“It’s very traditional to see cheese, nuts and dried fruit on a tray together as holiday items,” says Cain. She recommends cross-merchandising cheese and dried figs or dates together. Grab a block of good Parmesan (which does not have to be kept refrigerated all the time) from the deli department and set up an example tray.

“Figs are perfect with wine and port,” says Cain, so that’s another option for cross-merchandising; or place dried figs near the bagged salad, so people think to use them as salad toppers.

7. CREATE PARTNERSHIPS

“We’re always willing to welcome retail partners who want to work with us on joint social media initiatives,” says Hanagan-Muths of Natural Delights. “We can provide a lot of materials to help educate consumers about this product. If a retailer has a registered dietitian, we would be happy to create a connection with that individual. They’ll get better merchandising and connect with the consumers we’re driving to retail.”

Valley Fig Growers also has a strong social media presence. The company offers frequent contests to help draw consumers to its social platforms and get them thinking about how to cook with dried figs. Cain says she’s happy to discuss partnerships and promotions with retailers.

8. SAMPLE, SAMPLE, SAMPLE

“I think sampling is a real key,” says Heinen’s Latessa. “A sampling program will increase movement and sales.” That’s especially true for the almond and coconut date rolls, he says. “When people try them, they go, ‘Wow, these aren’t bad.’”

Williams agrees, but adds this caveat: “If you’re going to sample, make sure you’re not hiding the products. You have to have them in a highly visible location and make sure guests shopping can’t miss them.”

pb



Don't 'Coast' Through Summer Selling Season

BY DON HARRIS

On many occasions throughout the years there have been times during the key summer selling season where results from the previous week did not live up to expectations and there were concerns in the boardroom as to why sales didn't live up to projections. Often times the produce team offered suggestions of special seasonal promotions to help spur sales. Management would reply, "It's summertime, you don't need any special promotions." Once again management proves to us they "just don't get it"!

Just because it's the summer selling season — and produce is in abundant supply and available in peak quality and flavor — that is no reason to let up on promotional activity. In fact, this season offers many opportunities for additional promotional activity utilizing not only the abundance of produce but the opportunities to educate and to engage with customers.

Summer is the best season to utilize the assets you don't normally have available during other parts of the year. These resources include utilization of local farmers and growers to interact with your customers and to "show off" their produce. They can share stories as well as the process that they go through to harvest these beautiful fruits and vegetables. Farmers can provide the "human" touch for the consumer to relate to the person who grew the product they are buying and consuming. The farmers and growers are all too happy, in most cases, to participate in such activities in stores near their farms and in other more urban areas. They have a great story to tell, and in most cases they tell it very well.

This type of activity can also help you overcome some of the challenges from other methods of retail. Many of us faced the challenge of local farmers markets and felt the impact of sales in the operation. By engaging in this type of activity with local farmers and growers you take a page out of the farmers market playbook and provide your retail establishment a similar atmosphere to that of a Saturday morning farmers market.

The simple act of bringing growers into the store to explain their story and promote their products levels the playing field with the farmers market in terms of perception. As we all know, perception is reality. The farmers markets enjoy a perception of freshness and local flavor while in general regular retail grocery stores do not have this advantage. The simple action of bringing growers and farmers into the store helps to "cultivate" the same perception for your stores. No amount of regular advertising or television ads can affect perception as much as the simple act of allowing farmers and growers access to the customer and the customer the opportunity

to learn from the producers.

The second form of retail that is addressed by utilizing this type of event marketing is the online grocery shopping service that offers convenience as its main selling point. By showing the relationship between the producers and the products you are selling in your store, you "breathe life" into this retail activity. Online grocery competitors simply don't have the methods to impact the perception of freshness that these types of events can produce for your produce departments. This activity illustrates a major selling point by simply showing that there is more to the product than just quick delivery and ease of access. It provides, once again, that "human" touch to the sale of fresh produce. This has proven to be an ineffective way to combat the competitive challenge presented by these online shopping services.

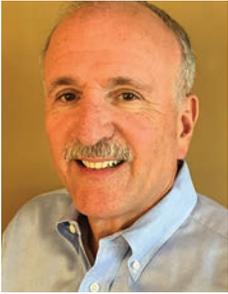
This type of event marketing is, by no means, the only one to utilize. Over the years, successful retailers utilized promotions such as "Summer Berry Patch," "Melon Mania," "Grape Extravaganza," and "Create a Summer Salad," just to mention a few, to further stimulate sales. These types of promotions are limited only by your imagination and creativity in combining the abundant key summer items into enticing themes that promote this peak availability of quality, full of flavor fruits and vegetables.

Utilizing these types of events also helps to promote the perception by your customers that there is something different every time they enter your department. It is a well-documented fact that this "discovery" perception drives customers to purchase products they may not be familiar with because of the enticing promotional activity. This type of strategy "flies in the face" of convention with a focus on efficiencies and cost control. However, it has been proven over and over again that this type of activity generates the kind of sales and excitement is worth far more than just a few dollars that is saved by being more efficient and practical. So if you are going through a period of lackluster sales this summer, you might want to try this strategy. I'm sure you won't be disappointed and on the contrary will be thoroughly satisfied with the results.

pb

This season offers many opportunities for additional promotional activity utilizing not only the abundance of produce but the opportunities to educate and to engage with customers.

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.



A Lesson On Honesty

BY ALAN SIGER

I was a 22-year-old rookie salesman when I joined Consumers Produce in 1973. Prior to my full-time role, I worked at Consumers in the warehouse and also drove a truck on some weekends and school breaks, but I knew little about trading produce. My father was one of the principals of the company, and was in charge of the “wet” department, but I worked in the “dry” department for one of his partners, Albert “Ubbie” Cohen.

Throughout the industry, Ubbie was known as a tough but fair trader. He wasn’t the easiest guy in the world to work for. In fact, he once chewed me out for being a few hours late when I was forced to detour around a tornado that leveled part of south-western Ohio. However, Ubbie knew the grape and tree fruit business as well as anyone on the planet, and whether he realized it or not, he was a wonderful teacher for me.

The best lessons are learned not by being told how or what to do, but by learning from others’ actions. I spent hours watching Ubbie sell on the old Pittsburgh terminal market, and often listened in on his phone conversations with our growers and shippers. From day one, Ubbie included me in every aspect of his produce life.

One of the most important lessons I ever learned was from an incident that occurred just about a month after I joined the company. A solid load of California cherries arrived from Nash De Camp Company, and I was helping the warehouse supervisor by checking in the load and making sure the product count was correct.

I carefully counted the pallets as they came off the trailer, and my tally amounted to 22 pallets of 99 for a total of 2,178 boxes. The bill of lading called for 20 pallets totaling 1,980 boxes, 198 less than I counted. I double checked the count and called over the warehouse supervisor to recheck with me and once again, we came up with two extra pallets.

I was raised by my parents to be honest, and to treat others as I would wish to be treated. But this was “business.” What should I do? Even 40-plus years ago, cherries were an expensive commodity; those 198 extra boxes were worth close to \$5,000, which was more than three months of salary for a first-year salesman. My instinct was to sign for the extra boxes, but I was new on the job and decided to call Ubbie and ask what to do.

I told Ubbie the load was over by two pallets, and he told me to count them again. I had worked with Ubbie long enough to know it was easier to recount rather than to tell him the load had been

counted four times already. After the fifth count confirmed the first four, I called Ubbie back and told him with absolute certainty that we received 198 more boxes of cherries than the bill of lading called for.

These cherries were shipped from Linden, CA, out of a packing shed that was operational just six weeks per year. To this day, cherry deals operate at a frantic pace with packing lines going and trucks loading around the clock. The year 1973 was way before anyone used computers in their daily operations; though larger companies may have done electronic invoicing, shipping and inventory were handled by some sort of manual system. There was very little chance that

the shipper would realize they were missing two pallets, and even if they found the shortage, there was almost zero chance they would know where the product went.

I asked Ubbie what I should do, and how many boxes I should sign for. Ubbie responded: “What do you mean, what should I do?” he yelled through the phone. “You sign for what we received.”

He explained that like our customers, our suppliers were the lifeblood of our business, and that mutual trust was the key to those relationships. He then asked what would happen if we had a load come in and didn’t realize we had a shortage until after the bills were signed. Wouldn’t we want the shipper to treat us the same way? He then told me that he was disappointed that I even *asked the question, and that when it comes to honesty, the answer is always an easy one.*

Today’s sophisticated computer tracking systems almost eliminate the possibility of untraceable shortages, but it doesn’t change the business value of honesty and integrity. I’m proud to say that when I left Consumers Produce a couple of years ago, my relationships with my suppliers were still built on that same solid foundation.

I’m sure many of you have learned some life lessons while working in our industry. If you’d care to share your story, I’d love to hear from you at alan@sigergroup.com.

pb

Today’s sophisticated computer tracking systems almost eliminate the possibility of untraceable shortages, but it doesn’t change the business value of honesty and integrity.

Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.



The Long Term Game of US Fresh Produce Exports to Europe

BY EMMA GOUGH

Within the global fresh produce sector, the U.S. is considered to be one of the most dominant players. It was the third largest producer of fruit and vegetables last year, behind China and India with a production volume of about 61 million tonnes. In trade terms, it sits within some of the key fresh produce nations as both a leading importer and exporter.

There is an abundance of potential market opportunities around the world in Asia, Central America and the Middle East for the U.S. in terms of fresh produce, but despite exports to the EU falling during recent years, there still remains a number of opportunities and the size of the potential prize remains large. And while the EU market presented a number of challenges to the U.S. fruit sector in the past, there is evidence there is now also some light at the end of the tunnel.

The talks on the development of a free trade agreement are ongoing between the EU and the U.S. and this might act as a spark for renewed business in the fresh produce sector. The very recent decision of the U.K. to leave the EU has many implications, most of which are still unclear, but it could be that a separate trade agreement between the U.S. and the U.K. is also negotiated.

The EU itself is a large importing nation, with about 91 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables imported on an annual basis. Key products imported include bananas, potatoes, apples, tomatoes and oranges. These are all dominant fresh produce export categories for the U.S., particularly in terms of apples and oranges. As such, the question is raised as to why fresh produce trade volumes have fallen between the U.S. and Europe over the years, if there 'appears' to be an overlap in supply and demand.

The ever-changing nature of the European market has its part to play in this situation, and the following factors need to be considered:

There is increasingly strong competition for U.S. suppliers from locally based EU producers. A resurgence in local and seasonal fresh produce means many modern retailers are promoting their locally grown items in order to try and compete with niche routes to market such as farmers markets and artisanal producers. Working with, and being seen to support, the local horticultural and wider agricultural sector also fits their local social and corporate responsibility agendas.

The retail sector in Europe has become heavily focused upon price and value. Until recently, as an example, the four largest supermarkets in the U.K. were all promoting their own 'brand match' schemes to highlight their low prices and compete with the big named discounters like Aldi and Lidl.

There has been a move in Europe toward retailers owning integrated and dedicated supply chains. With a number of food scandals and scares over the past few years having such a deep and negative impact, retailers are keen to ensure they have full traceability and control of the products they are selling.

Doing business in Europe is really only for those that are prepared to hold out for the long term gain. The development of the EU-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will potentially be a boost to trade development across the board — if put into place — but as mentioned above, might be complicated by the decision of the U.K. to leave the EU in the recent referendum.

Historically, the European market has been difficult for U.S. suppliers, particularly when the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) worked against them at times in terms of both tariff and non-tariff barriers. The CAP will be subject to ongoing reform; however, regardless of progress made in the EU/US free trade talks, there will — over a period of time — be more companies open to non-EU-based suppliers. This will take time.

It can often be felt that other developing markets such as India, China and Latin America — while all still challenging markets — can present quicker returns and better opportunities for U.S. exporters. It's important to remember that as well as being an important import market in its own right, there are key European countries, such as the Netherlands, that support high levels of re-exporting to other international markets that the U.S. is interested in, and this presents further opportunities and new markets for U.S. produce.

The key point to note is trying to enter into a new export market takes a lot of time and investment. The U.S. has been a recognised supplier to the EU market, especially to the U.K. and Scandinavia over a long period of time. Losing an export market, and then trying to reclaim it, though, takes considerably more effort.

As I mentioned, Europe is still a large-scale fruit and vegetable importer. Many of the markets in the EU still rely upon these imports in order to provide customers with the vast variety of fresh produce items they have become accustomed to and demand. Whether that be in the scorching summer months or the depth of winter, the majority of consumers want access to fruit and vegetables without being restricted by local seasonality issues.

The sheer diversity of Europe (27 countries, more than 500 million consumers, varying fruit and vegetable preferences, the growth of online and convenience markets, etc.), means there are wide and varying opportunities out there for U.S. exporters. It will never be a short-term process, but the size of the prize will remain strong for those willing to play the game.

pb

Gough is a senior consultant at Promar International, an agricultural consultancy based in the U.K. and a subsidiary of Genus plc. She has worked on a number of national and international fresh produce projects over the years — including those focused on the EU and South East Asia. Gough won the BIAC Young Consultant of the Year Award in 2013 and is a committee member for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Food and Drink Group.



Fried Chicken: The Gateway To Greater Produce Consumption

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

Fried chicken is one of the biggest trends in foodservice this year. Fried chicken? Really? Yes, it's true. As beef consumption drops and pork consumption stays flat, our chicken intake just keeps increasing. Part of this is due to nutrition and health concerns, and part of it is due to sustainability messages. People believe chicken is better for them and better for the planet compared to other sources of animal protein.

So how did fried chicken become such a hot trend in restaurants this year? According to Michael Whiteman of Baum + Whiteman, a NYC-based restaurant consultancy, chefs are "obsessing over fried chicken" with a lot of attention being focused on fried chicken sandwiches.

The National Restaurant Association's "What's Hot 2016 Culinary Forecast" shows fried chicken ranks No. 1 as a perennial favorite of chefs (diners, too); chef-driven fast casual concepts ranks fried chicken No. 2 overall for 2016 trends.

Which brings us to Danny Meyer's Shake Shack and its fried chicken sandwich offerings: Shake Shack released its Chick'nShack sandwich nationwide in January 2016 after its original ChickenShack sandwich was announced as an LTO (limited time offer) in July 2015.

The fast-casual Shake Shack concept was founded by industry icon Danny Meyer, and anything he does is closely watched and quickly imitated by others in the restaurant industry.

Have you tried Nashville Hot Chicken yet? It's crack. Well okay, it's not crack. It's fried chicken dipped in a sweet, spicy sauce. KFC is now selling Nashville Hot Chicken. So is Yard House, part of the Darden restaurant empire.

Hattie B's is an original Nashville Hot Chicken restaurant with a cult-like following. An online search for Hattie B's spicy sauce recipe shows the inclusion of lard, brown sugar, cayenne pepper, and other spices. It's not exactly health food, right? That's where the opportunity for produce comes in.

Let's say you're ordering a fried chicken sandwich or a bucket of Nashville Hot Chicken. In the consumer's mind, ordering a few vegetable side dishes "balances" out the meal. "I'll have the two-piece Nashville Hot Chicken meal with a side of coleslaw, and a side of sweet potatoes, and a Diet Coke."

So how can produce professionals capitalize on America's love affair with fried chicken? Here are some ideas to get you started, whether you're in retail foodservice or produce sales.

Fried Chicken Sandwiches

Sandwiches need toppings and coleslaws need updating. What can be shredded and added to the coleslaw to add more color and flavor? If the fried chicken is mild, add some heat with chilis or cay-

enne pepper in the dressing. If the fried chicken is spicy, keep the coleslaw on the milder, sweeter side with shredded apple. While kale is falling out of favor, think about other cruciferous vegetables that add a health halo, like shaved Brussels sprouts or Kalettes. And consider the dressing. What can you add to the coleslaw dressing in terms of spices, herbs, and aromatics to add a new twist to a familiar favorite?

Fried Chicken Dinners

Here is where the options are endless for produce. From simple sides like watermelon and corn-on-the cob to more chef-driven options such as sweet potato salad; jalapeno mac and cheese; collard greens with house-made vinegar; a watermelon and feta salad; or a roasted poblano, corn, and black bean salad; there are so many ways to entice diners to add more produce to their fried chicken dinners.

Beverages

I love seeing restaurants that use produce in summer beverages and cocktails. Strawberry lemonade is adored across this country while diners in Northern California, where I live, swoon over options like lemon verbena iced tea with frozen blackberries. Frozen berries and grapes can be used as ice cubes in a variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. From a sensory perspective, the acid from fresh produce can offset the richness of fried chicken. And the addition of a few cucumber and lemon slices to ice water can make the water feel more special ... and the chicken feel more healthful.

How can produce professionals capitalize on America's love affair with fried chicken?

A Final Note About Fried Chicken

A few years ago at a Produce for Better Health Foundation meeting, Harry Balzer, chief industry analyst and vice president of the NPD Group, was talking about U.S. food intake trends. He asked the audience, "How many of you have eaten fried chicken the past month?" Not a single hand was raised. Balzer laughed as he said most audience members at every conference he speaks at sit on their hands when asked that question.

He went on to explain that NPD data show fried chicken consumption has been steadily increasing in this country since the 1980s. Even though we don't admit to loving fried chicken, most of us do. Fried chicken is not a trend that will soon disappear. Let's embrace this delicious trend and figure out how produce can capitalize on it. **pb**

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer's daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc. Learn more about her business at www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com. Follow her insights on food and flavor issues on Twitter @AmyMyrdalMiller.



The Critical Role Of Produce In Menu Ideation

BY MAEVE WEBSTER, PRESIDENT, MENU MATTERS

The foodservice industry is as competitive as it's ever been, with competition elevated due in large part to a struggling economic recovery, increased competition from a broader array of away-from-home sources, and a lack of significant organic traffic growth. Menu innovation is a critical element of any operator's effort to remain a competitive force in an industry largely focused on share grabbing. As such, operators must carefully consider their culinary ideation efforts, incorporating ingredients that appeal to large shares of their patrons while creating experiences a consumer can't replicate elsewhere. Produce, now more than ever, is playing a critical role.

Produce Continues to Shine on the Menu

At this point, no one should be surprised that produce is enjoying a level of focus on American menus not seen in many years. Operators are turning to produce for a number of reasons, and designing dishes to be more produce-forward if not exclusively vegetarian.

Several macro trends are driving produce forward ideation. U.S. consumers continue to be more health-conscious now than in previous years, but that health consciousness has shifted. Rather than focusing on low calorie, weight-loss-oriented foods, consumers have an increased awareness and appreciation for the functional role of produce in a well-balanced diet. Vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants are an important part of many consumers' decision-making process when selecting a menu item.

The increased focus on protein in food has also aided produce and its use among foodservice operators. Though all sources have benefited from the heightened importance of protein, the demand for healthier protein has naturally led to greater awareness and use of plant-based proteins. More often than not, the plant-based protein options are not fully replacing animal-based proteins but rather augmenting them and aiding operators in reducing animal-protein serving sizes.

Additionally, the locally sourced movement continues and, with it, continues the use of produce, which is arguably the most readily accessible local food product. Locally sourced, however, is merging with and morphing into a broader focus on clean labels. Ultimately, nothing can be cleaner on a label than produce.

Using Produce To Drive Innovation

When designing new menu items or limited-time-offer promotions, the ultimate "sweet spot" is an item that scores high on both consumer purchase intent and perceived uniqueness. Produce seems most likely to approach the sweet spot with impactful preparations such as grilled mushrooms, roasted roma tomatoes and grilled onions, but others are driven more by being less common on U.S. menus such as corn on the cob and Chinese broccoli. It's a difficult position to

attain with uniqueness typically inversely related to purchase intent. In fact, according to Datassential's SCORES database, no operator within the past 12 months featured a new item or promotion that's scored in the top 50 both for purchase intent and for uniqueness.

How, then, can an operator achieve this elusive position? Often produce can be leveraged to elevate the uniqueness of an item. Purchase intent for U.S. consumers overall is still largely driven by animal-based proteins and indulgent ingredients. But, some of the highest uniqueness scoring individual ingredients when reviewing the consumer feedback in the SCORES database are produce items.

In this role, produce can be used as an accent ingredient that lends authenticity, intrigue, and visual punch without fundamentally altering the safety of the dish. As impactful preparation techniques are applied to the produce, the uniqueness increases as does the overall appeal of the item.

Of course, if the type of produce applied to an item is extremely unfamiliar or relatively divisive, the uniqueness impact can revert to the more traditional inverse relationship with purchase intent and turn the item into a relatively niche item rather than one with mass market appeal.

Unique Doesn't Mean Bizarre

When considering which produce may have the greatest impact on an item's overall uniqueness rating, an operator does not have to draw from the most difficult to source varieties or those most likely to negatively impact profit margin. In fact, many of the produce items with some of the greatest average uniqueness impacts are those that are relatively familiar to many consumers.

But, it's not the uniqueness of the individual ingredient but rather the application of the ingredient. Pears, for example, are not significantly unique when leveraged in a dessert but can be extremely unique to many U.S. consumers when featured in a savory appetizer or paired with a protein in an entrée.

Often, uniqueness can be driven as much by the freshness of the item, as is the case with fresh herbs. In other situations, the preparation technique applied to the ingredient such as charring green onions elevates the perceived uniqueness without pushing a consumer too far out of their comfort zone.

With anything, understanding your patron based on demographics, geography, culture, and needs is the most critical element to designing successful introductions or promotions. Regardless, produce can play a critical role in supporting effective menu ideation. **pb**

Maeve Webster is president of Menu Matters, a consultancy focused on supporting foodservice operators and manufacturers identify, understand, prioritize and leverage trends.

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COMING FULL CIRCLE

In the early 1970's, Vito Comasta (pictured left) and Harold Fleisher (pictured right), were captured in this photo discussing business on the Hunts Point Produce Market.

Comasta was one of Fleisher's two partners with his company, Haral Produce, which was located on Row A where A&J Produce presently resides. The company was originally started sometime in the late 1960s by Fleisher and Al Eisenberg.

"They sold the full gamut of produce: strawberries, wet vegetables, local produce, and they were one of the biggest mushroom dealers in New York City at the time," says Fleisher's son Mike Fleisher, who now works in sales, management and as a head buyer for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.

"I was a young kid who went to the Market with my dad on school holidays, and we also went to the old market on Washington Street where my grandfather worked," recalls Mike. "My grandfather was considered a 'jobber' at the time, and he would load trucks and bring inventory to retailers. I would go on trucks with my grandfather and got experience in the produce industry early on."

Harold also went to work with his father after he was released from the Navy, and then he became a buyer for Twin County Food Source in New Jersey. "Then my father eventually worked on the old

market with a company called Carbone Brothers," says Mike. "Then he moved to Nagelberg. He and Al met there and started Haral."

Mike went to five years of college at Syracuse University for a degree in engineering, but he always liked working with his dad on the Market. In the late 1970s, two stalls became available on Row C (right next to D'Arrigo). "So in the mid-80s, my father and I started H&M Fleisher," says Mike. "Dad retired around 1992. [As H&M Fleisher], we had about 17 years in business at that point, and then an opportunity came up where I could do good for D'Arrigo. I was tired of running a one-man business. It was one of those things where we were too big for small work and too small for big work. So I decided to join forces with D'Arrigo, and here we are 15 years later."

Although his dad is no longer with us, Mike still has fond memories of his time shared on the Market. "My dad was a carefree guy, and very well liked and respected in the industry — even in the heat of battle. He would say to customers, 'Go find out for yourself.'"

"My dad and I had a wonderful relationship. He respected what I did, and I respected everything he did. It was a good learning experience for both of us. It was great to work with my dad every day. It was fun."

pb

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