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MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS



SPECIAL SECTION



FLORAL MASTERS
OF MERCHANDISING

EXCLUSIVE



WAL-MART
PRICING REPORT

INSIDE

THE FRUIT BOWL • CONSUMER PACKAGING • WHOLESALERS
BERRY IMPORTS • JUICES • FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE • ROOT VEGETABLES
SWEET POTATOES • CALIFORNIA CITRUS • RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES • APPLES
TIE-INS • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • WEST MEXICO • NEW SALAD TRENDS
CRANBERRIES • ORGANIC CARE & HANDLING • STADIUM FOODSERVICE • PECANS
REGIONAL PROFILES: LOS ANGELES, ATLANTA AND CINCINNATI



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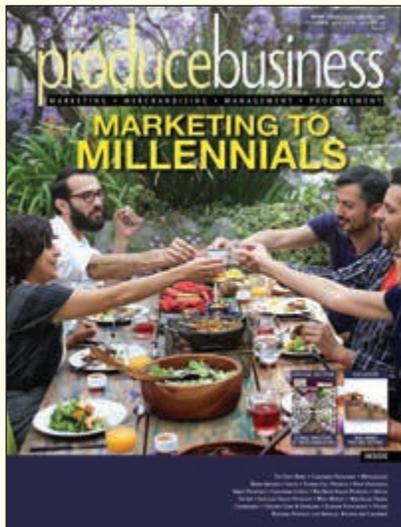


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MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS

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CORRECTIONS

In the August 2016 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, The Cattlemen's Beef Board should have been recognized alongside the Mushroom Council for The Marketing Excellence Award for the "Summer Grilling Promotion."

In the September 2016 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* there was a typo in the Prasino foodservice profile on page 142. The restaurant is "eco-friendly" rather than "echo-friendly."

Our regrets for the errors.

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produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



BRUCE STROCK
President,
S. Strock & Co., Inc.
Chelsea, MA

In 1975, Bruce Strock began his full-time career in the family produce business, S. Strock & Co., Inc., which was started in 1897 by his great-grandfather. "I first learned how to buy and sell," says Strock. "I worked in our business many summers prior to that, unloading and helping customers when they came in to pick up."

Strock recalls, in those days "we used hand trucks and manual pallet jacks that we pumped a foot pedal to raise, then stepped on another pedal to lower. Skill using a hand

truck was a highly prized commodity."

The manual work of a wholesaler has become easier over the years due to machinery, but so has the convenience of selling. "The biggest shift in the wholesale business during the past 10 years, in my opinion, is the use of instant communication," he says. "Smartphones with a camera, texting, and email changed the way we keep in touch with customers and suppliers. We can snap a photo of a product, add text, and send the photo on its way."

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 December issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

WIN A GOLF SET WITH BAG

The Callaway Men's Strata Complete 12-Piece Golf Club Set with Bag is designed for maximum performance. The set contains a driver, fairway wood, hybrid, irons with pitching wedge, putter and stand bag. The 460cc forged driver has a large sweet spot. Stainless steel irons offer a great combination of forgiveness and control. The lightweight, durable stand bag comes with five convenient pockets, an additional cooler pocket, a rain hood and a backpack strap system.



QUESTIONS FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- 1) From what country is the Costa Verde pineapple? _____
- 2) What pistachio brand has a \$50MM marketing spend for its new campaign? _____
- 3) What greenhouse brand is going to be featured at Epcot's Food & Wine Festival? _____
- 4) How many salad kits are featured on the Eat Smart ad? _____
- 5) What animal is drawn on the ad for NatureSweet Tomatoes? _____
- 6) Dulcinea/Pacific Trellis wants you to save a pumpkin by carving what brand of watermelon? _____

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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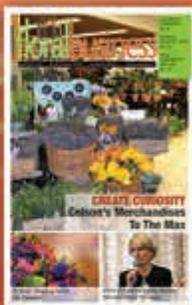


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FORWARD THINKING

OCTOBER 14 - 16, 2016

PMA FRESH SUMMIT

Conference Venue: Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: (302) 738-7100 • **Fax:** (302) 731-2409

Email: [jhillegas@pma.com](mailto:jhilligas@pma.com)

Website: pma.com/events/freshsummit

OCTOBER 16 - 20, 2016

SIAL - PARIS

Conference Venue: Parc des Expositions de Paris-Nord Villepinte, Paris

Conference Management: Comexposium, Paris

Phone: +33 6 34 32 28 62

Email: nelly.baron@comexposium.com

Website: sialparis.com

OCTOBER 19, 2016

CALIFORNIA CITRUS CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Exeter Memorial Building, Exeter CA

Conference Management: The Citrus Research Program, Visalia, CA

Phone: (559) 738-0246

Email: amy@citrusresearch.org

Website: CitrusResearch.org

NOVEMBER 2 - 4, 2016

AMSTERDAM PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Management: Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference, Amsterdam

Phone: 31 (0) 20-5219371

Email: Tommy.leighton@producebusinessuk.com

Website: amsterdamproduceshow.com

NOVEMBER 3 - 5, 2016

FPAACONVENTION

Conference Venue: Tubac Golf Resort, Tubac, AZ

Conference Management: Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Nogales, AZ

Phone: (520) 287-2707 • **Fax:** (520) 287-2948

Email: mar@freshfrommexico.com

Website: freshfrommexico.com

NOVEMBER 4 - 6, 2016

RETHINK FOOD

Conference Venue: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA

Phone: (845) 451-1457

Email: j_smyth@culinary.edu

Website: ciaprochef.com

DECEMBER 1 - 3, 2016

HEALTHY KIDS COLLABORATIVE

Conference Venue: CIA Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA

Phone: (707) 967-1100

Email: mark.p.linder@gmail.com

Website: ciaprochef.com

DECEMBER 5 - 8, 2016

NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York City

Conference Management: Eastern Produce Council, Short Hills, NJ and PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL

Phone: (212) 426-2218

Email: info@nyproduceshow.com

Website: nyproduceshow.com

JANUARY 4 - 6, 2017

POTATO EXPO

Conference Venue: Marriott Marquis, San Francisco, CA

Conference Management: National Potato Council, Washington, D.C.

Phone: (202) 682-9456 **Fax:** (202) 682-0333

Email: questions@potato-expo.com

Website: potato-expo.com

JANUARY 5 - 8, 2017

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLE CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Savannah International Trade and Convention Center, Savannah, GA

Conference Management: Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, LaGrange, GA

Phone: (877) 994-3842 • **Fax:** (706) 883-8215

Email: katkinson@asginfo.net

Website: gfvga.org

JANUARY 17 - 19, 2017

WORLDS OF HEALTHY FLAVORS

Conference Venue: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, Napa Valley, CA

Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA

Phone: (707) 967-1100

Email: mark.p.linder

Website: ciaprochef.com

JANUARY 22 - 24, 2017

WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW

Conference Venue: Moscone Center, San Francisco, CA

Conference Management: Specialty Food Association, New York City

Phone: (212) 482-6440

Email: kfarrell@specialtyfood.com

Website: fancyfoodshows.com

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Deluge of FDA Documents Released as FSMA Compliance Deadlines Approach



BY JENNIFER McENTIRE, PH.D.
VICE PRESIDENT, FOOD SAFETY & TECHNOLOGY
UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Just weeks before the first major Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) compliance deadlines go into effect, FDA released a multitude of documents, including several draft guidance documents, and extended the compliance deadlines for several types of operations.

Of greatest interest to the produce industry, and prompted by the efforts of United Fresh and others, is the additional 16 months that registered facilities' packinghouses have to comply with the Preventive Controls for Human Food rule.

Rather than a first compliance date of September 19, 2016, facilities solely engaged in packing and/or holding activities conducted on produce RACs (Raw Agricultural Commodity) and/or nut hulls and shells will need to comply beginning January 26, 2018, which coincides with the first compliance deadline for the Produce Safety Rule. Note that the deadline extension does not change which rule applies to an operation; it simply aligns the deadlines, so packinghouses and other specified operations have until at least January 2018 to comply with whichever rule applies.

United Fresh president and chief executive Tom Stenzel says, "the FDA recognizes packinghouses should have the same amount of time to prepare for regulatory compliance — regardless of whether they are located on or off a farm. The extended compliance dates for packinghouses subject to the Preventive Controls Rule (beginning January 26, 2018) allows us time to continue to work with FDA and the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance to develop a modified curriculum for these unique types of operations that are critical

parts of the fresh produce supply chain."

In the same document, the FDA acknowledged the criteria for secondary activities farms did not take into account some business relationships and structures that still keep with FDA's intent.

If an operation would be considered a secondary activities farm except for the ownership of the facility, but is still under common ownership with the primary production farm(s) that grow, harvest, and/or raises the majority of the RACs harvested, packed and/or held by the operation, the compliance dates are extended to align with the dates in the Produce Safety Rule.

"Coloring" was not listed as a manufacturing/processing activity that does not transform a RAC into a processed food. Upon further consideration, FDA is extending the compliance dates for facilities that would qualify as a farm if they did not color RACs. These now match the compliance dates in the Produce Safety Rule.

FDA also extended compliance deadlines for specific provisions of other rules, mainly related to needing to receive written assurance when a customer will be controlling a hazard. This would apply, for example, to a grower sending product for commercial processing with a kill step.

Other deadline extensions were provided for importers of food contact substances under Foreign Supplier Verification Program.

That same day, the FDA also released the first five chapters and two appendices of guidance related to the implementation of the Preventive Controls rule. These are released as draft guidance, and comments are due February 21, 2017.

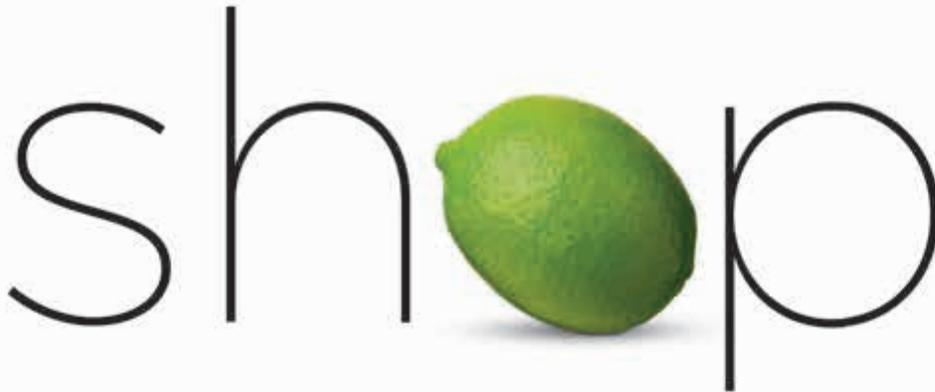
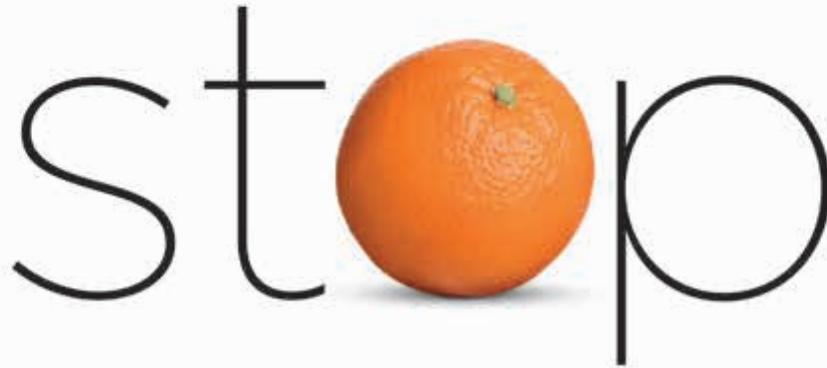
The very next day, the FDA released three additional draft guidance documents: two related to compliance with the Preventive Controls for Animal Food rule, and one that helps distinguish farms from registered facilities. The last document provides explanations and examples of terms such as harvesting, packing, and holding, particularly as these terms pertain to RACs. The draft guidance explains the difference between packing and packaging as well as distinguishing blending from mixing.

The draft includes helpful tables that identify activities noted in the final rule, as well as additional examples of activities that fall under each category. Importantly, a single activity (e.g., washing) can be considered in multiple categories (e.g., harvesting, packing, or manufacturing/processing in the case of washing).

Numerous examples are given that show, based on the activity conducted and the business relationships, whether a location is a farm, farm mixed-type facility (required to register), secondary activities farm, or registered facility.

"With the first compliance deadline for the Preventive Controls Rule less than a month away, our members continue to ask questions about which rule(s) they are subject to," says Stenzel. "We are hopeful that the draft guidance pertaining to industry classification for farms and facilities released will provide examples that help the fresh produce industry understand which rules apply to them."

Undoubtedly many companies will still find their questions unanswered. Official interpretations of FDA rules can be obtained by submitting an inquiry to FDA's Technical Assistance Network.



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JOINING HANDS IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

There is something very appealing about the idea of strategic planning. The notion that the way to achieve what you want in life is to identify it, develop a plan to get there, and then proceed to hold people accountable for the actions necessary to achieve this plan is immensely satisfying. It implies that success is just out there waiting for us to target it.

Lord knows I have run enough strategic planning sessions to see the good that can come from this kind of methodical approach. You evaluate options, examine competencies, and empower people to do much more through a strategic planning process.

Yet it also is true that my personal experience in business has not shown this to be the only way or even the primary way in which businesses advance, including my own.

My family roots in the produce business are deep. My great-grandfather, Jacob Prevor, took the skills learned in our family's multi-generational produce business back in Russia and immigrated to the United States, opening our business in the old Wallabout Produce Market in Brooklyn.

My grandfather, Harry Prevor, took what he learned from his father and moved the family business to the old Washington Street Market in Manhattan, setting up as both a wholesaler and auction buyer. My father moved the business to the Bronx, becoming an original tenant at the opening of the Hunts Point Market, diversifying into export, import, retail and much more.

This son took this heritage and what he learned working in the family business and, after reaching out to his old fraternity brother, Ken Whitacre, launched PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine in 1985. The issue you hold in your hands is thus our anniversary issue — representing 31 years of growth and progress.

Over time, we grew PRODUCE BUSINESS with an imperative of "Initiating Industry Improvement," combined with a focus on marketing, merchandising, management and procurement, to give the industry a mechanism that helped elevate the trade. We were rewarded with the rarest of results — in the age of the Internet, a print publication that has grown every year for over three decades.

Yet we didn't stop there. Some of our growth was horizontal. As we moved into adjacent fields, with publications such as FLORAL BUSINESS, DELI BUSINESS and CHEESE CONNOISSEUR, we brought back to the produce industry new ideas these industries were using to grow and progress.

We also went deeper vertically, trying to serve the produce industry in new ways. We branched out into websites and e-newsletters, developed a research and consulting arm, took on the task of facilitating share groups to help expand the use of best practices, and we moved into events — working domestically with the Eastern Produce Council to launch The New York Produce Show and Conference, spinning off The Global Trade Symposium and "Ideation Fresh" Foodservice Forum as co-located events, and with Cornell University to launch the Foundational Excellence program.

More recently, recognizing not only the importance of international trade in produce but, also, the imperative for intellectual exchange on a global plane, and realizing that ideas have no borders, we worked with the Fresh Produce Consortium to launch The London Produce Show and Conference and, this year, in November, we are unveiling The Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference.

It is not a coincidence that all three cities (New York, London and Amsterdam) are among the Top 10 cities in the Innovation Index as produced by *2thinknow*. That in itself shows our different approach. When others are calculating how many booths they can sell in some city, we look for where brilliant people want to meet and where innovation percolates.

Yet all this did not come about as a result of a strategic plan. It came about as a result of two things: excellent execution and deep relationships.

The new event in Amsterdam is a great example. Some leaders and longtime friends in the Dutch industry attended both our events in New York and London and asked if we could bring the concept to Amsterdam. With their help, we did. But if we hadn't built strong relationships for decades, and if we hadn't impressed people with the events in New York and London, the Amsterdam event

would have never come about.

The next stage of our expansion further illustrates this point. We met Gustavo Yentzen Wilson when he was just a young buck working for the Chilean Exporters Association. We built a good relationship, not because of any great strategic plan to capitalize on his career, but because we always try to help.

In 2007, after he launched his own company, Yentzen Consulting, we named him to our 40-Under-Forty class. In time, Gustavo would build an important company, producing the most significant international business publications for the produce industry. They are published in English, Spanish and Chinese: FreshFruitPortal.com, PortalFruticola.com and ChinaFruitPortal.com

Now we are pleased to announce that we have joined hands with Gustavo, and Yentzen Consulting and its portals are now part of the Phoenix Media Network. The respect we have for Gustavo is great. He does many of the things we do in three languages, which makes us think of the quip that Fred Astaire was a great dancer, but Ginger Rogers did everything he did, only backwards and in high heels!

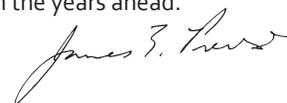
We undertake this combination for three reasons:

It lets us serve readers beyond the English-speaking world by expanding our reach to include Spanish and Chinese speakers.

It lets us serve the industry with cutting-edge digital technology.

With Gustavo and his team, it enriches our stock of human capital, which is the *sine qua non* of helping the industry.

As we integrate content and sources, readers and attendees, we will rededicate ourselves to our commitment to Initiate Industry Improvement, and we will be mindful that success is not just an outgrowth of planning, but of being prepared to take advantage of the serendipitous opportunities life presents. In some ways, that ability is harder than making a plan. If we can help the industry be more effective, we will have done a lot of good. It is to this task that we dedicate ourselves in the years ahead. **pb**



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**CATEGORY PARTNERS
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Category Partners announces the promotion of **Tom Barnes** to fill the position of chief executive. Mac Johnson, the founding President/chief executive of Category Partners, is stepping back and refocusing his efforts on driving value and growth for clients in the retail grocery channel. Prior to joining Category Partners three years ago, Barnes held a senior position at Wada Farms Marketing Group leading a major retailer account group for more than six of his 13 years with the company. With a technology background and a strong understanding of the retail world, Barnes is poised to take Category Partners to the next level.



TRANSITION

**KING FRESH PRODUCE
KANSAS CITY, MO**



King Fresh Produce hires **Drew Clubb** as part of the sales and marketing team of the company's Kansas City, MO, office. Originally from Columbia, MO, Clubb earned his agricultural business degree from Northwest Missouri State University. He is tasked with focusing on supplier and grower affiliations and strategic sales development. Clubb, more recently, worked in the field of banking and finance prior to his appointment as a sales representative with King Fresh Produce.

TRANSITION

**HOUWELING'S GROUP
CAMARILLO, CA**



Houweling's announces **Kevin Doran's** appointment to chief executive of the Houweling's Group of Companies. Doran joined the company in 2015 as COO and was added the responsibility of president this past January. Doran has extensive experience in the produce industry both in North America and Europe. His career's foundation was built in retail merchandising, marketing and operations.

TRANSITION

**ALPINE FRESH, INC.
DORAL, FL**

The grower/packer/shipper of fresh fruits and vegetables welcomes its new food safety director **Lilia Rivera**. With a degree in public health and having led the compliance department in a fresh-cut processing facility for the past five years, Rivera is well versed in all things food safety. Her vast experience in HACCP, test and hold programs, product testing, environmental testing, and social compliance has made her an asset to the industry.



TRANSITION

**ECO FARMS
TEMECULA, CA**



Eco Farms hires two new produce industry veterans: **Jeff Davis** and **Mike Nunez**. Davis will be national accounts manager and Nunez will be the key accounts manager. While originally incorporated in 1974 as a California avocado and citrus grower-shipper, Eco Farms continues to grow as a fully integrated avocado and citrus handler with avocado programs in California, Mexico, Peru and Chile.



TRANSITION

**INTERNATIONAL
BLUEBERRY
ORGANIZATION**



During the International Blueberry Organization (IBO) Summit in Argentina and Uruguay, the group announced Peter McPherson would take the reigns as the new president, succeeding Chilean Blueberry Committee president Andres Armstrong in the role. Argentinean Blueberry Committee (ABC) president Carlos Stabile will step into Mr. McPherson's previous role of treasurer, while British and Polish industry representative Stephen Taylor will continue as IBO secretary. McPherson, who is general manager for Australia's largest integrated fresh produce company Costa Group, said his election was unexpected, but certainly an honor.

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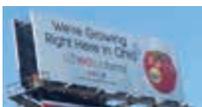


ANNOUNCEMENT

FOREVER FRESH EMBRACES CHILEAN AND PERUVIAN CHERRIES

Forever Fresh, LLC, (Moorestown, NJ) a vertically integrated sales and marketing company reports a positive outlook for Chilean and Peruvian winter fruit. Forever Fresh has the ability to repack cherries using state-of-the-art cherry repacking lines on both the East and West Coasts to ensure the highest quality cherries in the market. Cherries will be available in traditional standup pouches and controlled atmosphere 1-pound top seal clamshells.

ANNOUNCEMENT



RED SUN FARMS JOINS 'OHIO PROUD' PROGRAM

Red Sun Farms' (Kingsville, Ontario, Canada) commitment to the Ohio community continues as the company become a member of the State Department of Agriculture's Ohio Proud program. Ohio Proud is a marketing association developed to promote Ohio made and grown goods throughout the state. Red Sun Farms broke ground on its newest greenhouse and distribution center back in June, and construction is on schedule in Wapakoneta. They expect to start the hiring process this fall, and to plant the first crop in early 2017.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MARKON COOPERATIVE HOSTS CHEF SUMMIT

The Salinas, CA-based foodservice provider brought together 22 chefs from across North America in Monterey, CA. Attendees went on produce field and facility tours, participated in discussions around vegetable-centered menu trends and produce varieties, and participated in a new products expo. The three-day event culminated in a research and development session with the chefs working together to create new and innovative marketable products.



ANNOUNCEMENT

CORRUGATED PACKAGING ALLIANCE SHARES INDUSTRY ADVANCEMENTS

The Corrugated Packaging Alliance (Itasca, IL) announces advancements in papermaking technology and the availability of high-quality fiber made it possible to reuse more old corrugated containers (OCC) in the manufacturing process while at the same time maintaining the strength characteristics of new boxes. The amount of fiber reused in boxes varies



for different applications, with recycled content being as high as 100 percent for packaging many consumer product goods items and as low as 38.4 percent for packaging direct food contact items like fresh produce. Corrugated products can be made from 100 percent new fiber, 100 percent recycled fiber, or a blend of these fibers. The worldwide market needs both new and recycled fiber in order to produce the best quality of corrugated material and ensure a consistent and sustainable supply.

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

ANNOUNCEMENT



LGS SPECIALTY SALES DISTRIBUTES 15,000 DARLING CLEMENTINES FOR SUSAN G. KOMEN RACE FOR THE CURE

The give-away of 15,000 Darling-brand Clementines by LGS Specialty Sales (New Rochelle, NY) employees at the Susan G. Komen Greater NYC Race for the Cure 5K Walk/Run, created a refreshing connection between cancer prevention and produce-centric nutrition. The company's participation in the event, which attracted more than 12,000 participants to New York City's Central Park, proved a great way for the fruit importer to give back to the community and connect with its customers in a whole new way.

ANNOUNCEMENT

NATALIE'S JUICE COMPANY ANNOUNCES NEW FALL FLAVORS

Natalie's Orchard Island Juice Company (Fort Pierce, FL) announces it will begin shipping bottles of its specially handcrafted, small batch Pumpkin Apple Spice and Orange Cranberry juices to grocers. The two special juice blends are limited edition, and will only be available for the few months leading up to the December holidays. Natalie's Pumpkin Apple Spice juice contains only three ingredients: American pumpkins, apples, pears and spices. Orange Cranberry contains only two ingredients: Florida oranges and American cranberries. The juices have no preservatives, no artificial ingredients and no added sugars. Both are non-GMO, locally sourced and freshly handcrafted in small batches.



Natalie's also teamed up with The Pink Fund, (a charity that provides financial support to women going through breast cancer treatment) to help women both financially and nutritionally via its Orange-Beet juice. Forty percent of proceeds on sales of Natalie's Orange-Beet juice during the month of October will go to The Pink Fund. (Beet juice has a compound in it that starves tumors of a protein they need to grow and also helps prevent cancer.)



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ANNOUNCEMENT



NATUREFRESH MOBILE GREENHOUSE CONNECTS WITH CONSUMERS

NatureFresh Farms' (Leamington, Ontario, Canada) mobile Greenhouse Education Center is gaining momentum with consumers who want to know how and where their tomatoes, bell peppers, and cucumbers are being grown and by whom. Now in its second full year, the company's #GreenInTheCity Tour has been visiting schools and retail locations across eastern North America since late spring connecting with consumer of all ages.

ANNOUNCEMENT

VISION COMPANIES' KISS MANGOS

The Vision Companies (Vision Import Group LLC, Hackensack, NJ) and Vision Produce Co. (Los Angeles, CA) announce the return of the KISS Mangos from Brazil.



This variety, which is being propagated to increase the varietal choices currently available, has the profile to meet consumers broadening appetite for mangos. This fruit, which is in the Palmer family, has a unique elongated ovate shape, dark pronounced red almost burgundy blush, internal apricot flesh color when fully mature, low fiber and a superior flavor profile.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MONTE PACKAGE EARNS PRIMUS CERTIFICATION

Monte Package Company (River-side, MI) is supplying North American growers, shippers, and marketers during the heart of the growing season, while engaged in a detail-oriented food safety protocol, pursuant to the company's initiative to become certified in food safety as an agricultural packaging and supply distributor for the produce industry. Engaging with Primus Labs, the company now has its nationwide distribution network 100 percent Primus certified for packaging and supply storage and distribution.



ANNOUNCEMENT

IDAHO POTATO TRUCK SETS SAIL



According to the Idaho Potato Commission (Eagle, ID), New Yorkers consume more potatoes than any other state. To show its appreciation, the Commission donated 12,000 pounds of Idaho potatoes (equivalent to the weight of the Big Idaho Potato on the Truck) to Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, New York's largest emergency food program. The giant spud embarked on her maiden voyage through the New York Harbor, which began in Brooklyn and passed all the major landmarks in South Manhattan including the Brooklyn Bridge, Statue of Liberty and Freedom Tower. During the next six weeks, 320,000 acres in Idaho will be harvested and yield more than 13 billion pounds of Idaho potatoes.

ANNOUNCEMENT



BRAGA FRESH INTRODUCES TWO NEW JOSIE'S ORGANICS CHOPPED SALADS

Braga Fresh (Soledad, CA) announces the debut of two new organic chopped salad kits under the Josie's Organics product line: Organic Sweet Kale Chopped Salad and Organic Asian Chopped Salad. Sweet Kale kit (10 ounce) is a mix of organic kale, green cabbage, broccoli and radicchio. The organic toppings included in the kit, roasted pumpkin seeds, dried cranberries and poppyseed dressing. Asian kit (12 ounce) is a crunchy combination of organic green cabbage, celery, carrots, cilantro and green onions, plus organic almonds, sesame seeds, wonton strips and tangy sesame dressing.

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ANNOUNCEMENT



D&K REBRANDING

D&K, formerly Dietz & Kolodenco Co., introduced its new name and brand last month by hosting an open house party for the company's valued vendors, customers and other wholesalers on the Chicago market. The rebranding kick-off included food and entertainment.

LAKESIDE ORGANIC GARDENS ANNOUNCES GROUNDBREAKING

Lakeside Organic Gardens, LLC (Watsonville, CA) announces the groundbreaking of the company's new facility at 25 Sakata Lane, Watsonville, CA. The first phase of the Lakeside construction will be a cooling and shipping facility, which will house sales offices as well. The additional phases will include administration offices and the headquarters for the Dick Peixoto Family of Companies.

ANNOUNCEMENT



ANNOUNCEMENT

MARKET FRESH CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING AT NEW CORPORATE OFFICE



Market Fresh Produce (Nixa, MO) celebrated the grand opening of its new corporate office building in Nixa with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The new office, located at

1824 N. State Hwy CC, is a 7,500 square foot stand-alone building that will not only accommodate the current corporate staff of 21 employees, but will also accommodate new staff as the company continues to grow at a rapid pace.

In addition to the office space, the new building has a fitness center, lunchroom, and conference rooms with state of the art technology, allowing the Nixa staff to communicate constantly with its other campuses located in Tampa, FL and Monett, MO.

ANNOUNCEMENT

D'ARRIGO BROS. CO. DONATES TO SUN STREET CENTERS

D'Arrigo Bros of California made a generous gift to help renovate the Laundry Room for the ongoing campaign, Renovations for Recovery, for capital improvements to a men's recovery center located in Salinas. Established in 1968, Sun Street Center rehabilitated an abandoned labor camp to help alcoholics to a path of recovery from addiction. The Social Model Theory of recovery established at Sun Street Centers helps men rebuild their families, give back to their community, and regain their self-esteem.



ANNOUNCEMENT

KITCHEN22 DEMOS NEW PRODUCTS

The company founded by three French foodies will showcase its five flavors of soups and four new flavors of fruit cups at PMA's Fresh Summit. The Miami, FL-based Kitchen22 creates recipes that are transparent, meaningful, and delicious. The chilled fruit cups are made using HPP (High Pressure Processing) technology, which makes the products safe to consume while preserving more nutrients than if they were heated or traditionally pasteurized. The chef-inspired soups are Carefully crafted in small batches for a home-style flavor; Non-GMO, all natural, and contain no preservatives, additives or artificial ingredients; Convenient for home or on-the-go (can be consumed cold, right out of the bottle).



"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.

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Right Man For The Right Time

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Bob Carey was the chief staff officer for the Produce Marketing Association and its predecessor organizations for nearly 40 years. He shepherded the organization through a perilous youth, which frequently teetered on bankruptcy to become the most important produce association, not only in America, but in the world. He was immensely insightful and a kind person, generous in heart and always cognizant of rising stars in our industry.

More than a quarter a century ago, still in my 20's I attended my first PMA board meeting. Bob took me aside one night and asked if I wanted to know the secret to running a trade association. Flattered to be so instructed by a master, I left the reception and went with Bob. We were in one of those southwestern resorts, whose hallways are paved in Mexican tile and walls curve in with stucco.

We walked a distance and went outdoors in the dark to one of the many casitas that lined the property. Bob took out an old skeleton key and entered it in the lock, it hesitated and creaked but when it opened, Bob turned on the light and before me, arrayed across each wall, were large sheets of paper where the PMA board's golf foursomes were being arranged.

The message: running an association was about people and personalities. It was managing ambition and lack thereof, and the success of an association executive was directly related to his ability to relate to people.

Bob Carey did many exceptional things in his years at PMA, most notably, working with a small group of board members, he repositioned the association to align with buyers, in the hope and expectation that this would bring the supplier base to PMA as well. It was a brilliant insight, executed well, and it allowed PMA to surpass United and achieve enormous financial success.

Yet the real test of a leader is not how he runs an organization. It is what happens to the organization after he is gone, and without a doubt, Bob Carey's single greatest contribution to the growth and management of PMA was in hiring Bryan Silbermann and, ultimately, encouraging his appointment as his successor.

It was not an obvious choice. Bryan came in as a kind of technocrat, uber-schooled in South Africa, Oxford and the University of Chicago. A South African, he was not naturally in sync with the personalities of mostly American produce executives. Yet Bob saw in Bryan something unique, and history has proved him right.

I don't think Bryan would object when I say had he not worked 13 years side by side with Bob Carey, learning how to combine the technocratic side he excelled in with Bob Carey's focus on personality and relationships, Bryan would not have become the association executive

that has so successfully guided PMA since he became CEO in 1996.

In the early years with PMA Bryan's triumphs were very much technical in nature. He was the main impetus in having the produce industry adopt uniform coding systems, such as PLUs and UPCs. These actions not only had much utility for produce, but they served to professionalize and elevate the industry, making us a true peer of grocery and allowing better decisions to be made because we had better information.

As time went on, his South African background let him see what most insular Americans missed, and he was primarily responsible for setting up a global program as one of the key foundations of the association, including establishing PMA's first affiliate: PMA Australia/New Zealand.

It is difficult to know where credit should be given and impossible to say what would have happened in the absence of one person. So, would Salinas leafy greens growers, after having suffered devastating losses following the 2006 Spinach Outbreak Crisis, have founded something like the Center for Produce Safety if Bryan had never been PMA's CEO? How can we know such a hypothetical?

But we can say that Bryan developed and institutionalized a model of using PMA money and staff resources to give birth to numerous

organizations, including the Produce for Better Health Foundation, the Center for Growing Talent by PMA, and the Center for Produce Safety at UC Davis. One suspects that this model will be used time and again as industry needs arise.

There have, of course, been controversies; many see the inability to make a deal with United to merge the associations as a failure, though others see it as an important step in preserving the unique culture at PMA.

Bryan actually wanted to retire for some time. But his fierce dedication to PMA didn't allow him to do this until, like Bob Carey before him, he was persuaded that he had a successor who could extend the success of the organization long into the future. Now with Cathy Burns, longtime retail executive now with three years' experience working with Bryan at PMA, established as President and soon to become CEO at PMA, Bryan finally sees the future of the association assured and thus is ready to take his leave.

A grateful industry thanks Bryan for service well-rendered and extends wishes that the wind should be always at his back. **pb**

Bryan Silbermann developed and institutionalized a model of using PMA money and staff resources to give birth to numerous organizations.

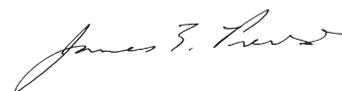


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How Does One Gain A Competitive Edge?



JIM PREVORA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

One can gain a competitive edge by doing things that others don't.

Conference, The London Produce Show and Conference and now, next month, the inaugural edition of The Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference, this has always struck me as the most compelling reason for participation: One can gain a competitive edge by doing things that others don't.

In Amsterdam, the focus is above and beyond the tasks that define the produce trade on a day-to-day basis. Four core themes – innovation,

Gaining a competitive edge is never easy. The difficulty is enhanced because most industries operate on a kind of closed information loop. Everyone goes to the same events, reads the same publications, talks to the same people. How is anyone going to acquire a sustainable differentiated edge?

I always thought I was fortunate in that, though my family business was focused on produce, a part of it was a business exporting produce to the Caribbean from the United States. In some cases, we could ship full trailers to a few islands, with items such as grapes, apples and pears going to the Dominican Republic for Christmas, for example. On core products such as potatoes we could bring full boats from Maine and Prince Edward Island in Canada down to Puerto Rico and Trinidad. There was also a substantial mixed-load business to smaller islands.

In a sense, we were like a service wholesaler delivering to individual supermarkets and hotels but via boat rather than truck. Many of our customers couldn't fill up even a 20-foot container with fresh produce alone, so they put us in the business of buying other refrigerated items. I remember visiting one of my father's old customers, Henderson's Supermarket in Curaçao, and seeing the shelves stocked not just with our

fruits and vegetables but also cheese, yogurt, butters and other items we had gotten into.

In time, this introduction to other items led us to ship frozen eviscerated poultry and eggs all around the world.

In my own professional career, after we launched *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, this exposure to other foods and products made it natural to launch magazines, such as *DELI BUSINESS*, *CHEESE CONNOISSEUR* and *FLORAL BUSINESS*. In one of the unintended consequences of diversifying into these fields, something unusual happened: I became a lot better at thinking about the produce industry.

Why was this? Basically by going to events in other fields, I learned things that were not common knowledge in the fresh produce industry. So I saw a larger fresh foods industry through a different prism, and thus provided value that others, schooled only in produce, could not.

Soon enough, I learned that, though the great continental events in produce were indispensable, that was both a strength and weakness. After all, if attendance is ubiquitous, it becomes a kind of ante for everyone to play the game. But, almost by definition, one can't differentiate oneself by doing only exactly what everyone else does.

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sustainability, education and health – challenge attendees to glimpse the future and try to understand the role produce and produce companies can play in the years to come.

Drawing on the Netherlands and the Dutch produce industry is key. There are many places with good growers; there are quite a number with excellent businesspeople; there are places

known as centers of leadership in technology; and still others have a history of commerce and trading in their citizens' very blood. Holland uniquely combines these elements, and thus offers the world a unique opportunity to learn how the integration of these insights and skillsets can, quite literally, determine the success or failure of an operation and, perhaps, even the future of the industry.

Being open to new things is the start of finding new ways to succeed and ways that address the challenges of the decades to come.

Though, of course, we have many retailers and big buyers on speaking panels, many of the speakers, drawn from fields such as medicine and education, are strangers to the produce trade. Few members of the industry will have ever heard any of them speak, which is, of course, the point — one can only earn an edge by exposing oneself to new ideas and new ways of thinking.

Offering unusual perspectives in places like New York, London and Amsterdam, which are the very centers of learning and culture, has had another unanticipated consequence: The attendees at these events — people from all corners of the globe — are also the best and brightest who gather to elevate themselves.

Of course, they do commerce, but, more than that, they realize value can come from building deep and lasting relationships that form in intimate communities, they realize that engaging with the agenda of tomorrow helps them position their companies, and themselves, for success today.

They realize that a competitive edge comes from stepping out and going beyond the norm, beyond the common. It is to these values that The Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference is dedicated. It is to people who commit to these values that the event is of service. Who knew it could all grow out of a visit to a supermarket in what was then an "island territory" of the now dissolved Netherlands Antilles halfway across the globe?

Nobody knew, of course, but being open to new things is the start of finding new ways to succeed and ways that address the challenges of the decades to come.



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**Agriculture
and Markets**

Marketing Vegetables in Elementary School Cafeterias to Increase Uptake

BY ANDREW S. HANKS, DAVID R. JUST, ADAM BRUMBERG

OBJECTIVES: Children do not eat enough servings of vegetables, underscoring the need for effective interventions encouraging this behavior. The purpose of this research was to measure the impact that daily exposure to branded vegetable characters has on vegetable selection among boys and girls in elementary schools.

METHODS: In a large urban school district, 10 elementary schools agreed to participate in the study. They were randomly assigned to a control condition or one of three treatment conditions: (1) a vinyl banner displaying vegetable characters that was fastened around the base of the salad bar; (2) short television segments with health education delivered by vegetable characters; or (3) a combination of the vinyl banner and television segments. We collected 22,206 student-day observations over a 6-week period by tallying the number of boys and girls taking vegetables from the school's salad bar.

What's Known on This Subject

This research builds on previous work illustrating how branded media that appeals to children can lead both boys and girls to take more fresh vegetables.

To increase fruit and vegetable intake in school-aged children, lawmakers passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Nutrition requirements associated with the new act include increasing the variety of vegetables served, ensuring that each lunch includes a serving of fruit or vegetables, serving more whole grain breads and pastas, and serving only 1% and fat-free milk varieties and only fat-free flavored milk.

In contrast to the regulatory approach, modifications to a child's external environment can influence food choice. For example, retrofitting one of two lunch lines to serve only healthier foods can decrease caloric intake among children, and simply paying children to eat their vegetables can also be effective. Furthermore, there is evidence that peer pressure and serving foods in more attractive bowls increase fruit

and vegetable uptake. The primary objective of the present research was to measure the effect of a vegetable marketing campaign in elementary school cafeterias to increase uptake of salad and other vegetables.

Branded Media Interventions

For this study, the branded media consist of a vinyl banner with vegetable characters printed across the front and short segments shown on a flat screen television. Researchers fastened each vinyl banner to the metal casing on the lower portion of the salad bar just below the area where the salad components are served and wrapped the banner around the whole salad bar. They also placed small stands above the sneeze shield to hold a second rectangular banner. Second, flat screen televisions were placed on small tables near the school's salad bar to attract children's attention. Short video segments with the branded vegetable characters delivering nutrition education messages ran on the televisions. In all the intervention schools, small decals printed with the vegetable characters were placed on the floor to direct traffic to the salad bars.

School Characteristics

Schools in this study were selected from a large urban northeastern U.S. school district and agreed to participate in a randomized controlled field study. Median household income in this district is just under \$52,000, and 82% of the students receive a free or reduced price lunch. Schools in the control group had the lowest average enrollment at 465 students, whereas schools in the combined intervention had the highest enrollment at 668 students. Furthermore, the percentage of students receiving a free or reduced price lunch was lowest in the schools with the combined intervention at 70% and highest in schools with the television segment-only intervention at 91%. Finally, the percentage of black or Hispanic students in the schools varied from 73% in the control schools to 94% in the schools

with a vinyl banner.

Data and Analysis

Two types of data were collected to measure the impact of media on student behavior. First, food preparation records were collected for all 10 schools. These records report the number of servings taken for each food item as well as the number of children receiving lunch. Vegetable servings taken met the requirement that children in grades kindergarten through 8 receive three-quarters cup of vegetables each day. The outcome measures of interest are the number and percentage of students taking salad and vegetables during lunch. The percent measure was calculated by dividing the number of students taking salad and vegetables by the number of students receiving lunch.

We also collected counts of the number of boys and girls serving themselves vegetables at the salad bar. The count data generated three outcome measures: (1) number of students taking vegetables from the salad bar; (2) percentage of students taking vegetables from the salad bar, calculated by dividing count values by the total number of children receiving lunch; and (3) separate counts of girls and boys taking vegetables from the salad bar. Based on the total number of lunches taken each day, the total number of student-day observations was 22,206.

RESULTS: Results show 90.5% more students took vegetables from the salad bar when exposed to the vinyl banner only, and 239.2% more students visited the salad bar when exposed to both the television segments and vinyl banners. Both boys and girls responded positively to the banners.



About The Ohio State University's Department of Human Sciences: Since its beginnings in 1895, the College of Education and Human Ecology (EHE) has valued learning as a lifelong process. The educators, researchers and professionals help grow academic success and health and wellness for generations to come.

Research Leads To 10 More Questions

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

In decades of writing columns for this magazine, we received and reviewed hundreds, maybe thousands, of research reports. If we had to say what we learned from this review, it would be this: The answer you get depends on the question you ask.

This research basically tests whether marketing can be successful with children in school when it comes to produce. Not surprisingly, children and fresh produce are not exempt from the many techniques that industry spends billions on every year to maintain and to change procurement habits.

As with all good research, this project raises many questions for further study:

1. **Is there a connection between students taking more produce on their plate and higher consumption at that meal?** In other words, if I don't like to drink alcohol, social pressure might make me take a drink from the bar just to have one in my hand. But that doesn't mean I drink it. If social pressure to be healthy is driving kids to take more produce, is it also driving them to eat it?
2. **If children do eat more produce in the cafeteria, do they compensate and eat less at other parts of the day?** If they have a big salad at lunch, does that develop the taste for salad, and they eat more salad at dinner? Or do they tire of the salad experience and eat less salad at other dayparts.
3. **Whatever the impact of these videos and banners, does it dissipate over time?** Maybe the banners and videos initially stimulate interest and thus trial, but if you keep playing the same videos and keep the same banners up, do they become background noise and wallpaper?
4. **Do these marketing efforts have long-term effects?** In other words, if we do a year of this marketing,

Not surprisingly, children and fresh produce are not exempt from the many techniques that industry spends billions and billions on every year to maintain and to change procurement habits.

does it impact what the children take from the salad bar next year? In high school? In college? As adults?

5. **Is there a downside?** Do children who are stimulated to take produce make bad combinations that turn them off produce? In other words, would we be better off having chefs create composed salads that don't cause indigestion?
6. **Will the kids eat kale?** All produce is not created equal. It is one thing to get children to select sweet fruits, even certain vegetables, such as carrots and peas, but what about getting children to eat bitter vegetables and other produce items that are believed to have valuable nutritional qualities? Do these banners and videos do that?
7. **To what degree does the health education component have any real impact?** The study shows that the video had a big impact, but if instead of having a health message, those videos had the produce items doing funny dances or had celebrities eating the produce...would this have been more or less effective?
8. **Does eating more produce actually improve the health of the children?** For example, do children who are taught to eat more produce

reduce consumption of other foods, or do they tend to get heavier as time goes by?

9. **Do children who learn about produce influence their parents to change their eating and shopping habits?** There are many anecdotal stories about children turning against smoking through education and then convincing their parents to quit. Does this dynamic work with diet?
10. **Will willingness to accept produce continue to increase with more marketing?** The study indicates that adding the video to the signage boosts the amount of produce on children's plates. What if we add other promotions, such as online, audio, table-tents cards on the tables, etc.?

There are many other questions to be answered, such as how the impact of the promotion differs on different ethnic groups or income demographics. Most of these children received free or subsidized school lunches: How does the dynamic change when one has to pay hard-earned money to buy more produce?

But for now, we can tip a hat to the researchers for reminding us that produce is a consumer good that needs to be constantly marketed and promoted if we want to increase consumption.



The Fruit Bowl

Experiencing produce retailing in a paradise setting.

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

High-quality produce might seem like a no-brainer in a supermarket located in a tropical island paradise. Not so in the U.S. Virgin Islands where more than 95 percent of all food, including produce, is imported. What's more, most of this food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, travels four days by sea before reaching this U.S. territory located 1,100 miles southeast of Miami.

It's no wonder that when Marty Goldberg, a New York City go-getter with an MBA who never worked in the produce industry, teamed up with a friend to ship a container of top-notch produce to St. Croix in the 1970s it sold like hotcakes. Most importantly, this successful test of the island market's waters for superior produce sowed the seed for what is now the second-generation family-owned and -operated supermarket on the neighboring island of St. Thomas called The Fruit Bowl.

"My father and mother honeymooned on St. Thomas and were blown away by the

beauty. So, after seeing the sales success of the produce on St. Croix, Marty decided to move the family to St. Thomas, open his own store, and set out to learn the produce business with the guiding principal of offering high quality at a fair price," said David Goldberg, Marty's son and the store's manager.

In 1973, the elder Goldberg opened his first store, named Top Banana, in a mid-island residential area. One of his first suppliers was Harry Krupnick, at Amigo Foods, which was then located on the Hunts Point Produce Market, in New York City.

In 1975, Goldberg opened at his present location, near the territory's capitol of Charlotte Amalie. The two big supermarkets at the time were Grand Union, located directly across the street from the small complex in which The Fruit Bowl is located, and Pueblo, less than half-mile down the street.

The business strategy of high-quality perishables proved a key differentiator. In fact, The Fruit Bowl was the first to offer fresh milk

imported from Florida rather than the re-constituted milk made on-island from powder shipped in from Ireland.

Always Expanding

Today, The Fruit Bowl still occupies its spot in the Wheatley Shopping Plaza. However, instead of one bay, the Goldbergs increased its size to four bays through successive remodels that enabled the market to offer a greater volume and variety of fresh produce and other perishables to its customers.

The Fruit Bowl occupies a total of 6,000-square-feet, with 4,000-square-feet of retail area (produce occupies 45 to 50 percent) and the remainder in cold storage. There are two walk-in coolers, one set at 58-degrees Fahrenheit for items such as tomatoes and the other set at 36-degrees for other fruits.

"We are very particular about maintaining the cold chain. The refrigerated trailers from the docks drive right up to our back door where everything is offloaded quickly and efficiently.

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RED ONION



In fact, we'll often go into the trailer and grab items out of order like mushrooms or okra to ensure they get right into our coolers at the correct temperature," explains Goldberg.

Goldberg and James Clark, a Kentucky native who has worked at The Fruit Bowl since 1982, order the bulk of the store's produce. This supply comes through Global Perishable Services, a Doral, FL-headquartered company opened in 2011 by Doug Tannehill, a 20-year veteran of C.H. Robinson Worldwide and now GPS's president.

GPS buys and consolidates perishables product for customers in the Caribbean, Central and South America. Orders are placed 1.5 to 2 weeks in advance to allow time for sourcing, transporting cross-country or out-of-country, and loading prior to the nearly week-long sail south on commercial carriers such as Tropical Shipping, headquartered in Riviera Beach, FL.

The remainder of the average 200 produce SKUs, which adds up to nearly 1,000 SKUs counting all produce carried throughout the year — including specialties, such as dragon fruit and fresh turmeric — arrive from a few sources.

First, items such as green-skinned avocados, mangos, calabaza, breadfruit, dasheen and cassava arrive weekly via a farmer in Dominica who flies the produce in himself or by boat from the neighboring island of Puerto Rico. These tropicals are especially popular with the store's core customer of island residents.

Second, during high season from December through May when the island is at its peak population, The Fruit Bowl will fly in specialty and highly perishable produce such as organics and microgreens for the chefs who work on the dozens of mega yachts docked at the marina down the street.

In 2009, The Fruit Bowl was named as one of the top six places in the world to provision for fruits and vegetables by super yacht publi-



David Goldberg, Store Manager

cation, *Dock Walk*.

Third, Virgin Islands' farmers will supply produce such as Scotch bonnet peppers, herbs (such as basil), tomatoes and greens (such as collards and kale), when available. There has been a resurgence in agriculture in the Virgin Islands fostered through the global interest in locally grown along with support from the territory's Department of Agriculture.

Other Features

The most popular feature at The Fruit Bowl is the salad bar, which was added after the most recent store expansion in 2007. The 6-foot salad bar serves more than a dozen fresh produce selections, in addition to prepared salads as well as cubed cheeses, assorted olives and cut fruit. Two full-time employees keep the bar stocked, cleaned and serviced.

Customers can find daily menu changes based on what's available in-store. For example, a variety of mushrooms, stuffed grape leaves and roasted red peppers was available during a recent visit in September. Two additional feet of space on the bar holds three 5-quart kettles of hot soup. The salad bar is so popular that a hot bar is now in the works.

Also new to The Fruit Bowl is the use of social media to let customer's know what is in-store. For example, the store's Facebook



page lists the daily soup selections and weekly price promotions.

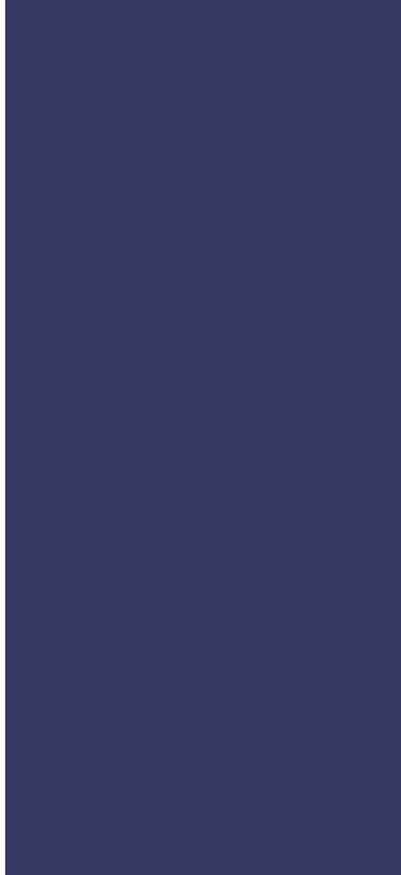
Traditional advertising efforts are used too. The store runs an ad each week in the island's only print newspaper and airs a commercial on local TV. However, unlike any other supermarket on St. Thomas, The Fruit Bowl periodically posts newspaper, magazine and Internet clippings on its front glass doors informing customers about everything from the latest produce nutrition facts to information about a weather event on the U.S. mainland that will temporarily affect the price of produce.

Beyond fresh produce, The Fruit Bowl is known for its other perishables such as a wide-range of cheeses and dairy products, never-frozen prime meats, antibiotic- and hormone-free chicken and pork, as well as fresh fish flown in during season three times per week.

The store's grocery section offers gluten-free flours and baked goods, recipe ingredients like almond paste, Indian spices coveted by the island's East Indian population, and dispensers of dried fruits and nuts by the cash registers.

The Fruit Bowl celebrated 40 years in business last year. The market, has definitely become an integral part of the community on this 13- by 4-mile island with a population of 60,000. One of the most well-known ways is through its almost three-decade sponsorship of the Women's Jogger Jam, a 2-mile fun run that attracts more than 300 women, from tots in strollers to seniors, and benefits the Family Resource Center. The Fruit Bowl provides everything from T-shirts to cut fruit and vegetable snacks. The market makes countless other community contributions annually — including fruit and vegetable gift baskets for events such as Nurse's Week.

"People want good quality. This, and offering more unique items is what sets us apart from the competition and what keeps our customers coming back," says Goldberg. **pb**



Marketing To Millennials

Understanding this lucrative demographic helps retailers and produce suppliers better target marketing messages.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

BY LISA WHITE

If it is true that nearly 50 percent of supermarket sales is attributed to the group of consumers who “came of age” around the turn of the century, then opportunities abound for retailers and suppliers who understand the proclivities of these shoppers.

Price, taste, local, health and corporate transparency are among the key drivers Millennials (also referred to as Generation Y) gravitate toward, but there is also an element of spontaneity and experimentation that produce marketers can capitalize on if they want to boost sales and increase consumption.

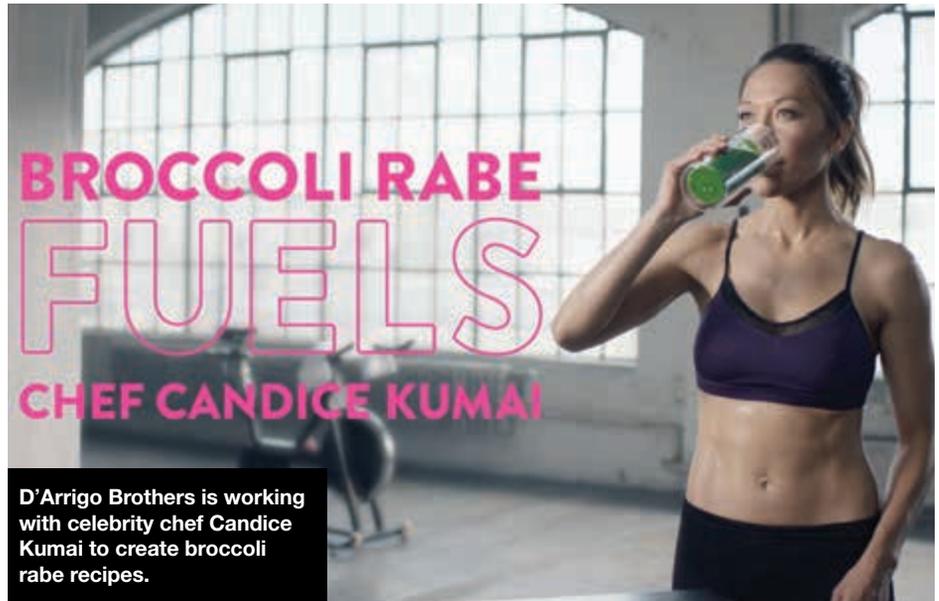
Due to this demographic’s healthful

focus, produce is a strong category with Millennials. These consumers are eating less processed food and more natural items, such as produce.

“Millennials are more attached to the health and wellness wave that continues to be strong as a megatrend,” says Rick Stein, vice president of fresh foods at the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), based in Arlington, VA. “They align themselves in the fresh department.”

A number of sources report four out of five retailers attribute 50 percent of their sales to Millennials, which total about 75 million in the U.S., according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

“Messaging to these consumers has to be very authentic, as this generation



“Millennials want content, not advertising, and this [content] needs to have value and be usable, fun, engaging and sharable.”

— Steven Muro, Fusion Marketing

is about sharing and inclusiveness,” says Steven Muro, founder and president of Fusion Marketing, a marketing firm based in Chatsworth, CA. “Millennials want content, not advertising, and this [content] needs to have value and be usable, fun, engaging and sharable.”

According to CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Monterey,

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“Retailers can still drive sales by creating an easy-to-use value-added loyalty program, and for Millennial consumers, transparency within the program is key.”

— Jacob Shafer, Mann Packing Co., Inc.

CA-based Dole Fresh Vegetables, “The specific attributes Millennials want in their food are freshness; transparency; convenience; an emphasis on healthy, simple ingredients; a growing preference for ethnic cuisines; and a desire for spices and seasoning, which dictates the stores they choose and how they shop.

“Much has been written about Millennials only shopping the perimeter of the store, and while this may be a bit of an exaggeration, we know the produce, meat and bakery departments are destinations, because they deliver on many of these needs.”

Research has also revealed that, more than any other generation, Millennials respond best to a well-maintained

produce department stocked with fresh, pristine fruit.

REACHING THIS DEMOGRAPHIC

To understand the Millennial consumer, it helps to have a consistent lens or a framework that can compare these consumers against the entire market, to other generations and to one another with their behavior and media usage, according to New York City-based market research firm Nielsen’s *Millennials: Marketing to Generation ‘Me’* report.

Millennials are more likely than Gen-Xers or Boomers to hear of what’s going on with companies through social media outlets (such as Facebook, Twitter

or blogs) according to the Nielsen report. They’re also more likely to trust the information they learn about a company through social media than information offered elsewhere.

“Social media engagement seems to be outpacing traditional methods of advertising, like television and print,” says Jacob Shafer, marketing and communication specialist at Mann Packing Co., Inc., headquartered in Salinas, CA. “Retailers can still drive sales by creating an easy-to-use value-added loyalty program, and for Millennial consumers, transparency within the program is key.”

“It’s not about print or being online, but doing all these things right — such as texting, using social media and getting involved with all the ways to deliver a message,” says Muro.

Where the target Millennials spend their day in terms of social media communication will determine what platforms to use (such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Tumblr).

“Millennials spend about an hour a day on Facebook, seven hours a month on Instagram, and six hours a month



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on Snapchat,” says Muro of Fusion Marketing. “And those [figures] are just the online presence, and it doesn’t include Twitter, Tumblr, Vine, Spotify and Buzz-Feed. Plus, they’re not all the same with these platforms.”

By zeroing in on Millennial’s lifestyles, communication mediums, wants and needs, retailers and brands can effectively catch the attention of this lucrative demographic.

GenerationWhy is a custom research study commissioned by the Washington, D.C.-based Corn Refiners Association and conducted by the Omaha, NE-based research firm MSR Group. The study’s data segmented the consumer demographic into four different types of Millennials: Traditionalists (37 percent) represent the largest segment and are less connected and the least health-conscious; Bon Vivants (28 percent) are more

DEFINING MILLENNIALS/GEN-Y

Although the demographic is somewhat ill-defined, many consider the Millennial generation as those born after 1980 and coming of age after the millennium. This fairly large time span has made these consumers prime targets for companies looking to tailor their marketing messages.

The Millennial cohort varies widely in terms of ethnicity, urbanity and income, marital status, presence of children and home ownership. All of these traits impact behavior and can be used as an organizational framework for insight and activation, reports Nielsen.

“We believe marketers should focus on approach before tackling strategies when marketing to Millennials,” says Dan’l Mackey Almy, president and CEO of DMA Solutions, Inc., a Dallas, TX-based marketing agency that helps produce growers reach buyers and consumers. “The age gap between Millennials is the largest to-date, so we don’t believe that marketing to this generation based on age alone is necessarily the best strategy.”

DMA Solutions’ approach helps its brand partners determine what types of content is most relevant for their audiences, regardless of age.

“By learning insights relating to preferences, brands are able to use this information to deliver valuable, customized information,” says Almy. “Marketers can meet the needs of their Millennial audiences by first figuring out what they want and prefer, and then creating content that supports how they want to receive it.”

Retailers or companies doing a good job marketing to Millennials get rewarded. **pb**



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likely to dine out and least likely to avoid certain ingredients; Purists (19 percent) avoid certain ingredients and use social media to find deals; and Balance-Seekers (16 percent) most interested in moderation and engaged as well as influential on social media.

According to Sara Martens, vice president of MSR Group and *GenerationWhy* research analyst, “We know that 93 percent of [the Food Purist] segment checks a brand or product’s page on social media for discounts or specials. So,

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Chef B.

if you're trying to reach her, then coupons or deals would be the way to draw her to the produce section."

[Editor's Note: For more details on the GenerationWhy study, please see related article on page 48.]

"This demographic spends more online than any other age group," says Muro. "On average, they spend about \$2,000 annually on e-commerce."

SPENDING HABITS

Though social media and the use of technology are child's play to the Millennial shoppers, this group also enjoys the experience of grocery shopping, as long as certain criteria are met. The "I want it, when I want it" generation also likes



California Avocado Commission worked with university and college culinary groups for menuing ideas and grove tours for education.

“The age gap between Millennials is the largest to-date, so we don’t believe that marketing to this generation based on age alone is necessarily the best strategy.”

— Dan'l Mackey Almy, DMA Solutions, Inc.

quality for a good price. Various research during the past couple years — including one by MediaPost (a New York City-based integrated publishing and content company providing resources for media, marketing and advertising professionals) — shows the top brand for food shopping is the store brand (or private label). With

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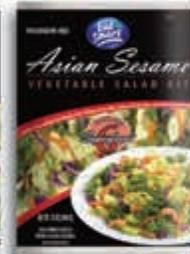
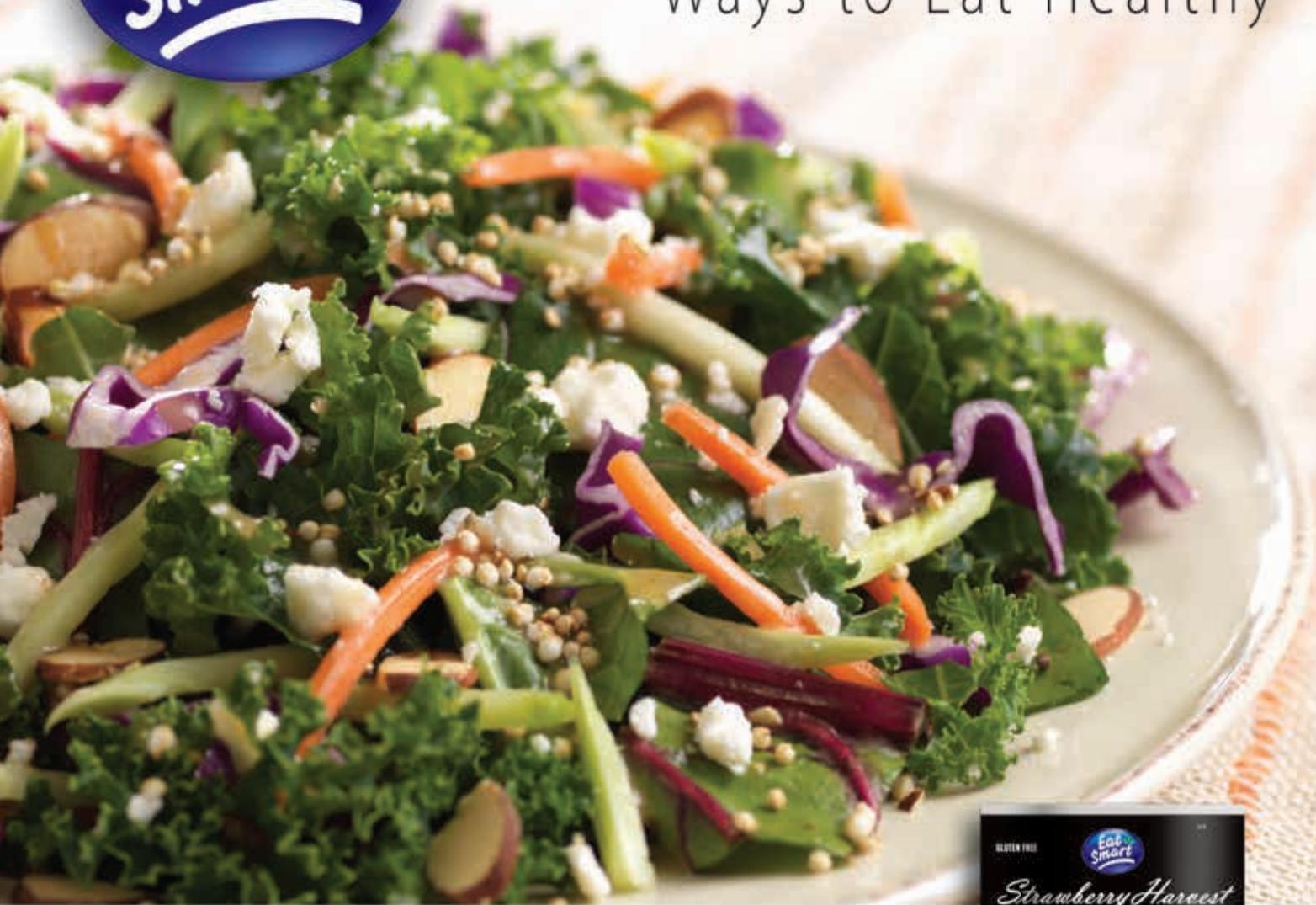
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“store brand” or “generic brand” being the primary response, it’s no wonder Whole Foods Market conceptualized and opened an entire banner catering to Millennials with 365 by Whole Foods Market. Walmart/Great Value, Trader Joe’s, and Kroger also made the Top 10 list in the MediaPost survey. For most of the respondents, their reason for going with store brands was simple: less cost for what they feel is the same quality.

According to the Spring 2016 study, *The Why Behind the Buy Shopper Survey*, by Jacksonville, FL-based sales and marketing consultants, Acosta, Inc., 72 percent of Millennials enjoy grocery shopping. This number is significant when compared to the desire to visit grocery stores from other shopping groups, especially the Baby Boomers (54 percent favorability) and older (45 percent favorability) segment.

“It’s not enough to have a strong brand in and of itself. That works for Gen-Xers and Baby Boomers, but is not effective with the Millennials.”

— Maeve Webster, Menu Matters

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When it comes to brands they support, Millennials are likely to spend more for goods and services from companies with programs that give back. According to a report from the New York City-based consultancy firm the Good Scout Group, of all generations “Gen Y likes being asked to give to charity at the register the most.”

More than 50 percent said they will spend more on products from socially responsible companies, and 60 percent are willing to pay more for a product if it’s good for the environment, according to Nielsen research. When these consumers buy, they care about a brand’s social impact, making cause-marketing appealing to this generation.

“It’s not enough to have a strong brand in and of itself,” says Maeve Webster, president of Menu Matters, an Arlington, VT-based company that assists food-service operators in identifying, understanding and leveraging trends. “That works for Gen-Xers and Baby Boomers, but is not effective with the Millennials.”

This younger demographic wants to know why they should care about the brand, its heritage, and more about the company producing the product. These are consumers whose buying decisions are emotionally and ethically driven, so the connection is key.

Although Millennials collectively have more wealth than Baby Boomers, individually they don’t, says Stein of FMI, which gained insight on Millennials through its ongoing research — particularly its “Power of Produce” study (now in its second year). [For more information on the “Power of Produce” findings, please see the Voice of the Industry column on page 215.]

Consequently, these consumers are in tune with organic product, but there’s a

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limit to what they will pay for it. “Millennials perceive organics to be more nutritional and less harmful to them, so they try to stay with these products if possible, assuming price doesn’t take them out of the category,” says Stein.

“This demographic spends more online than any other age group,” says Muro. “On average, they spend about \$2,000 annually on e-commerce.”

“Organic in and of itself, as it relates to health and wellness, is more important

— or perhaps I should say more *de rigueur* — to Millennials than to previous generations,” says Samantha Cabaluna, marketing director for San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm. “With that understanding as a starting point, we strive to introduce new flavors for more adventurous palates and for those looking to do more with greens than make a salad. Millennials are more adventurous with their food; they are more apt to want to travel with their taste buds, so to speak.”

“Millennials are more adventurous with their food; they are more apt to want to travel with their taste buds, so to speak.”

— Samantha Cabaluna, Earthbound Farm

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CONVENIENCE IS KEY

In terms of food, the ability to get dinner on the table in 20 to 30 minutes is ideal for these consumers, who are also seeking cleaner production with no pesticides and organic produce whenever possible.

“These consumers do not want to spend time prepping food, so looking at the value-add for convenience, such as cut fruit, and positioning properly is key,” says Patty Johnson, global food analyst at Mintel International, a market research firm based in London. “For those with children, it’s about avoiding the dinner crisis by balancing the desire to go out with the desire to cook from scratch and control the ingredients.”

Older Millennials, especially those with children, are all about convenience, kits, preassembled meals and making meal preparation easy as possible, says Muro. “So at retail, anything we can find that emphasizes convenience, presliced, premixed and packaged salads is good inspiration, with loyalty as the goal.”

Companies are responding to this need for convenience and fresh options. For example, Dole’s innovation teams are creating products, such as its new Chef’s Choice Salad Kits, with the Millennials in mind, positioning its products against the 18- to 34-year-old consumer when it makes sense.

“Chef’s Choice’s emphasis on freshness, flavor-forward ingredients, easy instructions and the opportunity for hands-on preparation appeals to Millennials, so we are leveraging’s Dole’s extensive social media platforms with user-generated content (UGC) contests and other relevant tactics to reach this group,” says Arias of Dole.

“For convenience, we’re excited to have just launched our new organic Chopped Salad Kits, and we share our sustainability

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story on an on-going basis — it's part of our DNA," says Earthbound's Cabaluna. "That starts with organic farming practices and extends to our clamshell packaging, which is made from post-consumer recycled PET."

D'Arrigo Brothers of California, located in Salinas, focused on Millennials with its broccoli rabe.

"We noticed the majority of our sales were on the East Coast and eastern Canada due to the big Italian population, but then we saw an opportunity with Millennials," says Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos, marketing and culinary manager.

The company launched a Millennial-focused broccoli rabe marketing campaign featuring the product's health benefits,



D'Arrigo Brothers partnered with celebrity nutritionist Keri Glassman to create broccoli rabe recipes, like these "lemon chips."

“Chef’s Choice’s emphasis on freshness, flavor-forward ingredients, easy instructions and the opportunity for hands-on preparation appeals to Millennials. ...”

— CarrieAnn Arias, Dole Fresh Vegetables

which include anti-cancer compounds.

"We are fortunate; as a vertically integrated grower/packer/shipper, we have scientists on staff to do testing on this product," says Pizarro-Villalobos.

The company partnered with celebrity nutritionist Keri Glassman and enlisted

Continued on page 50

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Q&A WITH SARA MARTENS, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE MSR GROUP, AN OMAHA, NE-BASED RESEARCH FIRM AND GENERATIONWHY RESEARCH ANALYST

PRODUCE BUSINESS (PB): How can supermarket produce departments best tailor its marketing to reach all types of Millennials?

Sara Martens (SM): Produce departments have already begun to make changes geared toward attracting Millennial consumers. In addition to expanded produce sections, we're also noticing more exotic produce offerings and snackable produce options such as hummus with veggies or apples with peanut butter, packaged together for on-the-go eating. As these changes are being implemented, produce managers need to remember that Millennials are not a monolith.

PB: What impact does this breakdown of the Millennial demographic have on the produce industry and supermarket produce departments?

SM: Until now, many studies have made sweeping generalizations about Millennials. GenerationWhy picks up where others left off, proving that the Millennial generation is a very complex one. This segment breakdown gives food and beverage marketers and manufacturers the opportunity to dig deeper into the generation, learning their preferences about certain ingredients, their social media habits and influence, and what they are truly looking for both in the grocery aisles and when dining out.

PB: Is there a certain Millennial segment that is best to focus on?

SM: Two segments [we categorize from our GenerationWhy research] as Traditionalist Taylor and Food Purist Paige, are most likely to visit

the grocery store. Taylor is the largest Millennial segment (37 percent of the Millennial population) and least health-conscious of the four segments. Seventy-four percent of her segment spends the majority of the food budget on groceries. Paige, on the other hand, is a much smaller segment (19 percent of the Millennial population) and is the most dogmatic in her food and beverage beliefs. She spends 72 percent of her food budget in the grocery aisles. But while these two segments generally have different views on foods and beverages, both still rank taste and price as critical purchase drivers in the grocery aisles.

PB: Do you see these different Millennial segments merging at some point, or changing as they age?

SM: As Millennials become older and enter parenthood, their food and beverage behaviors tend to shift. Overall, 31 percent of Millennial parents take their children grocery shopping with them, which greatly affects how closely these parents follow their grocery lists.

Food Purist Paige and Balance-Seeker Brad are the most intriguing segments identified by GenerationWhy due to their contrasting food attitudes.

For example, Paige (the consumer segment with the most ingredient concerns) is much more likely to give in to her children's requests at the grocery store. Only 28 percent of her segment sticks to a grocery list when shopping with children versus 57 percent when they're shopping solo. However, Brad is the opposite. Without his children present, he's more likely to allow himself indulgences in the grocery store. **pb**

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*This message was
approved by Mr. Peel*

Continued from page 46

foodie and chef bloggers. D'Arrigo Brothers is also working with celebrity chef Candice Kumai to create broccoli rabe recipes. The promotion is rolling out on social media.

The company recently expanded its broccoli rabe bunch to include an 11-ounce triple washed premium chopped value-added bag geared for the Millennial demographic. "We're also working with other partners to create blends that

include broccoli rabe, which we expect to launch in 2017," says Pizarro-Villalobos.

"Millennials overall are looking for quick meal and snack options that are priced right and convenient," says Mann's Shafer. As a result, Mann's recently launched Nourish Bowls for consumers on the go, which is a warm single-serve meal containing fresh vegetables and grains that can be prepared in about 4 minutes. The company partnered with three San Francisco Bay area chefs to develop

the line's flavor profiles, which include Monterey Risotto, Sesame Sriracha, Smokehouse Brussels and Southwest Chipotle.

"Older Millennials are expert online customers, but that doesn't mean they stopped shopping at traditional venues, especially when it comes to grocery," says Shafer. "When it comes to fresh veggies, older Millennials are not unlike generations past; they want to touch the product, smell it, and pick out what looks best."

To target these consumers, Mann's added to its Culinary Cuts line of fresh-cut vegetables, which are offered in a variety of shapes, including Sweet Potato Ribbons, Butternut Squash Zigzags, Finely Chopped Cauliflower, Shaved Brussels Sprouts and Sliced Broccoli Clovers.

When it comes to time spent in a grocery store, according to the July 2016 *The Revolution of Grocery Shopping Hot Topic Report* from Acosta, the convenience of online shopping is having an impact on grocery store purchases. Nearly half of Millennials surveyed said they would use an app allowing them to pay for their groceries.

MILLENNIALS WANT TRANSPARENCY

One of the important things retailers and companies need to do when targeting Millennials is focus on the story behind the brands and products.

It's important to note that Millennial consumers expect more from food brands, and their preferences changed because the access to real food and information about food is changing.

"Millennials are experimenting and connecting with smaller, more transparent and local brands that they can trust," says Suzanne Ginestro, chief marketing officer and general manager of long term innovation for Campbell Fresh (or C-Fresh) of Campbell Soup Co. (Camden, NJ) — a fresh-food division that combined the assets of Garden Fresh Gourmet business with carrot and juice supplier Bolthouse Farms and Campbell's portfolio of refrigerated soups.

"In order for the big food companies to connect with Millennials, they are either acquiring these smaller brands or are building their own authentic brands that feel very different from the mainstream brands that they currently produce and sell," says Ginestro.

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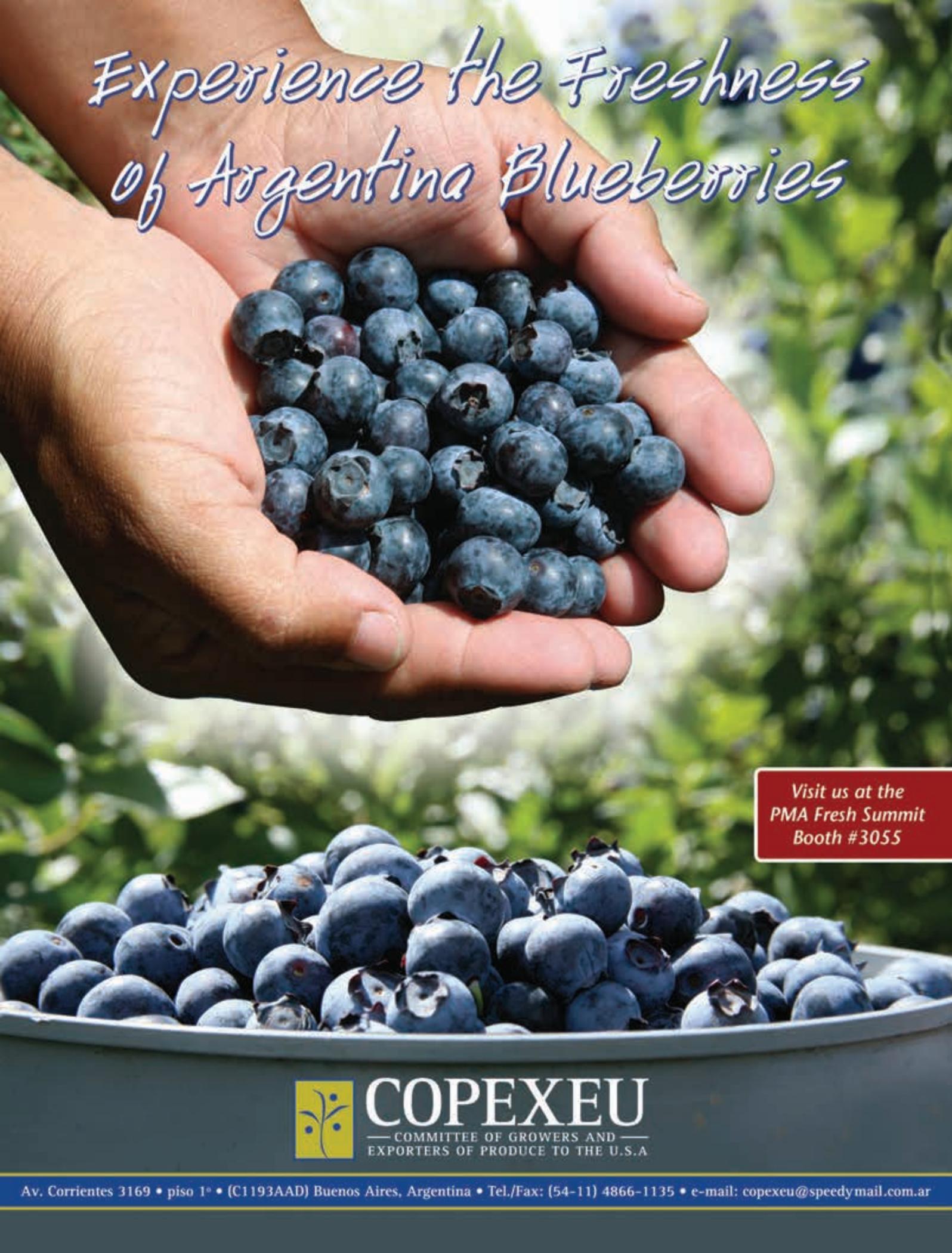
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PRODUCE ORGANIZATIONS DETAIL MILLENNIAL MARKETING PLANS

A number of produce organizations are creating initiatives to target the lucrative Millennial generation.

The Cranberry Marketing Committee in Wareham, MA, set out to create a paradigm shift around the fall season and engage a younger audience through a cranberry social media photo-sharing contest timed to “Friendsgiving.” As a Millennial-driven trend, Friendsgiving is about celebrating the holidays with friends in the days and weeks before and after Thanksgiving.

“The Cranberry Friendsgiving photo contest allows retailers to engage with Millennial shoppers and create additional cranberry purchasing opportunities,” says Michelle Hogan, executive director of the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee. “Retailers have the opportunity to join the growing social media buzz and invite shoppers to share a photo of their Friendsgiving cranberry creations with the hashtag #FriendsgivingCranberryContest and enter the contest for a chance to win one of eight \$500 prizes.”

According to a new survey commissioned by the Cranberry Marketing Committee, more than other generations, these consumers are more likely to add cranberries to smoothies or cocktails.

“By tying into an existing occasion that Millennials are celebrating, we’re able to give shoppers creative recipes and decoration ideas perfect for Friendsgiving — with cranberries at the forefront,” says Hogan. “Leveraging a turnkey promotion provides more ways to drive sales at little to no cost to retailers.”

The National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, works with Dr. Ronald Ward, Emeritus Professor from the University of Florida, to conduct monthly surveys and gauge mango consumption and trends.

“From this data, we gathered that Millennials buy fresh fruit when they go to the grocery store about 53 percent of the time,” says Rachel Muñoz, director of marketing for the NMB. “However, the No. 1 reason Millennials are not buying mangos is that they just didn’t think of it. This information provides us with great insight on how we can target Millennials and increase their awareness of mangos to bring it top of mind as they’re shopping for fresh fruit.”

This year, the NMB, partnered with the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) to feature mangos as the Official Superfruit of the NWSL. Through this program, each team in the league, nine total, was able to share how they enjoy mangos on their social media channels, which have a large Millennial audience reach.

The NMB also participated in the Yoga Solstice event in New York City that included 5,000 participants. Approximately 3,600 fresh mango samples were distributed, along with educational and nutritional messages shared with consumers over the course of the eight-hour event. This yoga event targeted the healthy lifestyle trend of the Millennial population as well as other fitness-oriented age groups.

Another outlet used to reach the Millennial population about mangos was through Instagram.

“With popular hashtags such as #Health, #Fitness, #Foodie, and #CleanEating, it was a great fit to partner with influencers and create a #MealPrepMondays program around mangos,” says Muñoz. “Every Monday since January 2016, we highlighted a recipe or mango-inspired message from one of our influencers and post it on our Instagram page as well as the influencers’ channels.”

Fusion Marketing in Chatsworth, CA, works with The Mushroom Council to introduce a healthier meat blend concept that incorporates ground beef with chopped mushrooms.

Millennials, in particular, are picking up on this product, which has less fat, sodium, cholesterol and calories than traditional ground beef. The council also is working directly with universities to introduce the blend into menus, educating students about new ways of eating burgers.

“Colleges are holding burger bashes on campus,” says Steven Muro, Fusion Marketing’s founder and president. “Millennials love experiences, so these events allow them to try these burgers.”

Because Millennials value authenticity and tend to be early adopters of new media and technology, the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission (CAC) strives to use an authentic brand voice that is unassuming, friendly and seeks to remain on-trend with new and popular media channels and offerings.

“Remaining true to who you are as a brand and on the pulse of new trends in media and merchandising are important in marketing to the Millennial generation,” says Jan DeLyser, CAC’s vice president of marketing.

Much of CAC’s marketing initiative includes the strategy of providing consumers with relevant and useful information.

“With sponsored content on lifestyle websites, CAC has been able to reach the Millennial audience and provide California avocado recipes, presented in the fun and upbeat tone of a favorite editorial voice,” says DeLyser. “These initiatives, which feel less like ads and more like content, resonate well among the Millennial audience.”

Additionally, CAC has worked with university and college culinary groups to incorporate California avocados in menus.

Foodie culture is more trendy among older Millennials, where it’s not just about being a foodie, but about sharing foodie activities with social media networks.

One of CAC’s most successful programs targeted to older Millennials involved a popular foodie platform with an artistic aesthetic.

The program encouraged users to submit their favorite California avocado recipes with the incentive of being featured on the platform’s Instagram channel. The program enabled CAC to influence the social conversation among Millennials and built on CAC’s affiliation as a foodie brand.

While households without children purchase about 60 percent of avocado volume, according to CAC, households with children under the age of five spend the most on avocados per shopper, especially the California avocado shopper.

“This is great news for the future of the category, and the Commission encourages that shopping behavior to introduce avocados to the youngest among us,” says DeLyser.

CAC’s goal when marketing to Millennials is to foster preference for and loyalty to California avocados, and to do this consumer engagement is necessary. The majority of its marketing to this group is either on social or sharable to social, allowing users to like, comment and share.

Marketers are increasingly creating editorial content sponsored by the advertiser or native advertising that provides relevant content to consumers. With this content, consumers are likely to spend more time with the brand’s messaging than they would with traditional advertisements.

“The Commission works with retailers on programs customized for their needs,” says DeLyser. “When Millennials are the target, these programs can include social media, in-store activities and SRD programs.”

pb



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C-Fresh toggles between buying and building new product platforms and brands. For example, the company built the premium beverage brand, 1915, roughly a year ago in effort to capture a greater share of sales at the perimeter of supermarkets.



Jeff Dunn, president of C-Fresh, told *Food Business News* (the Kansas City, MO-based trade magazine for the food processing industry), "We're actively building our brands and capabilities to leverage the shift in consumer demand for 'better-for-you' products and to sustain growth in packaged fresh categories over the long term."



American soccer player and FIFA Women's World Cup champion Julie Johnston is a brand ambassador for the National Mango Board.

“In order for the big food companies to connect with Millennials, they are either acquiring these smaller brands or are building their own authentic brands. ...

— Suzanne Ginestro, Campbell Fresh (C-Fresh)

IN-STORE MILLENNIAL-MARKETING

Since Millennials are not the same, Muro of Fusion Marketing says companies need to do research for products or commodities to ensure people interact with what's being sold. "There is a lot of information provided by associations, but this will only reveal how Millennials interact

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with product or food, not with specific items being sold,” says Muro.

Since Millennials spend the majority of in-store shopping time around the perimeter, rather than the supermarket aisles, experts say retailers and brands should concentrate promotions and messages for these consumers in this part of the store.

“Certainly, due to the Millennials’ quest for fresh foods, the produce department can be considered ground zero in efforts to capture the 18 to 34 age market,” says

Dole’s Arias. “Since many Millennials don’t possess the same cooking skills as other generations, an emphasis on step-by-step recipes, serving suggestions and convenient-but-healthy products will likely also reap rewards.”

According to the Acosta research, supermarkets are also finding success merchandising traditional center-store goods in conjunction with the perimeter products. Bringing wisely cross-promoted center-store items into the produce



Older Millennials, especially those with children, are all about convenience, kits, preassembled meals and making meal preparation easy as possible, says Steven Muro, founder and president of Fusion Marketing. “So at retail, anything we can find that emphasizes convenience, presliced, premixed and packaged salads is good inspiration, with loyalty as the goal.”

department, such as crackers for dipping guacamole, peanut butter next to apples, cereal or oatmeal for suggested breakfast tie-ins to fruit, etc., will go a long way to building the market basket among Millennial shoppers.

“This includes nutritional information, how to prepare it and cooking tips,” says FMI’s Stein. “Retailers who provide this will garner additional sales.”

Millennials also index high on local food, as they perceive it as fresher and seek to support the local economy. However, the focus has changed in the past year.

“Freshness was the top reason Millennials sought local product in 2015, but in 2016 the top reason changed to supporting the local economy,” says Stein. “Also, the circumference with local products has tightened in the last year, with consumers seeking a more defined radius.”

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According to FMI research, this varies depending on the region. In states with longer growing seasons, such as Arizona, California, Florida and Texas, local is considered within 100 miles. For states above the Mason-Dixon Line, this radius expands to encompass more states.

Because the Millennial generation spans a much wider age gap than other demographics, it helps to be aware of the differences between the older and younger consumers who fall into this classification.

For example, some of these consumers closer to the Gen-Xer age are more apt to seek adventure and are attracted to sophisticated messaging and imaging, says Webster.

Maturity for younger Millennials is nonconforming, since the economic conditions are much different than in years past.

“The fact remains that there are boomerang kids and younger Millennials living at home, so their road to adulthood will be different,” says Muro. “Building experiences with this group is one of the key ways to connect, since one in four are

“We’re also working with other partners to create blends that include broccoli rabe, which we expect to launch in 2017.”

— Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos,
D’Arrigo Brother of California

willing to pay money for an experience rather than product.”

Although there are differences, many preferences are the same for older and younger generations in this demographic.

MEETING GOALS & NEEDS

The goal in marketing to these consumers is for brands to speak the language of Millennials.

“People ages 18 to 34 will engage when hearing or reading words that could have come from them or their peers, since these messages create comfort and trust,” says Shafer of Mann Packing. “Marketers are meeting the needs of younger and older consumers in this generation by focusing on price above all other factors — including quality, brand, store and

availability.”

This is in part due to the fact that Millennials have the ability to instantly price compare and geo-locate product availability, so if something is too expensive at one store, they can locate a sale on that same product in their area with relative ease.

For grocery shopping, the majority of Millennials prefer higher-value rebate offers versus an instant discount. “In response to this tendency, retailers can offer rebates that provide more savings and a greater overall value as opposed to a simple price-match or dollar off promotion,” says Shafer. “Again, retailers must assure that any rebate program is not difficult to redeem or deceptive, which would turn off a Millennial shopper.” **pb**

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Clear-Packaging Innovations

The ability to see and preserve produce while still marketing the features and benefits is a delicate but attainable balance.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

As packaging in the produce department evolves, the options for displaying commodities increase. New packaging concepts give marketers and growers opportunities to tell their story and inform customers about product origin and nutritional benefits. Food safety, longer shelf life and better stacking options also play into the design of packaging and the systems used to create them.

Convenience is a driving factor across the retail supermarket space, and the produce department is no exception. “Convenience has become

more apparent in the produce department,” says Hans Christian Schur, chief executive, Schur Star Systems based in Oceanside, CA. “When we look around retail produce, we’re seeing more stand-up pouches with handles. Before it was with grapes and cherries, but now you’re starting to see it with tomatoes, apples and more produce categories.”

The mobility of consumers is reflected in packaging design as people move away from sit-down meals and consume smaller meals throughout the day. “Mobile packaging designs are in high demand,” says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging, Inc. headquartered in Elk Grove Village, IL. “Consumers live increasingly active lifestyles. Being able to eat at work, school, in the car, while walking, are all benefits to today’s consumers.”

For citrus, grab-and-go bags work well with easy-to-peel fruit such as Mandarins and Clementines. “We’ve been growing and shipping easy peelers for more than a decade now and have seen the shift from 5-pound, gift-type cartons to bags in various sizes such as 5-, 3- and 2-pounds,” says Kim Flores, marketing director for Seald Sweet based in

“Mobile packaging designs are in high demand. Consumers live increasingly active lifestyles. Being able to eat at work, school, in the car, while walking, are all benefits to today’s consumers.”

— Roman Forowycz, Clear Lam Packaging

Vero Beach, FL.

For Stemilt fruit company based in Wenatchee WA, grab-and-go packaging has been a tremendous success, especially for their Lil Snappers bags of “kid size” fruit. As Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt, explains, “We had record sales in the past three years. It continues to sell for two reasons: it’s grab-and-go and easy, but it’s also targeted toward a usage. People need to be marketed to. They want solutions, and kid-sized apples have really resonated with parents. The grab-and-go aspect adds to that. It shows better in the store.”

Jacob Shafer, marketing and communication specialist for Mann Packing Company in Salinas, CA, recognizes the demand for

quick meal and snack options that are priced right. This inspired the development of Mann’s Nourish Bowls. Shafer explains, “The veggie-blend bowls take 3 to 4 minutes to prepare in the microwave and pair nicely with an added protein of choice. The bowls are kid-friendly, pre-portioned and low in calories.”

The company has enlisted help from food bloggers and launched social media campaigns and in-store promotions to boost awareness and leverage the products’ innovative and convenient features.

Inline Plastics Corporation, headquartered in Shelton, CT, has come up with its own product to meet demand. According to the company’s market research manager, Jack Tilley, “Inline has just added to its grab-and-go

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CONVENIENCE RULES

The demand for smaller, convenient retail options must first be met by packaging system manufacturers. “Convenient, single-serve packages continue to be popular for dried fruit and nuts, as well as small, fresh-cut produce,”

says Kim Magon-Haller, marketing manager at Triangle Package Machinery Co. based in Chicago.

“Through the years, we’ve seen a growing demand for smaller bag sizes such as those used for tube nut bags or individual servings of baby carrots. Customers want to be able to run a variety of bag sizes on the same machine, and they want to be able to run at high speeds.”

“As a manufacturer, you always wonder if something is just a trend or here to stay, and



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Marketers agree grab-and-go bags work well with easy-to-peel fruit such as Mandarins and Clementines.

it seems like the pouch bag is here to stay,” says Aaron Fox, executive vice president at Fox Packaging headquartered in McAllen, TX.

“Our job is to make it better and friendlier to the packinghouse. We developed a pouch bag with more ventilation for increased shelf-life, and we’re developing a bagging machine to pack pouch bags that will be quick and simple to use.”

SEEING CLEARLY

Transparency in packaging means several things: It means consumers are clearly informed on nutrition and food origin but are also provided a clear look at the product inside the package. “Transparency throughout the supply chain is an expectation with consumers today, in particular with Millennials,” says Forowycz at Clear Lam Packaging.

“People want to know everything about the product and the packaging materials. Traceability from raw materials to finished goods and from finished goods to raw materials is essential,” Says Forowycz.

Tilley says crystal clear packaging is as an important tool in appealing to consumers. “The freshness and bright colors are spotlighted, and the consumer can see the quality of the contents. It often will lead to impulse buying, increasing sales for the retailer.”

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Consumers are choosing eco-friendly alternatives when they shop, buying products where packaging can be recycled. Monte Package offers sustainable packaging for Fresh Produce, proudly carrying the Earth Choice brand, which is renewable, biodegradable, and eco-responsible.

Let our packaging allow your produce department managers become your on-site masters of merchandising. Increase your sales and profits with packaging and props that can be used season after season, "year after year."

Megan Arnold, senior manager of food safety for Robinson Fresh based in Eden Prairie, MN echoes these preferences. “Consumers want transparency and instant assurance that the product they are purchasing is fresh, clean, and at peak quality. Clear packaging means less guessing on what they will open when they get home.”

Flores at Seald Sweet notes many suppliers and retailers lean toward high-graphic, stand-up pouch bags, but this isn't necessarily a universal preference. “In the last year or so,

we've seen a divide between retailers where some prefer this type of bag and others are requiring generic, clear packaging with little to no graphics printed on the bag, so the product inside the packaging has maximum visibility.”

FLEXIBLE MEANS CONTROLLABLE

Flexibility is about more than just packaging pliability, it also means flexibility in terms of products offered. “One of the biggest things in consumer packs that we're providing to growers, partners, shippers and packers that's



Several years ago, Inline Plastics switched all its containers over to 100 percent recyclable PET material.

going to end up in the hands of consumers, is anything that will allow the package to be more user-friendly and add value,” says Sam Monte, director of operations at Monte Package Company, based in Riverside, MI.

“Resealable zippers on pouch bags are not the newest thing, but every week we're looking at new commodities that can be put into those types of pouch bags.”

Flexible packaging also provides opportunities for portion control. “We are seeing continued movement toward portion control — packaging that allows for mobility, reclosing and product visibility,” says Forowycz. “We are trending away from rigid packaging to flexible packaging formats. Lots of stand-up pouches, trays with lidding films versus clamshells and designs that are easier to store and dispose.”

“Reclosable bags are also in demand,” says Magon-Haller at Triangle. “Our solutions for reclosable bags include zipper applicators, seal strips, or resealable film. Another option is the exclusive new PrimaPak package, which we introduced last year with Clear Lam Pack-

Continued on page 66

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■ TELLING THE STORY

Packaging creates branding opportunities which allows growers to tell their stories and make a personal connection with the consumer. This is something Stemilt takes advantage of, as Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt explains, “Stemilt is a big storytelling company, we always told stories about our products.”

This is evident with the brand’s Half Mile Closer to the Moon cherries. The packaging not only tells the product’s story, it also provides a QR code to lead consumers to a product page where there is a video to further support the story. “People want to know who grew your food and packaging really allows you to do that.”



Seald Sweet also takes advantage of increased space on packaging. “When space allows, we list nutritional benefits — especially for citrus, which is packed with valuable nutrients,” says Kim Flores, marketing director for Seald Sweet based in Vero Beach, FL. “Regarding the origin, we also have used QR codes linked to our “Meet the Grower” videos. Consumers are increasingly interested in their food source, where it comes from, is it safe, etc. So we are able to share the story of our growers, who are part of the Seald Sweet family, and have been for a very long time.”

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties, headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL, also sees the value in communicating directly with consumers through packaging.

“Our Southern Selects packaging affords us the ability to inform consumers regarding nutrition, health benefits, preparation, recipes and storage — all in one convenient location. And, of course, establishing a premium persona for our

product,” he says.

Sam Monte, director of operations at Monte Package Company, based in Riverside, MI, sees clamshell sleeves as another great opportunity for creating billboard space. “Everyone is fighting for placement in the produce department,” says Monte.

“On a clamshell, if that label is on the top you have to stand above it to look

down and see that label. One feature we started doing more of in 2016 is a glued chipboard sleeve that slides right on around the clamshell. It can be anywhere from a 1-inch to 3-inches wide. Now you have 360 degrees of printable area that you can put your message on — Pure Michigan, Fresh from Florida, Georgia Grown, whatever it is.”

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Continued from page 64
aging.”

The flexible package comes in a variety of sizes, has a resealable lid and works well for individual servings of fresh cut produce or for up to one pound packages of lettuce.

Smart packaging design can also help limit food waste, according to Roy G. Ferguson, chief executive of Chantler Packaging Inc. headquartered in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. “The easiest way to dramatically reduce food loss is

to properly package the food so it lasts longer in consumers’ refrigerators. One example of food waste reducing packaging is our PrimePro shelf life extension film, which extends the freshness of fruits and vegetables.”

SUSTAINABILITY

While consumers like the convenience of stand-up pouches and grab-and-go handled bags, many have environmental concerns. “We know consumers are looking for packaging

“Our Pull-n-Pak bagging solution is produced to be eight times stronger than other bags without having to use thicker film, which allows for source reduction and allows the customer to place more items in one bag.”

— Clarissa Trejo, Crown Poly



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to be more sustainable and environmentally-friendly,” says Tim Debus, president and chief executive of the Reusable Packaging Association, headquartered in Tampa, FL.

The RPA addresses issues related to transport packaging such as bins, totes, and crates for the shipment of product to retail. “A study by Mintel [a London-based global market research firm] found 63 percent of U.S. consumers said ‘reusable and repurposable packaging is a key purchasing driver,’” says Debus. “Consumers are becoming more aware that the reuse of packaging is the preferred option to eliminate waste and reduce the environmental footprint of products.”

Reusable packaging products not only reduce a retailer’s carbon footprint, according to Debus, they are also designed to protect commodities through distribution and “preserve the quality from farm to point-of-purchase by optimizing temperature control and maintaining the cold chain, which can have a significant impact on freshness and shelf-life extension.”

“Sustainability issues and environmental concerns have become a normal part of business and culture,” says Forowycz at Clear Lam Packaging. “Many companies are trying to take a holistic approach and are trying to help explain short-term and long-term benefits to consumers. It’s still pretty confusing for consumers. In the area of packaging we are working hard to develop designs and structures that use less plastic, are more space efficient, and can be either recycled or included in composting.”

“Several years ago Inline Plastics switched all its containers over to 100 percent recyclable PET material,” says Tilley. “To further enhance the sustainability of our containers, we now utilize DPET material, which has been shown

to have a carbon footprint as low as containers made from 50 percent post-consumer recycled material.”

According to Shafer, Mann Packing Company is mindful of consumer wants because the company has done the research. “We found 92 percent of the consumers we asked said they did not use the black tray (lids) for serving, per the package design,” he says. “So we redesigned our vegetable platter/tray and removed the black plastic ‘lid’ of the package.

“Our new large tray has 38 percent less packaging material than the old tray — small trays have 43 percent less — and 50 percent less packaging than other trays on the market.”

The redesign reduced 1.4 million pounds of plastic from landfills annually. “Additionally, removing the bottom tray allows consumers a bigger viewing window to the products. Sustainability and protecting our precious environment and valuable resources will continue to be top-of-mind at Mann’s throughout all of our operations in the future.”

Likewise packaging company, Crown Poly based in Huntington Park, CA, introduced a number of products with environmental



Mann Packing’s veggie-blend bowls take 3 to 4 minutes to prepare in the microwave and pair nicely with an added protein of choice. The bowls are kid-friendly, pre-portioned and low in calories.

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concerns in mind. “Our Pull-n-Pak bagging solution is produced to be eight times stronger than other bags without having to use thicker film, which allows for source reduction and allows the customer to place more items in one bag,” says Clarissa Trejo, digital marketing

manager. “Also, with our dispensers that make it easier for people to take one bag at a time, there is less waste produced by unused bags.”

The RPA addresses issues related to transport packaging such as bins, totes, and crates for the shipment of product to retail.

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“People take comfort in the fact that packaging provides food safety. That’s a key element and part of the reason we’ll see more retailers demand that from the produce sector.”

— Hans Schur, Schur Star Systems

option to eliminate waste and reduce the environmental footprint of products.”

Reusable packaging products not only reduce a retailer’s carbon footprint, according to Debus, they are also designed to protect commodities through distribution and “preserve the quality from farm to point-of-purchase by optimizing temperature control and maintaining the cold chain, which can have a significant impact on freshness and shelf-life extension.”

FOOD SAFETY

Food safety is a critical factor for packaging. “People take comfort in the fact that packaging provides food safety,” says Schur at Schur Star Systems. “That’s a key element and part of the reason we’ll see more retailers demand that from the produce sector.”

In some packaging the zip lock is exposed on the front of the pouch, which means shoppers, looking to sample a commodity, may slide them open and gain access. However well-meaning they may be, this is a cause for concern. Schur Star Systems has addressed this issue with its packaging systems.

“We can offer to seal our zippers in so you can’t open it from the outside. The only way you can gain access to the zipper is through a laser score where you tear off the top of the pouch to gain access to the zipper,” says Schur.

“For several years now, Triangle has offered customers a choice of sanitation levels when it comes to vertical form fill seal baggers,” says Magon-Haller. “These include stainless steel, stainless steel wash down, and models that meet USDA/3A sanitation standards.”

As a way to simplify the cleaning and maintenance of machines, as well as to help food packagers comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act, Triangle’s equipment features pitched top plate, continuous electro polished elements, eliminated crevices and stainless steel food grade motors.

“With food safety issues and the need

to comply with FSMA, food packagers are looking at cleaner equipment designs, as well as equipment that is easy to keep clean in a plant setting,” says Magon-Haller.

According to Forowycz at Clear Lam Packaging, “Tamper evidence is also a very important consideration. A variety of new designs entered the market. Peel and reseal films that clearly identify if someone has tampered with a package offer a benefit for processors, retailers and consumers.”

OTHER TRENDS IN INNOVATION

New innovations and advances in technology have allowed many opportunities to reduce waste, provide information, increase safety, and display produce in the best light. “The technology is so much more sophisticated now, packaging can be developed and selected based on the respiration of the actual product to be packaged versus the “one size fits all” approach in the past. This really is better for the product, the consumer, the retailer and

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the grower/shipper,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s Specialty Produce headquartered in Los Alamitos CA.

Schur Star Systems specializes in the fresh-and-go concept. “Handle bags, stand-up pouches — that’s our bread and butter,” says Schur, “but we also specialize in more advanced special pouches in which you can incorporate different spices or fruits in three different compartments in the pouch. You could put cherry tomatoes on one side and celery sticks on the other side. It allows for flexibility.

“With our equipment, we’re able to make very quick changeovers from a handle pouch to a compartment pouch,” says Schur. “You’ll only have a 5 minute change over between SKUs. In general, we try to encourage our customers to try a new concept. For example, our conversion technology allows us to offer a wide range of bag shapes. If you want a pouch shaped as a Christmas tree, we can make it.”

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties, headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL, sees a

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Schur Star Systems specializes in advanced pouch options with high graphics.

“A problem that we were regularly seeing on store shelves with traditional pouch bags was a lack of ventilation that caused too much condensation and resulted in diminished shelf-life.”

—Aaron Fox, Fox Packaging

continued trend toward value-added products that are also microwaveable. New technologies and innovations in consumer-friendly produce packaging also improves shelf life. “Micro-perforation technology evolved to the point where oxygen transmission rates can be fine-tuned to provide the best atmosphere for any fresh vegetable or fruit.”

“A problem that we were regularly seeing on store shelves with traditional pouch bags was a lack of ventilation that caused too much condensation and resulted in diminished shelf-life,” says Fox at Fox Packaging. “We addressed that challenge by designing our Stand-Up Combo Bag, the first bag to incorporate a mesh side to a pouch bag. This drastically increases airflow and increases shelf life the same way our Fox Fresh Mesh Combo bag improved the performance of the straight poly film bag.”

“As the innovator of the bag on a roll and self-opening dispenser, we continue to be the market leader in consumer friendly produce packaging solutions,” says Trejo at Crown Poly. The company’s bag rolls are self-opening, allow for one-at-a-time dispensing, and can

be dispensed right to the last bag.

“Since the produce bag is the only product that is interactive with the customer, providing an easy to use system is key to keeping the customer happy,” says Trejo. “Additionally, for our upscale clientele, we offer High Clarity clear bags to provide the customer full clarity of their produce,” adds Trejo.

“Modified Atmosphere Packaging is being used more for both wet products and dry products,” says Forowycz of Clear Lam

Packaging. “For fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, the packaging is designed to allow oxygen in at a specific rate and carbon dioxide out. With dried fruits and nuts the packaging is designed to keep out oxygen.

“Antifog capability has been a big deal in recent years. Technology has evolved to allow plastics to truly prevent the package from fogging up and losing clarity. Consumers want to really see what they are getting and they want it to look fresh.” **pb**

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In Sunny Simi Valley, California, Wal-Mart Sees Clouds On Produce Pricing



It is well known that Wal-Mart is struggling to find an effective way to deal with deep discounters such as Aldi and Save-A-Lot. With Lidl preparing to roll out stores across the country, this threat both to Wal-Mart's image as the Low Price Leader and threat to the top and bottom line is substantial.

Perhaps not as fully recognized, though, is the degree to which Wal-Mart's pricing ceased to provide competitive advantages against ethnic grocers, specialty stores and, in many cases, mainstream supermarkets.

In this, the 29th iteration of *The PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report*, we head to Simi Valley in California. Part of the Los Angeles metropolitan area, home to the Reagan Library, and often considered one of the most conservative towns, politically speaking, in America. This is also the city in which the challenge Wal-Mart is facing crystalized in our Pricing Report.

Once again, we add our usual caveats. This is a study of produce pricing only. So, theoretically, a store could have high produce prices and low meat prices or vice versa. And this is true of any department

in the store. Still the results from Simi Valley are striking.

In our main market basket of 53 items, both Jons International Marketplace, an independent chain with about 15 stores that prides itself on extensive micro-marketing for each of its locations, and Vallarta, a Latino independent with more than 45 stores, came in less expensive than Wal-Mart. Jons was 13.44 percent under Wal-Mart, and Vallarta, a whopping 28.44 percent under Wal-Mart. Ralphs was insignificantly more expensive at 1.32 percent over Wal-Mart's pricing. Only Vons was significantly more expensive than Wal-Mart, coming in at 21.75 percent over



Editor's note: For a look at the history of all 29 Wal-Mart Pricing Reports, please visit our website at www.producebusiness.com.

WAL-MART PRICING COMPARISON IN SIMI VALLEY - 53 ITEMS

STORE NAME:		WAL-MART			JONS		RALPHS		VALLARTA		VONS	
Produce Item	How Priced	Regular Price*	Regular Price*	% Over Wal-Mart	Regular Price*	% Over Wal-Mart	Regular Price*	% Over Wal-Mart	Regular Price*	% Over Wal-Mart		
Apples - Granny Smith (PLU #4139)	Lb	1.31	\$0.99	-24.43%	\$0.99	-24.43%	\$0.79	-39.69%	\$1.99	51.91%		
Apples - Gala	Lb	1.47	\$0.99	-32.65%	\$1.25	-14.97%	\$0.79	-46.26%	\$1.99	35.37%		
Apples - Red Delicious (PLU #4016)	Lb	0.99	\$0.99	0.00%	\$1.99	101.01%	\$0.99	0.00%	\$1.49	50.51%		
Avocados	Each	0.78	\$0.99	26.92%	\$1.25	60.26%	0.50	-35.90%	\$1.99	155.13%		
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	0.39	\$0.59	51.28%	\$0.69	76.92%	\$0.59	51.28%	\$0.69	76.92%		
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	2.98	\$1.00	-66.44%	\$2.99	0.34%	\$1.56	-47.65%	\$2.99	0.34%		
Coconuts	Each	1.98	\$2.99	51.01%	\$2.49	25.76%	\$2.29	15.66%	\$2.29	15.66%		
Grapefruit - Red	Each	1.28	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$1.28	0.00%	\$1.49	16.41%		
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	2.79	\$1.49	-46.59%	\$2.79	0.00%	\$0.99	-64.52%	\$2.99	7.17%		
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	\$0.99	-50.00%	\$2.79	40.91%	\$0.99	-50.00%	\$3.99	101.52%		
Honeydew - Whole	Each	2.98	\$2.50	-16.11%	\$0.99	-66.78%	\$2.50	-16.11%	\$3.99	33.89%		
Kiwi	Lbs	1.29	\$2.50	93.80%	\$2.99	131.78%	\$2.50	93.80%	\$2.50	93.80%		
Lemons - Bulk	Each	0.38	\$1.49	292.11%	\$0.79	107.89%	\$0.50	31.58%	\$0.89	134.21%		
Limes - Bulk	Each	0.20	\$0.16	-20.00%	\$0.33	65.00%	\$0.12	-40.00%	\$0.39	95.00%		
Mangos	Each	1.28	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$0.69	-46.09%	1.50	17.19%	\$1.49	16.41%		
Oranges - Navel bulk	Each	0.88	\$0.65	-26.14%	\$1.29	46.59%	\$0.45	-48.86%	\$1.99	126.14%		
Papayas	Lb	1.48	\$0.50	-66.22%	\$1.29	-12.84%	\$0.50	-66.22%	\$1.09	-26.35%		
Pears - Bosc	Lb	1.67	\$1.39	-16.77%	\$1.99	19.16%	\$1.49	-10.78%	\$1.99	19.16%		
Pineapple	Each	2.50	\$4.46	78.40%	\$1.49	-40.40%	\$4.90	96.00%	\$2.99	19.60%		
Raspberries	Package:6 oz	2.77	\$3.99	44.04%	\$2.99	7.94%	\$3.99	44.04%	\$3.99	44.04%		
Dressing - Other	13 oz	3.64	\$3.89	6.87%	\$3.99	9.62%	\$3.24	-10.99%	\$3.99	9.62%		
Asparagus	10 oz	4.48	\$2.49	-44.42%	\$2.49	-44.42%	\$1.87	-58.26%	\$3.12	-30.36%		
Beans - Green	12 oz	2.98	\$1.04	-65.10%	\$1.49	-50.00%	\$1.49	-50.00%	\$1.49	-50.00%		
Broccoli Crowns	12 oz	2.24	\$1.04	-53.57%	\$1.34	-40.18%	\$0.52	-76.79%	\$1.34	-40.18%		
Cabbage - Green	Each	0.74	\$2.07	179.73%	\$1.72	132.43%	\$0.74	0.00%	\$0.99	33.78%		
Carrots - baby	Package	1.48	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$1.59	7.43%	\$1.19	-19.59%	\$1.50	1.35%		
Carrots - Regular 1# Bag	Package	0.82	\$0.40	-51.22%	\$0.99	20.73%	\$0.50	-39.02%	\$0.99	20.73%		
Celery	Lb	2.00	\$0.40	-80.00%	\$1.26	-37.00%	\$0.34	-83.00%	\$0.76	-62.00%		
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.33	\$0.69	109.09%	\$0.25	-24.24%	\$0.59	78.79%	\$0.69	109.09%		
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	0.78	\$0.59	-24.36%	\$0.99	26.92%	\$0.59	-24.36%	\$0.99	26.92%		
Garlic	Lb	3.18	\$3.49	9.75%	\$1.00	-68.55%	\$0.60	-81.13%	\$1.18	-62.89%		
Green Onions	Bunch	1.18	\$0.50	-57.63%	\$0.79	-33.05%	\$0.50	-57.63%	\$0.99	-16.10%		
Kale	Each	1.98	\$0.79	-60.10%	\$2.49	25.76%	\$0.69	-65.15%	\$2.49	25.76%		
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	1.48	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$0.79	-46.62%	\$1.69	14.19%		
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Each	1.68	\$0.50	-70.24%	\$0.99	-41.07%	\$0.79	-52.98%	\$1.69	0.60%		
Mushrooms - White Package	8 oz	1.09	\$0.99	-9.17%	\$1.85	69.72%	\$1.59	45.87%	\$2.29	110.09%		
Onions - Red	lb	0.97	\$0.50	-48.45%	\$2.98	207.22%	\$0.99	2.06%	\$2.98	207.22%		
Onions - White	Lb	0.97	\$0.50	-48.45%	\$1.49	53.61%	\$0.33	-65.98%	\$1.49	53.61%		
Onions - Yellow	Lb	0.98	\$0.25	-74.49%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.21	-78.57%	\$1.49	52.04%		
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.68	\$0.99	45.59%	\$1.49	119.12%	\$0.50	-26.47%	\$0.99	45.59%		
Peppers - Red	Each	0.35	\$0.99	182.86%	\$1.49	325.71%	\$0.79	125.71%	\$1.29	268.57%		
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	Bag	2.47	\$1.99	-19.43%	\$1.99	-19.43%	\$0.50	-79.76%	\$1.99	-19.43%		
Squash - Zucchini	Lb	1.34	\$0.89	-33.58%	\$1.49	11.19%	\$0.89	-33.58%	\$1.79	33.58%		
Sweet Potatoes	Lb	1.28	\$0.89	-30.47%	\$1.99	55.47%	\$1.09	-14.84%	\$1.99	55.47%		
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	0.48	\$1.29	168.75%	\$0.99	106.25%	\$0.99	106.25%	\$1.69	252.08%		
Tomatoes - Regular Large	Lb	1.88	\$0.89	-52.66%	\$2.99	59.04%	\$0.99	-47.34%	\$2.99	59.04%		
Coleslaw - 1# Bag	Bag	1.75	\$1.29	-26.29%	\$2.27	29.71%	\$1.75	0.00%	\$5.90	237.14%		
Salad - Caesar	Bag: 3 oz	3.74	\$0.67	-82.09%	\$1.07	-71.39%	\$1.18	-68.45%	\$1.14	-69.52%		
Salad - Garden	Bag: 12 oz	1.56	\$1.69	8.33%	\$1.69	8.33%	\$1.79	14.74%	\$1.69	8.33%		
Salad - Organic	Bag: 5 oz	3.46	\$3.99	15.32%	\$2.99	-13.58%	\$3.49	0.87%	\$3.49	0.87%		
Jalapenos	lb	0.98	\$2.99	205.10%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.69	-29.59%	\$1.49	52.04%		
Cilantro	each	0.48	\$0.69	43.75%	\$0.69	43.75%	\$0.48	0.00%	\$0.89	85.42%		
Fresh Juice	15.2 oz	2.38	\$3.49	46.64%	\$3.49	46.64%	\$2.50	5.04%	\$3.49	46.64%		
MARKET BASKET		87.21	\$75.49	-13.44%	\$88.36	1.32%	\$62.41	-28.44%	\$106.18	21.75%		

Red Prices - Adjusted for size difference Blue Prices - Adjusted for "Each" VS. Weight

WAL-MART PRICING COMPARISON IN SIMI VALLEY - 38 ITEMS

STORE NAME:	WAL-MART		JONS		RALPHS		VALLARTA		VONS	
Produce Item	How Priced	Regular Price*	Regular Price*	% Over Wal-Mart						
Apples - Granny Smith (PLU #4139)	Lb	1.31	\$0.99	-24.43%	\$0.99	-24.43%	\$0.79	-39.69%	\$1.99	51.91%
Apples -- Gala	Lb	1.47	\$0.99	-32.65%	\$1.25	-14.97%	\$0.79	-46.26%	\$1.99	35.37%
Apples - Red Delicious (PLU #4016)	Lb	0.99	\$0.99	0.00%	\$1.99	101.01%	\$0.99	0.00%	\$1.49	50.51%
Avocados	Each	0.78	\$0.99	26.92%	\$1.25	60.26%	0.50	-35.90%	\$1.99	155.13%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	0.39	\$0.59	51.28%	\$0.69	76.92%	\$0.59	51.28%	\$0.69	76.92%
Coconuts	Each	1.98	\$2.99	51.01%	\$2.49	25.76%	\$2.29	15.66%	\$2.29	15.66%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	1.28	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$1.28	0.00%	\$1.49	16.41%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	2.79	\$1.49	-46.59%	\$2.79	0.00%	\$0.99	-64.52%	\$2.99	7.17%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	\$0.99	-50.00%	\$2.79	40.91%	\$0.99	-50.00%	\$3.99	101.52%
Lemons - Bulk	Each	0.38	\$1.49	292.11%	\$0.79	107.89%	\$0.50	31.58%	\$0.89	134.21%
Pears - Bosc	Lb	1.67	\$1.39	-16.77%	\$1.99	19.16%	\$1.49	-10.78%	\$1.99	19.16%
Raspberries	Package: 6 oz	2.77	\$3.99	44.04%	\$2.99	7.94%	\$3.99	44.04%	\$3.99	44.04%
Dressing - Other	13 oz	3.64	\$3.89	6.87%	\$3.99	9.62%	\$3.24	-10.99%	\$3.99	9.62%
Asparagus	10 oz	4.48	\$2.49	-44.42%	\$2.49	-44.42%	\$1.87	-58.26%	\$3.12	-30.36%
Beans - Green	12 oz	2.98	\$1.04	-65.10%	\$1.49	-50.00%	\$1.49	-50.00%	\$1.49	-50.00%
Broccoli Crowns	12 oz	2.24	\$1.04	-53.57%	\$1.34	-40.18%	\$0.52	-76.79%	\$1.34	-40.18%
Carrots -- baby	Package	1.48	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$1.59	7.43%	\$1.19	-19.59%	\$1.50	1.35%
Carrots - Regular 1# Bag	Package	0.82	\$0.40	-51.22%	\$0.99	20.73%	\$0.50	-39.02%	\$0.99	20.73%
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.33	\$0.69	109.09%	\$0.25	-24.24%	\$0.59	78.79%	\$0.69	109.09%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	0.78	\$0.59	-24.36%	\$0.99	26.92%	\$0.59	-24.36%	\$0.99	26.92%
Green Onions	Bunch	1.18	\$0.50	-57.63%	\$0.79	-33.05%	\$0.50	-57.63%	\$0.99	-16.10%
Kale	Each	1.98	\$0.79	-60.10%	\$2.49	25.76%	\$0.69	-65.15%	\$2.49	25.76%
Lettuce - Iceberg Bulk	Each	1.48	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$0.99	-33.11%	\$0.79	-46.62%	\$1.69	14.19%
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Each	1.68	\$0.50	-70.24%	\$0.99	-41.07%	\$0.79	-52.98%	\$1.69	0.60%
Mushrooms - White Package	8 oz	1.09	\$0.99	-9.17%	\$1.85	69.72%	\$1.59	45.87%	\$2.29	110.09%
Onions -- White	Lb	0.97	\$0.50	-48.45%	\$1.49	53.61%	\$0.33	-65.98%	\$1.49	53.61%
Onions - Yellow	Lb	0.98	\$0.25	-74.49%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.21	-78.57%	\$1.49	52.04%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.68	\$0.99	45.59%	\$1.49	119.12%	\$0.50	-26.47%	\$0.99	45.59%
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	Bag	2.47	\$1.99	-19.43%	\$1.99	-19.43%	\$0.50	-79.76%	\$1.99	-19.43%
Sweet Potatoes	Lb	1.28	\$0.89	-30.47%	\$1.99	55.47%	\$1.09	-14.84%	\$1.99	55.47%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	0.48	\$1.29	168.75%	\$0.99	106.25%	\$0.99	106.25%	\$1.69	252.08%
Tomatoes - Regular Large	Lb	1.88	\$0.89	-52.66%	\$2.99	59.04%	\$0.99	-47.34%	\$2.99	59.04%
Coleslaw - 1# Bag	Bag	1.75	\$1.29	-26.29%	\$2.27	29.71%	\$1.75	0.00%	\$5.90	237.14%
Salad - Caesar	Bag: 3 oz	3.74	\$0.67	-82.09%	\$1.07	-71.39%	\$1.18	-68.45%	\$1.14	-69.52%
Salad - Garden	Bag: 12 oz	1.56	\$1.69	8.33%	\$1.69	8.33%	\$1.79	14.74%	\$1.69	8.33%
Salad -- Organic	Bag: 5 oz	3.46	\$3.99	15.32%	\$2.99	-13.58%	\$3.49	0.87%	\$3.49	0.87%
Cilantro	each	0.48	\$0.69	43.75%	\$0.69	43.75%	\$0.48	0.00%	\$0.89	85.42%
Fresh Juice	15.2 oz	2.38	\$3.49	46.64%	\$3.49	46.64%	\$2.50	5.04%	\$3.49	46.64%
MARKET BASKET		64.06	\$51.40	-19.76%	\$65.37	2.04%	\$44.84	-30.00%	\$78.27	22.18%

Red Prices - Adjusted for size difference

Wal-Mart's pricing.

Now, in studying pricing in this market, we observed Wal-Mart appeared to be trying to avoid direct price comparisons on many

In this Los Angeles commuter town, Wal-Mart is beaten solidly by the micromarketing independent, Jons, clobbered by the Latino independent Vallarta and basically in a draw with Kroger's division, Ralphs.



items. So, it adopted pricing by the "each," rather than the pricing by the pound, which was standard in the marketplace. When this is done, our practice is to adjust the pricing to make it comparable. So, if one store sells an

item at .50 cents each, and another sells it for \$2.00 a pound, we calculate how many units are in the pound and adjust accordingly.

This is generally accurate but can pose problems as sizes, etc., can vary. Just to double



check, we also ran our market basket on a more limited 38 items — as opposed to 53 items in our main market basket. We did this by eliminating any items on which we had to do adjustments of prices by the each and by the pound.

Was our first market basket off base? It seems not. In fact, Jons and Vallarta both compared even more favorably with Wal-Mart when it came to pricing, with Jons beating Wal-Mart by 19.76 percent and Vallarta coming in a full 30 percent under Wal-Mart's produce pricing. Ralphs was a tad less competitive at 2.04 percent over Wal-Mart. Vons also inched up a bit with its numbers showing at 22.18 percent over Wal-Mart.

None of this is good news for Wal-Mart, beaten solidly by the micromarketing independent, clobbered by the Latino independent and basically in a draw with Kroger's division, Ralphs. And Vons is just at the line where we

found stores get in trouble, when their prices are 20 percent over Wal-Mart.

Yet this is still not the whole story. It is our policy to report prices based on what any consumers can get when walking in a store. So discounts offered to, say, loyalty club members, don't show up in these comparisons. In this market, both Vons and Ralphs offer significant discounts to loyalty card holders. Card holder prices applied to our 53 item basket mean that Ralphs actually comes in 1.94 percent below Wal-Mart. Vons is the

most aggressive of the studied chains with cardholder discounts, and when these discounts are applied to our main basket, Vons came in at 15.32 percent over Wal-Mart's prices — which may be higher than Wal-Mart, but much more in range.

So where does this leave Wal-Mart? What is the proposition the Wal-Mart brand is making to consumers? Wal-Mart abandoned its "Always Low Prices" slogan a decade ago. But even its current "Save Money. Live Better" motto is grounded in the idea that shopping at



WAL-MART PRICING VERSUS LOYALTY CARDS

STORE NAME: Wal-Mart	Wal-Mart Price		Ralphs		Vons	
Produce Item	How Priced	Regular Price*	Price*	% Over Wal-Mart	Price*	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples -- Gala	Lb	1.47	0.99	-32.65%	1.99	35.37%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	2.98	2.5	-16.11%	1.99	-33.22%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	2.79	2.79	0.00%	2.49	-10.75%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	1.98	2.79	40.91%	2.49	25.76%
Oranges -- Navel bulk	Each	0.88	1.29	46.59%	1.49	69.32%
Raspberries	Package Size : 6 oz	2.77	2.5	-9.75%	3.99	44.04%
Carrots -- baby	Package	1.48	0.99	-33.11%	0.99	-33.11%
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	0.68	0.99	45.59%	0.99	45.59%
Peppers - Red	Each	0.38	0.99	160.53%	0.69	81.58%
Tomatoes - Regular Large	Lb	1.88	2.99	59.04%	1.99	5.85%
Salad -- Organic	Bag Wgt: 5 oz	3.46	2.99	-13.58%	3	-13.29%
MARKET BASKET - WITH LOYALTY CARD		87.21	85.52	-1.94%	100.57	15.32%

Wal-Mart will save you money. At least in fresh produce, in the Simi Valley, that is not true.

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Report next rolls out to our 30th city, we will test the proposition that Wal-Mart is prepared to allow itself to be underpriced, and we will

look at what that means for the future of this chain, for American retailing, and for the produce vending community. **pb**



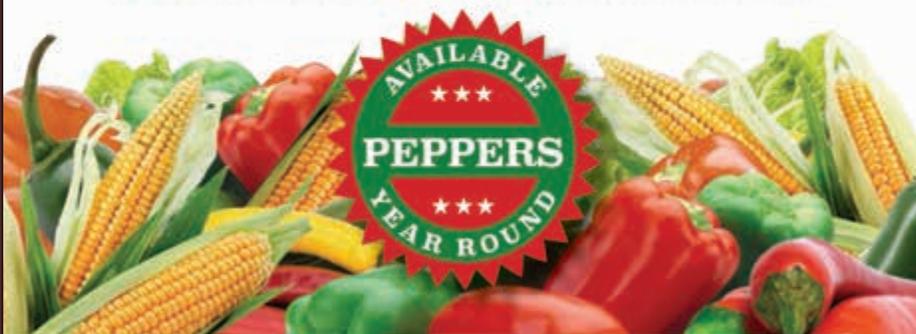
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Wholesalers Remain A Key Link For Local And Small Farms

Wholesalers add value to both sides of the local equation, helping farms and retailers connect effectively.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Five or six years ago, one or two local sweet corn producers supplied all of Redner's Markets, headquartered in Reading, PA. With the growing demand for local produce, Redner's now uses nine or 10 local sweet corn farmers to meet its needs. "We have seen demand for local increase dramatically," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's. "We use more local farmers and source more via wholesalers to keep all our stores adequately supplied with local products."

Wholesalers around the country report increased interest in local products. Corey Brothers, Inc. a wholesaler in Charleston, WV,



has seen interest in locally grown increase 10-fold for its business. "All our local customers want locally grown as long as it complies with insurance and food safety requirements," says Bob Corey, chief executive.

In West Caldwell, NJ, FreshPro Food Distributors observes an increase in local demand, describing how customers perceive it as healthier, fresher, having a lower carbon footprint and overall being better for the consumer. "Local has become the new buzzword," relates Joey Granata, produce sales director.

Retailers experiencing this buzz for local produce find solutions via the wholesaler, according to Rob Strube, president of Strube Celery and Vegetable Company in Chicago,

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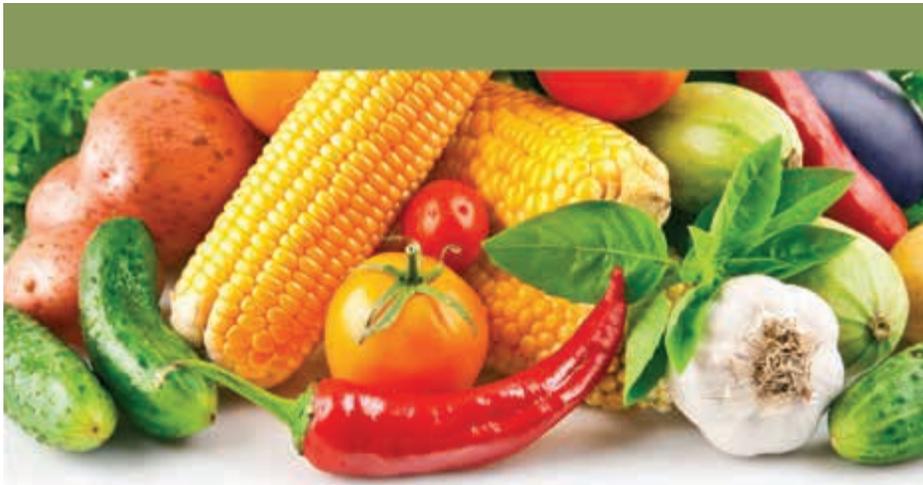
A LEGACY OF SERVICE

IL. “Our customers report more demand from their shoppers for local,” he says. “Our local offerings help our customers compete against farmers markets and farm stands during the local seasons.”

Wholesalers remain well positioned in the farm-to-market connection if they stay focused on what drives the local movement. “Based on research we read and done, we determined local demand is driven by four factors,” reports Paul Lightfoot, chief executive of local producer BrightFarms Inc. in New York, NY. “First

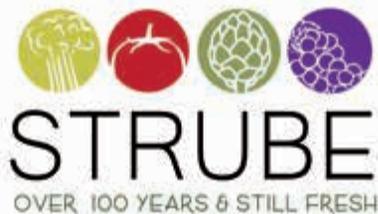
is freshness. If you’re not able to exploit the freshness advantage with local, you’re squandering an opportunity. When you’re doing a good job of getting from farm to shelf in a few days, you have an advantage.”

Lightfoot lists trust as the second factor. “This is an issue stemming from the Millennial generation,” he explains. “They don’t trust big food companies and see local as an anecdote to big food. So to sell local, you need to do more than just say local, you need to talk about what farm, town, farmer – being specific relays trust.”



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The other two factors referenced by Lightfoot include sustainability and keeping money in the local economy. “These four factors are what anyone in the local food business should be trying to communicate because they drive demand,” he says. “If a wholesaler is messing any of this up, they’re doing themselves a disservice.”

DEFINING LOCAL

With increasing emphasis on marketing “local,” wholesalers face the challenge of defining what local is. “Local is very subjective in terms of talking to growers,” relates Robert Guenther, senior vice president for public policy at United Fresh Produce Association based in Washington, D.C. “In most eyes, local means down the road or within a certain state such as a state-grown program. But in reality the marketplace is defining locally grown.”

Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation in Philadelphia, PA, sees local as a mutable term. “It really ends up depending on your customer base,” he explains. “This is why we label produce specifically by origin: for example, New Jersey Grown, Pennsylvania Grown, or Delaware Fresh, so our customers can decide if it’s local to them.”

S. Katzman Produce/Katzman Berry Corp in Bronx, NY, uses local when referring to produce grown in the New York tri-state area. “We pull a lot of product out of New Jersey and New York,” says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager.

Other wholesalers must widen their local definition given limitation of availability. “Local West Virginia is tough because there are

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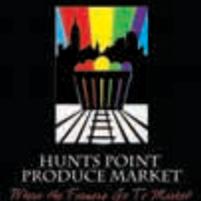
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very few farms,” reports Corey. “Since we must procure local, we reach into Ohio, Kentucky and Virginia for local until our West Virginia producers can supply more.”

Location of the customer also plays a role. “A customer located in Northern New Jersey may buy local Jersey corn but that corn could be grown 100 miles south of them, versus corn grown 20 miles away in New York state,” expresses Michael Rigo, produce buyer for West Caldwell, NJ-based FreshPro Food Distributors.

A broader distribution region, such as Procacci’s, may affect its definition as well. “We source product from New England and even Canada,” says Maxwell. “But for our customers further north of our Pennsylvania location, those are local products.”

Ultimately, the buyer/customer and retail consumers decide what local is. “Everybody draws their local line in the sand somewhere different,” says Nate Stone, chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc. in Detroit, MI. “Our customers put the title on

“In the end, the consumers drive the definition of local to support the growers in their own state, county, or neighborhood.”

— Nate Stone, Ben B. Schwartz & Sons

what is local. As a wholesaler, we know when people are going to use Michigan product versus California or Texas or Mexico. In the end, the consumers drive the definition of local to support the growers in their own state, county, or neighborhood.”

At the end of the day, according to Emily Kohlhas, marketing and business development for John Vena, Inc. in Philadelphia, PA, the onus is on the retailer or other consumer-facing entity to define what value they assign the word local. “They need to communicate it to their customers,” she says. “As a wholesaler, it’s our responsibility to share the fact: point of origin.”

EXPEDITING DISTRIBUTION

A wholesaler’s fundamental role in effective distribution is the same with local as with non-local. “Think of us as logistics and sales agents for the farmers,” explains Katzman. “They grow the product, and we sell it and get it to the customers — a true partnership at its best! Everyone specializing in what they excel at and working together to benefit all.”

Though the amount of local food being sold is increasing, Lightfoot reveals many super-markets are still on the sidelines because of distribution issues. “It’s tough to replace three suppliers with 20,” he says.

Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Procacci, agrees logistics is a huge issue for the local movement. “A big hurdle for retailers is getting product from the grower to the store,” he states. “We play an integral role in making this connection.”

“Transportation of the product to the stores is a wholesale benefit,” concurs Rick Rutte, produce/floral director at North State Grocery in Cottonwood, CA, with 19 stores. “We don’t own any trucking.”

Even local producers who do have direct fulfillment capability, such as BrightFarms, use wholesalers where the cost of sales, order-taking and transportation is more efficient for the wholesaler. “From our Bucks County farm, we directly sell to two large chains but there are several smaller chains where it’s more efficient and economical for us to sell via a wholesaler

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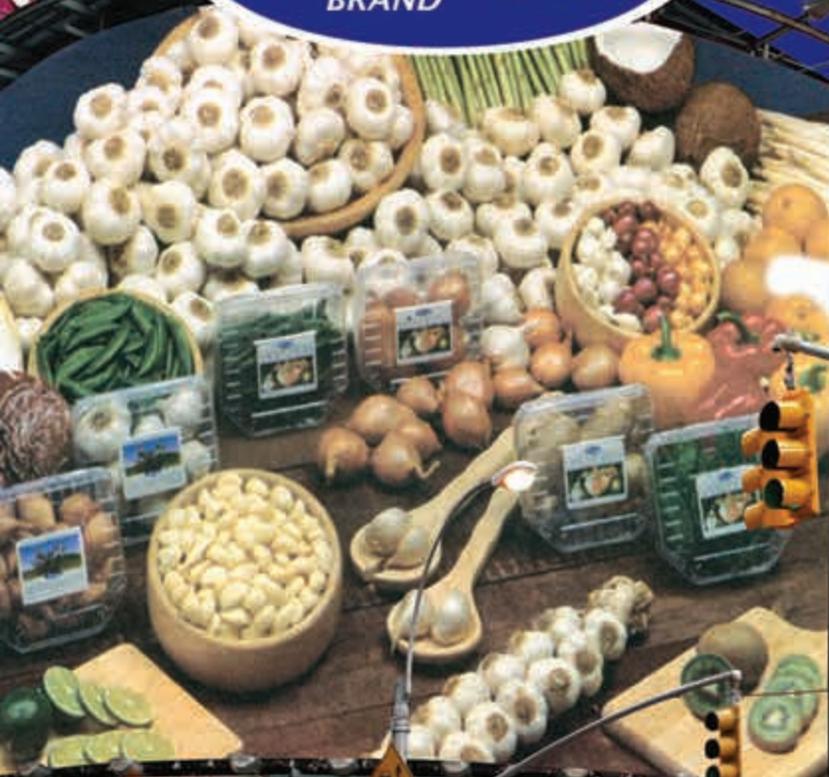
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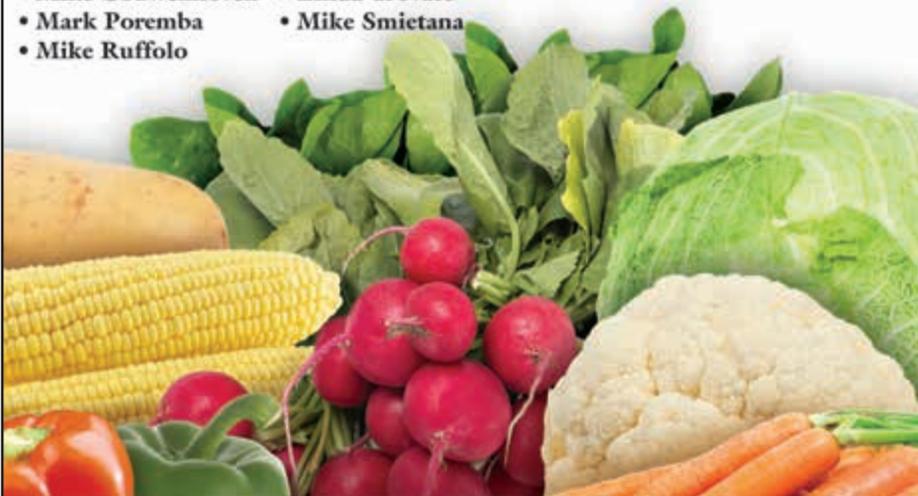
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such as FreshPro,” describes Lightfoot. “Fresh-Pro gets us into chains we wouldn’t be able to service without changing our cost structure or staffing.”

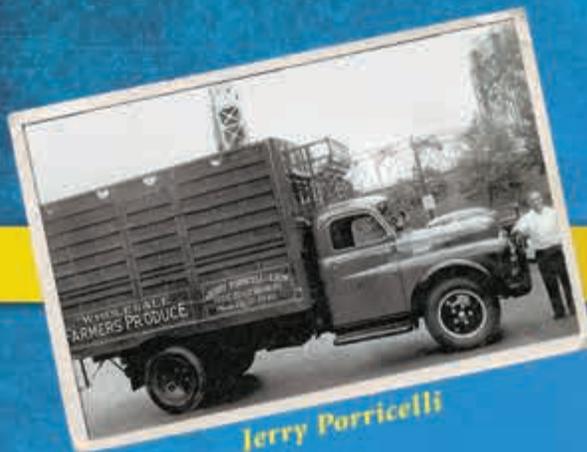
Crucial to the distribution challenge is staying as close to harvest as possible. “It’s a huge advantage to get on the shelf with 11 days of code,” says Lightfoot. “But that requires multiple drop-offs and for small store multiple drop-offs, we just couldn’t do it. However, a wholesaler such as FreshPro plugs that gap beautifully.”

Stone agrees on the importance of helping customers make sure turns on product are as fresh as possible. “We pretty much know in advance what our growers’ plan-and-pick list is,” he explains. “How we expedite daily receiving and distribution of local product is a huge benefit to our customers and shelf life.”

Resolution of the distribution challenge has left room in the marketplace for unique wholesale concepts. BrightFarms works with local food hub wholesaler Zone 7 LLC in Ringoes, NJ. “They’re solving the problem of aggregating volume from lots of small farms to meet a lot of smaller customer needs,” shares Lightfoot. “And, further up in New England, a nonprofit called Red Tomato connects farmers to market as well.”

Mikey Azzara, founder/owner of Zone 7 defines his company as a local food hub, helping local farmers access the wholesale market and sell produce. The company services restaurants, retail outlets and schools. After spending five years with an organization trying to connect farms directly, Azzara realized a lot of the farms were not set up for wholesale. “They don’t have a dedicated sales person, don’t send availability lists, don’t call for orders, don’t have dedicated delivery drivers or refrigerated trucks,” he explains. “Zone 7 fills those voids. We offer a reliable, consistent supply of locally

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VOLUME, VARIETY AND VALUE

Variety, volume and consistency constitute other challenges to marketing local produce

and represent another opportunity for wholesalers to provide solutions. “Wholesalers are there to consolidate for buyers,” says FreshPro’s Rigo. “Many buyers don’t have the distribution network wholesalers have. We’re an easy

one-stop shop for everything local.”

Procacci’s Maxwell highlights the convenience offered by wholesaler one-stop shopping. “Our customers can get local product from different farms, but without having to

■ A LASTING LEGACY

Local may be new to the marketing world but it’s old hat to wholesalers who have been sourcing locally for generations.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

While local may be a trendy new label, Nate Stone, chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc. in Detroit, MI, points out it’s not a concept new to wholesalers. “Our company has used and supported local growers since its inception in 1906,” he explains. “We’d be silly not to appreciate everybody’s newfound love and quest for local produce. Local gives the wholesaler something else to offer the customer – but not because it’s new; merely because most of the time it’s seasonal.”

Local product has always been central

to John Vena, Inc. in Philadelphia, PA. “When product is in season locally, there is no substitute in taste or economy,” says Emily Kohlhas, marketing and business development. “We’re just glad after 40 to 50 years of ambiguity in the supply chain and demand blind to flavor or source, consumers are again beginning to recognize where their fruits and vegetables are coming from, and how they taste.”

Strube Celery and Vegetable Company in Chicago, IL counts itself among one of the larger and longer-term local-handling wholesalers in its area. “We’ve always handled local,” says Rob Strube, president.

“I’m a fourth generation and my grandfather set up deals with local farmers to sell to Jewel Osco. We carried on this tradition.”

More than 80 years ago, S. Katzman Produce/Katzman Berry Corp in Bronx, NY, was wholesaling product from local farmers. “We have grown with them every year since,” says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager. “With the increase in hype for local product from our customers over the years, we developed partnerships with our local farmers to get the customers what they want because, after all, it’s about making them happy.” **pb**

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By Indianapolis Fruit Company, Inc.
Posted Tuesday, April 3, 2012 at 9:09AM EDT

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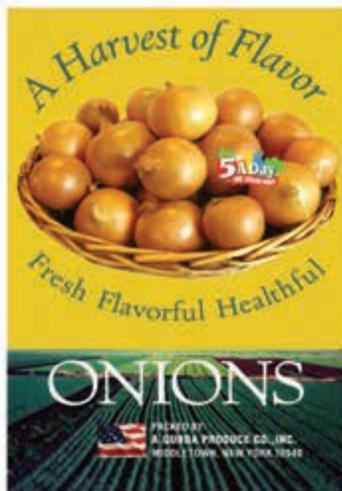
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■ SMALL BUT SAFE

Wholesalers toe the line on food safety even with small local farms, offering support to local growers to ensure compliance.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

The increase in demand for local produce has led to increasing scrutiny and speculation about food safety and small growers. Though in some instances small farms are exempt from regulations, Robert Guenther, senior vice president for public policy at United Fresh Produce Association based in Washington, D.C., asserts the market drives the standards. "Under the Food Safety Modernization Act, small farms are exempt from the produce regulatory requirements for food safety," he explains. "However, we believe if you are selling into the commercial marketplace you should have some baseline of food safety practices on your farm."

Wholesalers support this assumption, noting their reputation and business are on the line. "Everybody expects the highest level of food safety," says Nate Stone, chief operating officer of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc. in Detroit, MI. "Good food safety is a minimum requirement. A company wouldn't be in business if the farm didn't have good food safety. No retailer would allow the product in the stores and no well-established wholesaler would ever sacrifice their reputation."

Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation in Philadelphia, PA, maintains stringent food safety requirements for everyone it buys from. "Every one of our growers is responsible for the highest food safety standards," asserts Rick Feighery, vice president of sales. "We require it and our customers require it as well."

Food safety programs, recall and trace-back programs, and proper insurance coverage are all items FreshPro Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ, requires before using a vendor. "This may put us at a disadvantage over others but we adhere to our internal policies and guidelines," states Joey Granata, produce sales director.

Redner's Markets in Reading, PA, won't purchase product from a local farm if it is not Good Agriculture Practices (GAP)-certified. Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral, notes the company's wholesalers

that supply the retailer know what they're looking for. "We rely on them to ensure our standards are met," he relates. "Also, we don't play games with the certifications. Sometimes farms may be certified for green squash but not for sweet corn. We require them to be certified for the specific product they're selling us."

As more and more local farms seek to enter the commercial supply chain, wholesalers assist them to ensure food-safe practices. "We work with farms to see where they're at on food safety and get them up to speed with third-party audits and certifications," reports Mikey Azzara, founder/owner of Zone 7 LLC in Ringoes, NJ.

Wholesalers and farms garner support from various sources. "There are programs out there helping small farms meet basic requirements," reports Guenther. "For instance, in some states they are using Specialty Crop Block Grant funding to provide GAP on food safety to small and very small farmers. In addition, USDA has just launched a GroupGAP program, which makes it easier for growers of all sizes and grower groups to receive USDA GAP certification."

Zone 7 is looking to utilize GroupGAP to aid more farms. "We can work with 30 of our growers hand-in-hand and share costs," explains Azzara. "This program is designed to help the small growers. We are involved in the training and paperwork end."

According to Bob Corey, chief executive at Corey Brothers, Inc. in Charleston, WV, there is a substantial movement in West Virginia to train current growers and attract new growers. "We want them to be GHP (Good Handling Practices) and GAP certified and with packing facilities to properly pack product," he says. "Corey Bros works closely with the governor's office and Department of Agriculture. It's important to help the grower become compliant without fear; to make it easy for them to understand, to provide advice, counseling and encouragement."

pb

“As wholesalers we operate more as an extension of our farmers. We view it more as a partnership than a buying and selling relationship.”

— Stefanie Katzman, S. Katzman Produce

deal with 20 or 50 different vendors,” he states.

Helping customers stay consistent with supply profits customers and wholesalers, notes Katzman. “This is crucial for repeat business,” she says. “We also pass customer feedback on to the farmers, so they can try to accommodate customer needs.”

The expanding size of local demand necessitates Redner’s buying from wholesalers to help cover the volume it needs. “This is especially true when growers run short,” says Stiles. “This past year is a good example — with the heat and rain, our direct growers could only provide a limited amount of product so we had to fill in with local product from our wholesalers.”

To better serve customers, wholesalers continue to explore increasing variety for local products and play a more proactive role with growers. About 10 to 12 years ago, Procacci started putting staff at the New Jersey auction block in Vineland. “We wanted a presence there on a daily basis to buy local and bring it to our warehouse,” says Maxwell. “We also have relationships with various growers who rely on us to move their product.”

Azzara notes the benefits of Zone 7’s master crop planning. “We know which farm will come in with broccoli the first week of September and then who’ll be in the second or third week,” he explains. “We have backup growers for most items, so once broccoli goes on the availability list in September it will be there through most of November.”

Wholesalers also alleviate customer crises in local when the inevitable increase or decrease for an order arises. “Because we are a wholesaler we can give them more or give them less if their demand changes,” says Stone of Ben B. Schwartz. “We keep our customers’ shrink to a minimum, and shrink costs money.”

Maxwell ultimately views the wholesaler’s role in local as finding value for its customers. “We seek to deliver value to our customers on

a daily basis, and if I can get it from a local grower, I’ll seek them out,” he says. “A lot of times, locally grown product is cheaper because of freight. It’s up to us to identify and market this advantage.”

PARTNERING WITH FARMS

Wholesalers also play a vital role in collaborating closely with local farms to help them achieve long-term success. “As wholesalers we operate more as an extension of our farmers,” relates Katzman. “We view it more as a part-

nership than a buying and selling relationship.”

For farmers at or reaching mid- to large-scale production, Vena’s Kohlhas notes wholesalers offer an incredible opportunity. “Working through a wholesaler diversifies and adds stability to a farm income stream in a way business-to-consumer and direct-to-institution sales can’t,” she explains. “Especially considering the time investment necessary to pursue them.”

One major benefit for local farmers working with Vena is access to an established market

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with huge buying power. “This comes with little to no investment in business development or direct sales for the grower,” states Kohlhas. “They also receive constructive feedback and partnership on developing grading, packing, and labeling standards meeting the criteria of conventional retail and foodservice buyers.”

Delivery efficiencies are another essential wholesale element. “Having a wholesaler handle local items provides smaller farms an

outlet for their products versus delivering to multiple locations,” says North State Grocery’s Rutte.

Maxwell points out how farms selling directly to a store must deal with the ups and downs of market and volume fluctuation, something wholesalers can neutralize. “We have standing agreements for fixed amounts of produce,” he says. “We help growers plan their planting and growing schedules. If you’re

working knowing your orders in advance, it helps. Also, if growers are long on a product, we can put out opportunity buys and move product quickly.”

Zone 7’s commitment to the farms it works with includes a crucial planning element. “We sit down with all the growers in the winter and do master crop planning,” reports Azzara. “We’re looking back at the year; what worked, what didn’t work? What did we have enough

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of, what not? We're trying to minimize their risk by giving our best estimates of how much we'll take per week and what price range we'd expect to pay. This is in contrast to just buying in a volatile market."

Wholesalers remain a vital link between production and market, essentially serving as a conduit of information. "We try to give our customers as much information as we can," states Strube. "So much of availability

is weather pending. We know when a local farm will start and what they project, but one hailstorm can wipe everything out. For us, we always know what's going on all over the country and with our local guys. This way, if need to jump to fill gaps, I know where."

ADVANCING THE LINK

Consumer interest in local details necessitates emphasis on information for both whole-

saler and customer. "Tell the story about the grower using signs and pictures to reinforce the local grower involvement in the community," advises FreshPro's Granata. "Many are third- and fourth-generation growers who have a wealth of knowledge. Sharing that knowledge with the end consumer drives the local movement."

Procacci's wholesale market site not only lists locally grown, but also identifies the specific

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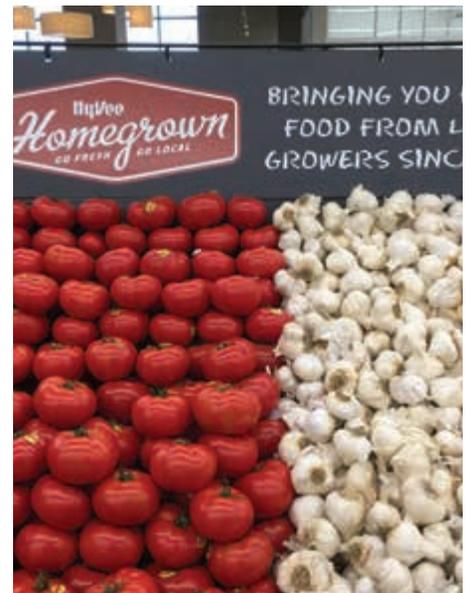
farmer's name for the customer. "Everybody wants to know where the product is from and support the region and locally-grown product," says Maxwell.

Corey notes the importance of making sure all shelf and product displays have signage stating locally grown. "If possible, include a photo and brief description of the grower," he suggests. "We also support our customers by helping promote via in-store radio and outdoor banners/signage."

North State Grocery stresses the impor-

tance of providing the name of the farm and location for customers. "Many customers know the growers from farmers markets so brand identification helps both retailer and farmer," expresses Rutte.

Redner's posts signs labeling the specific product origin. "We also utilize a variety of local growers instead of one large grower because many of our customers know these growers," adds Stiles. "They are fourth- or fifth-generation farmers who have a reputation in their area. For example, our well-known



"Many customers know the growers from farmers markets so brand identification helps both retailer and farmer."

— Rick Rutte, North State Grocery

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sweet corn farmers actually bring customers back to our stores and increase demand for our corn."

Wholesalers, customers and growers can find support via local or state organizations. "Increasingly, states are dedicating more funds to promote local and state-grown through programs such as the Specialty Crop State Block Grant Program or Farmers Market Program at USDA," says United's Guenther. "For instance, New York just launched a new New York State Grown & Certified program and announced a \$20 million food hub at Hunts Point Produce Market to increase access to farm-fresh produce."

Linking farms, buyers and consumers is an integral function of the wholesaler. "The linkage we provide between buyers and producers is a great part of what we do," explains Maxwell. "It gives produce managers and buyers a whole different sense of what the product is and their confidence level in it."

Procacci's Feighery recounts one produce manager's farm visit: "He noted how he'd been in the produce business for 25 years and only ever saw the back of a truck," he remembers. "This was the first time he'd ever been in a field!"

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAMMA CHIA



PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM COURTESY OF GRIMMWAY FARMS AND MINDY HERMANN

Juices And Beverages ‘Producing’ Big Results

Rapid growth calls for teamwork between retail and producers

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

Much like the yogurt shelves in the dairy department, the juice and beverage section of the produce department offers an increasingly dizzying assortment of products to choose from. Gone are the relatively simple displays of freshly squeezed orange juice and lemonade. In their place is a rainbow of fruit juices, fruit/vegetable blends, smoothies, protein drinks, and functional beverages promising health benefits. While a shakeout may be inevitable — Del Monte Fresh Produce withdrew from the juice market — it behooves produce executives and buyers to work closely with distributors who can help them assemble the optimal product mix.

PRESSED, PRESSURIZED PROCESSING PREVAIL

Growth in the juice case reflects several trends. Cold-pressed has become synonymous with quality in the eyes of the consumer. Saratoga Juice Bar, a Saratoga, NY, storefront dedicated to the town’s health and wellness tradition, began bottling its premium-priced, cold-pressed fruit/vegetable blends for distribution to retailers in 2015. Bolthouse Farms also entered the category last year with its organic, cold-pressed 1915 brand, joining a shelf crowded with cold-pressed pioneers such as Suja, Blueprint, and others. Cold-pressed typically command a price premium.

Heritage juice brands are quick to point out that cold-pressing is not new or exclusive.



Red Jacket Orchards, based in Geneva, NY, “set the standard in cold-press, as we’ve been doing it since 1958,” notes marketing director Kelli Foster. “It’s how we extract juice from a fruit or vegetable.”

“Technically, every juice is cold-pressed,” says Bob Rovzar, chief executive, Perricone Juices, Beaumont, CA. “It’s a bit of a marketing term. Extractors press the fruit or vegetable and chill immediately.”

High pressure processing (HPP) is touted as superior to traditional flash-pasteurization for preserving flavor, color, and nutrition without heat. It allows manufacturers to incorporate a wider variety of fruits and vegetables into beverage products and increases shelf-life compared to freshly squeezed juices.

GOOD FOR YOU AND FLAVOR

Health continues to grow as a trend in the juice category. Bolthouse Farms, for example, is establishing itself as a leader in protein beverages, with three protein products under its 1915 Bolthouse Farms banner and seven Protein Plus SKUs. Carlsbad, CA-based Mamma Chia offers Chia Energy and Chia & Greens lines, touted for its high content of fiber and nutrients from greens.

Watermelon juice is a relative newcomer. “We focus on the health and hydration benefits of watermelon,” explains Hilary Martin Long, head of business development, Tsamma Juice, Keenes, IL. “We see Tsamma watermelon juice as the next coconut water.”

However, Foster advises that health can’t trump taste. “Wellness should be a celebration, not a chore. Red Jacket Orchards gets customers excited about taste.”

Purple beets are a big ingredient for Bolthouse Farms, Mamma Chia, and others. Scott LaPorta, president, Bolthouse Farms, Bakersfield, CA, notes that buyers of the company’s beet product tend to be repeat purchasers.

LoveBeets stands out for its products that are 99 percent beet juice. “Our high beet content is unique,” says Natasha Shapiro, marketing manager, Love Beets, Bala Cynwyd, PA. “Beets have such a potent color that consumers might think they’re getting more beets than they actually are in some products.”

Not surprisingly, best sellers and new products tend to be sweet, although greens continue to grow. Grimmway (Bakersfield, CA) best sellers are Bunched Greens and Bananaberry Crush. The always-popular banana is featured in Bolthouse Farms’ best seller Strawberry Banana. Bolthouse Farms also combines everyday produce with exotic items in its newer Vanilla Chai Tea, Raspberry Blood Orange, Mango Pineapple Colada, and Berries & Green Veggies.

TRADITIONAL JUICE COMPANIES RISE TO THE COMPETITIVE CHALLENGE

While smaller companies often set trends in the juice category, traditional juice companies are rapidly expanding to meet the competition. “In addition to launching our 1915 line of organic, non-GMO, cold-pressed juices and non-dairy protein beverages, we significantly expanded our super-premium beverage portfolio to more than 30 flavors,” says LaPorta of Bolthouse Farms. “Reflecting the popularity of greens and avocado, one of our most popular flavors is our Green Goodness blend of fruits and greens. Consumers also gravitate

toward the 1915 Pineapple blend with broad taste appeal and avocado. We recently introduced six new Bolthouse Farms beverages, three new Protein Plus flavors, and three new cold-pressed juices.”

Bolthouse Farms listens to its consumers when developing new products. “People are looking for more convenient and delicious ways to get more fruits, vegetables and nutritional benefits into their diet at an affordable price. We have beverages that are gluten-free and no added preservatives, artificial flavors, or high fructose corn syrup. Additionally, our 1915 line of cold-pressed juices and protein beverages is made with simple ingredients. They are organic as well as non-GMO,” says LaPorta.

Dominic Engels, president of Los Angeles-based POM Wonderful, says most juice purveyors use blended formulas or technology as a point of differentiation. “POM Wonderful juice products are the oasis of calm in a cluttered world of juice varieties,” he says. “IRI data shows we are, once again, up 20 percent in sales from last year, which also had a significant increase from the prior year. That’s impressive for a juice brand that’s been around for about 15 years.

The brand’s best-selling product is a 48-ounce, 100-percent pomegranate juice. In order to quench consumers’ thirst for renditions of its classic favorite, POM also has three juice blends using mango, coconut water, and pineapple as well as four Super Teas using black, white, green teas.

In 2014, Grimmway Farms launched its True Organic Juice line of USDA organic, 100-percent juice — no sugar added, gluten free, non-GMO. “We are a family-owned farm

for almost 50 years now,” says Melissa Pine, vice president, beverage sales, Grimmway Farms. “We include only the most authentic, natural ingredients in our juices, and all have at least one vegetable grown on our CalOrganic farms.” She describes organic juice as a “niche within a niche” and notes that True offers a value alternative for consumers looking for organic.

Some brands promote their long and rich heritage. “We stand behind the integrity and quality of fresh Florida citrus, and we continue to promote our line of 12 citrus juices as being sourced from Florida,” explains Natalie Sexton, director of marketing, Natalie’s Orchid Island Juice Company, Fort Pierce, FL. “Everything we make is clean label and minimally processed. Our label is transparent, and we don’t have more than four ingredients in our juices. We continue to look for opportunities to add popular flavors, most recently orange-beet and a fresh tomato juice.”

“We stay relevant by sticking to our basics,” says Perricone Farms’ Rovzar. “Perricone has a long and rich heritage in primarily California citrus, and we produce a premium high-quality product. We squeeze fruit year-round and blend juices to ensure consistency in flavor.” Perricone is a private label supplier for several

“Everything we make is clean label and minimally processed. Our label is transparent, and we don’t have more than four ingredients in our juices.”

— Natalie Sexton, Natalie’s Orchid Island Juice Company

store brands.

STANDING OUT FROM THE REST

With so many products in the juice case, brands jockey for position, looking for ways to catch the eye of shoppers who are not committed to a particular juice. It is unusual for juices to be promoted in the weekly circular, because “circular space is precious space that typically is dedicated to higher volume items,” observes Grimmway’s Pine. “We find that temporary price reductions on the shelf attract shoppers, as does our price point of \$2.99 to \$3.99 for a 12-ounce bottle and \$5.99 to \$6.99 for a 28-ounce bottle.”

Mamma Chia guides shoppers through its broad line of Mamma Chia products. “We created a Mamma Chia destination center that is frequently located in the produce section.

This rack houses our food products, so it is the perfect complement to our beverages,” says Janie Hoffman, Mamma Chia founder and chief executive. “We also use a variety of POS materials, including neckers, shelf strips, aisle violators, and danglers that either provide the consumer with a discount on product or educate them on the nutritional benefits of our beverages.” Mamma Chia offers branded refrigerators to retailers upon request that carry all three beverage lines.

POM Wonderful works with retailers to promote product in store with multi-buy offers.

LoveBeets utilizes shelf strips, recipe cards, coupons, and POS, but also relies on its merchandising and sales representatives who develop relationships with retailers, help maintain the product display, and offer promotion suggestions. Shapiro says, “it’s great having

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them as a resource at the ground level.”

SAMPLING AND SOCIAL SELL

Juice brands are in agreement regarding the value of demos and sampling. “We have a dedicated team of ‘Chia Leaders’ who regularly demo products to introduce new shoppers to our brand, and existing shoppers to our new products,” notes Hoffman. “These in-store demos also give us the opportunity to educate consumers on the nutritional benefits of chia. We often participate in store events, as well as community events where we engage consumers and direct them to our local retailers.”

Sampling benefits smaller producers who lack large advertising budgets. “Driving trial through promotion, demos, and grass-root events introduces consumers to True Organic Juice products,” says Grimmway’s Pine. “Because we are a family-owned, smaller player, we also need to rely on social media to help get the word out.”

Saratoga Juice Bar also has enjoyed success with sampling and education to build a core group of customers.

Natalie’s relies on its social media program and layers on public relations to help get its name and products in front of media outlets and lifestyle influencers.

Tsamma too uses an integrated approach. “We try to get better at reaching consumers through social media, guest bloggers, and food writers,” says Martin Long. “Tsamma also benefits from vertical integration. Our Frey Farms watermelons have a Tsamma sticker, so shoppers are familiar with the name.”

WORKING TOGETHER TO MINIMIZE SHRINK AND WASTE

Solid relationships among juice producers, distributors, and store management and personnel benefit all parties and help ensure customer satisfaction. Because shelf life can vary across a brand, in-store personnel and/or product representatives need to rotate product based on freshness dates. Love Beets relies on various distributors to manage its product in-store, and it works directly with a handful of accounts. As a small newcomer, Saratoga stresses personal engagement. “We cultivate relationships that include meeting with and educating produce staff members on a regular basis,” notes Shawn Wilbur, national account manager, Saratoga Juice Bar.

“Shelf management always is a challenge,” notes Foster of Red Orchard Farms. We do custom production based on orders from distributors. They understand the turnaround needs of a fresh product.”

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The Pulse Of Fall Produce From Florida

The Sunshine State fulfills a key niche as the country's primary produce provider during the fall and winter months.

BY LISA WHITE

The business climate in the U.S. has undergone a number of challenges recently that tested the fortitude of the produce industry. Florida is one of the states that benefitted from this the economical twist.

"The increased cost of production, competition from overseas and the North American Fair Trade Agreement created a situation in the produce industry where produce companies had to retrench or consolidate to stay in business," says Chuck Weisinger, chief executive at Fort Myers, FL-based tomato supplier Weis-Buy Farms. "[Despite these challenges], Florida has not only become a hub of produce growing, but we also became a major import area where much of the overseas produce is being distributed from here."

Weis-Buy Farms' major market is the roughly 100 million people between Baltimore and Boston, and its tomatoes are sought out due to its high-quality and long shelf life. This is attributed to being domestically grown, as the shorter travel time helps preserve the product for a longer period.

"We can deliver within the spectrum of reality on price, but on the other hand, the fact that costs have gone up drove the less efficient growers out of the produce business," says Weisinger.

Today, to grow a net acre of tomatoes, harvest the product and pack it costs well over \$11,000 an acre.

"It's not only hard to grow for that price and make a decent return, but it's difficult to get loans from banks with today's economic conditions," says Weisinger. "Only the strong have survived, and the smaller growers are having a tough time."

As the country's fourth largest state, Florida is also seeing an increase in development, with real estate taking up land formerly designated



PHOTO COURTESY OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

for farming.

Although some of the finest agronomists in the world call Florida home, experts say there has been a lot of flux in the state's produce industry in recent years.

Still, this is the state to find a wide range of produce in the colder fall and winter months.

"We grow out of season rather than into season like other areas," says Weisinger. "We also develop unique fruit and vegetable varieties that can flourish in these conditions."

Because Florida is like one big beach, much has to be put into the soil to get anything out of it.

"The fact that water has become more valuable has made us some of the leaders in drip technology, even though this was invented in Israel," says Weisinger. "The state monitors every gallon of water growers use, so we specialize in growing economically rather than in new soil, since everything relies on mulch and is drip irrigated."

AVAILABLE COMMODITIES

What makes Florida unique is that this region grows fruits and vegetables during the fall, winter and early spring, a time period

where the majority of U.S. farms are stagnated by cold weather and frost.

"We have mild winters that are ideal for growing a variety of fresh market fruits and vegetables," says Morgan Edwards, information specialist II, Division of Marketing and Development, at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), located in Tallahassee, FL.

Florida commodities offered during fall and winter include Eastern vegetables, such as bell peppers, cucumbers, squash, cabbage, green beans and eggplant, along with tomatoes and melons.

"Florida is unique in that it allows our radishes to grow in black peat or muck in the Everglades swamp, and the state is the only domestic supplier in winter, aside from Arizona," says Jeff Walker, sales, Napoleon, OH-based shipper TC Marketing Inc./Top Class Logistics, with radishes grown in Florida. "Radishes have become a bigger seller in the past three years as a product consumers buy on a regular basis, because it's availability is consistent," says Walker.

"Organics offer the same varieties, for the most part," says Steve Oldock, owner of King

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Farms LLC, a Naples, FL-based broker that also partners with growers to market their product. "These products are supplied in the East, Northeast, some parts of the Midwest and Canada and cover the gaps for shortages from Mexico and the western states when there are weather or supply issues."

Florida essentially has a seven-month growing season for vegetables, from November to June.

New produce varieties are always evolving with extensive research from the University of Florida extension offices throughout the state.

"The university conducts research, and for our purposes, the bulk has been on bell peppers and tomatoes," says Oldock. "There is a lot of testing on seeds, which are first designated



numbers and then given a name when the product is successful and goes to market. But research is mainly to improve current varieties."

In terms of emerging produce, Florida peaches continue to be a new crop for the state. Additionally, many new cultivars (a plant



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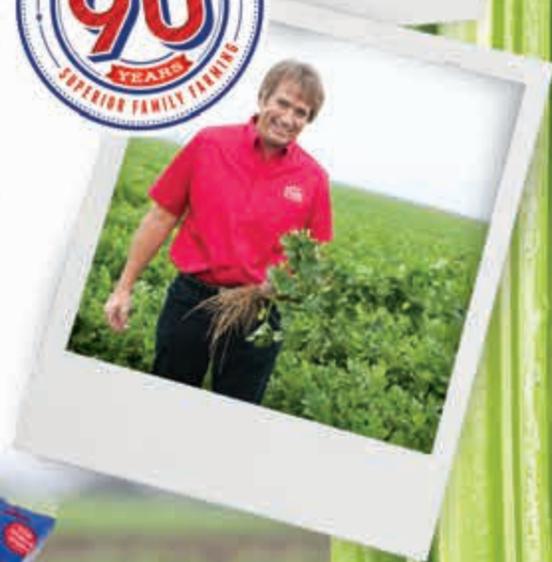
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Florida continues to be an integral part of Duda's national supply chain for fresh produce, including its signature celery.



or grouping of plants selected for desirable characteristics) for existing Florida varieties were developed through close working relationships between the University of Florida IFAS division, local farmers, various commodity associations and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

"These new cultivars ensure Florida fruits and vegetables taste great and maintain their freshness longer," says Edwards.

J & J Produce Inc., Loxahatchee, FL, is offering new proprietary varieties within the pepper category, including green, yellow and red varieties.

"These peppers have been developed to provide superior flavor profiles, upgraded nutritional values, enhanced appearance and improved post-harvest qualities including shelf life," says Daniel Whittles, manager of business and product development. "These field-grown varieties will rival the quality of protected cultivation with the advantage of regional East Coast production and the improved economies of earth grown, open field farming."

Through new varieties and growing practices, "Florida continues to be an integral part of our national supply chain for fresh veggies and fruit," says Jason Bedsole, Florida sales manager for Oviedo, FL-based Duda Farm Fresh Foods. "Variety trials on all products are a continual part of our program, and we constantly look for new varieties.

Duda Farm Fresh's fall produce includes corn, celery, radishes, leaf lettuce, Romaine, Iceberg and citrus fruits.

Being a Florida-headquartered company,

the Lakeland-based Publix Super Market chain realizes it makes good business sense to support the local business economy and to buy local when possible.

For Publix, local purchasing means buying products when feasible within the six states in which the company operates, including Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina.

For the chain's Florida-centric produce, it has been status quo in recent years.

"We don't have new varieties for the fall and winter months, but dragon fruit has become quite popular during this time of year," says Maria Brous, Publix director of media and community relations. "South Florida has a lot of produce harvesting during the fall and winter months — including squash, beans, varieties of peppers, cucumbers, etc."

Plant City, FL-based Wish Farms grows traditional summer produce in the winter, and starts harvesting in November, which is when the early Florida strawberry crop arrives. Bare-root planting doesn't start before December, but by using potted or plug plants, the company can start berry production much earlier for November harvesting.

"We're growing a good amount of Sweet Sensation 127 strawberries, which is the trademark name," says Gary Wishnatzki, Wish Farms' president and chief executive. "The other main strawberry variety grown here is Radiance, and both types are early yielders."

Radiance berries have numbers earlier in the season, hold the size better and sugar longer. This variety is also more consistent

in flavor and shape than other strawberry varieties.

Like Weis-Buy Farms, Wish Farms' primary market area is the eastern half of U.S. and Canada.

"With Mexico becoming a larger player in the winter, our distribution has shrunk a little," says Wishnatzki. "We used to ship more berries to the West and Texas, but overall demand for fresh strawberries continues to grow, so our primary market has remained the same."

For East Coast growers, it's the length of the season that makes Florida a top resource for fruits and vegetables in the fall and winter

"The benefit of Florida produce is higher quality products, better-looking produce and a longer shelf life, since it is sourced domestically."

— Chuck Weisinger, Weis-Buy Farms

months, as this state has one of the longest growing seasons.

The soil also makes the state's produce selection diverse.

"What many are not aware of is the fact

that there's different soil from within 30 miles of growing areas — since around the lakes is mucky soil, and 20 to 30 miles east is sandy soil," says Scott Seddon, brand manager/corporate chef at Pero Family Farms LLC, headquartered in Delray Beach, FL. "This difference allows us to have diverse produce offerings in a smaller geographical area than is typical for a growing region."

Pero Family Farms handles most of the Eastern row crops, including hot and mini peppers; eggplant; squash; cucumbers; okra; and green beans. It offers both conventional and organic varieties to the Southeast, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states.

"We ship everywhere east of the Mississippi, with some commodities traveling to the Midwest," says Seddon. "In the winter, Florida is providing the majority of the produce to three-fourths of the country."

With Florida as a major provider in the cold months, retailers and distributors can source specialty produce like tropical fruit domestically. Florida tropicals may not be at the peak during the colder months, but they're in good volumes throughout the fall and early winter. This includes Florida-grown starfruit, dragonfruit, red guava and avocados.

"As locally grown fruits and vegetables gradually disappear from our Northern neighbors' produce aisles, most folks are content to extend the definition of local to include domestically-grown produce to keep the tropical fruit [in the rotation all year]," says Mary Ostlund, marketing director at Brooks Tropicals, LLC, based in Homestead, FL.

Some growers in the state also are starting to grow later varieties of green skin avocados during the colder seasons, according to Eddie Caram, general manager at New Limeco, based in Princeton FL.

■ PROFITABLE PROMOTIONS FROM STATE AG GROUPS

The Florida Department of Agriculture, the growers, and the marketing organizations — including the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, Florida Department of Citrus, Strawberry Growers Association and Florida Tomato Committee — helped increase the profile of this state's fall and winter produce.

Although Florida produce is primarily shipped to states in the U.S., including the Midwest, Southeast and Northeast as well as eastern Canadian marketplaces, much of the promotional activity for these products takes place in the Sunshine State.

"The trend in purchasing locally certainly is most in play for the Florida market, which coincidentally is where much of our media marketing is targeted through various Fresh From Florida (FFF) marketing initiatives," says Morgan Edwards, information specialist II, Division of Marketing and Development, at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDAC), located in Tallahassee, FL.

Fresh From Florida also works with grocery retailers throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Asia, Central and South America and the Caribbean to buy and promote more Florida commodities. In 2014, FFF worked with 64 retail partners representing more than 12,000 stores in 26 countries.

FFF works with grocery store category managers to encourage them to source their winter produce needs from Florida. The program provides incentives to place commodities on sale; assistance in sampling select commodities in stores; and works with the retailers on sponsoring coupons for select Florida fruits and vegetables.

Compared with The Florida Department of Agriculture, The Florida Department of Citrus, headquartered in Bartow, FL, does not have many retail promotions in place for fall, as much of its work during this season focuses on Florida grapefruit, which are in peak season beginning in December through early spring, according to Shelley Rossetter, the department's public relations manager.

Once it is in market, the department's efforts will include sampling, working with retailer-specific magazines, building relationships with retail-based registered dietitians and digital activations. The department also will have some promotions this winter focused on fresh Florida oranges, which are on store shelves beginning in October.

The Florida Strawberry Growers Association provides marketing materials, but growers and suppliers also offer promotional assistance.

Although Florida is the largest tomato-growing state in the country, with crops starting in October and continuing until mid-June, the Florida Tomato Committee in Maitland, FL, does not have its own promotional program.

Instead, it partners with the Florida Department of Agriculture and its Fresh from Florida program to hold promotions around the Southeast.

"We downsized our marketing presence to let them do what they do well," says Reggie Brown, manager of the Florida Tomato Committee.

The state is known for its round, Roma, grape and cherry tomatoes, in addition to varietal changes.

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One big advantage is Florida produce is generally shipped to destination points within 24 hours.

The region does have its challenges. For example, insects are an ongoing problem. And although Florida is known for its citrus, greening problems have cut yields by as much as 10 percent.

"We're still trying to make it work, not only looking at traditional crops, but experimental crops, as well," says Weisinger.

Newer industries, such as blueberries, make it easier for companies like Weis-Buy Farms to market emerging items for more selling opportunities.

"We also can consolidate a bunch of different products to send to customers instead of sending trucks all over the country to source products," says Weisinger. "This year, we expect a healthy pepper growth as well as an increase in seedless watermelons."

FFF works with grocery store category managers to encourage them to source their winter produce needs from Florida. The program provides incentives to place commodities on sale; assistance in sampling select commodities in stores; and works with the retailers on sponsoring coupons for select Florida fruits and vegetables.

Wish Farms is currently pitching point-of-sale display signage for inside stores that retailers can use in the peak of the produce season or throughout the Florida growing season to highlight these items.

"We're trying to tie these promotions around recipes, so consumers can take ingredient lists with Wish Farms strawberries and other items to get a higher ring at the register," says Amber Kosinsky, director of marketing at Wish Farms.

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Savvy Merchandising Key To Non-Produce Tie-Ins

Balancing freshness and convenience can increase sales.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

Companion products can increase sales if merchandised correctly — and distract if they aren't.

The resounding argument for why produce departments should carry non-produce tie-ins, or non-produce items in general, is because they make money.

“Cross-merchandising with non-produce products is an effective vehicle to increase a shopper’s basket size, and in turn, grow profitable sales for your produce department and store,” says Brian Haaraoja, vice president of fresh merchandising for SpartanNash in Grand Rapids, MI. The company operates 160 grocery stores under banners such as Family Fare Supermarkets, No Frills, Econofoods and Dan’s Supermarket.

Companion products, as they’re also known, can also make the shopping experience more convenient for consumers and introduce them to new foods. But Haaraoja cautions that they can also distract from the department’s mission and appearance if not handled correctly.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPARTAN NASH



"It can be easy to get carried away with the amount of tie-ins throughout a produce department, which can have a negative effect on your business," he says. "A produce department with too many tie-ins will appear cluttered. That can take away from the 'fresh' perception of your customers, which is vitally important."

"Keep in mind that we sell produce," says Jay Schneider, produce sales manager with Acme Markets, a Malvern, PA-based chain with more than 110 stores throughout Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and Maryland. "Even though you can get some incremental sales, you still want to keep more of a fresh image with a balance of tie-ins."

COMMON COMPANION PRODUCTS

Beside salad dressings, some of the most popular non-produce tie-in products include croutons, salad toppers, fruit and vegetable dips, pre-made shortcakes, olives, cheeses and snack items. Some ready-to-eat products, including packaged soups, juices and smoothies, are also showing up in produce departments.

Tofu is another common tie-in product. House Foods America, a manufacturing company headquartered in Garden Grove, CA, sells water- and vacuum-packed tofu, plain and marinated tofu and tofu meal kits. The company's Shirataki noodles (a thin, translucent noodle made from konjac yams), egg roll, and wonton wrappers are sometimes merchandised in produce as well.

Seasoning packets that can be used to create produce-centered dishes, such as guacamole, salsa, smoothies and banana bread, make good companion products. Departments also carry utensil merchandise such as melon ballers, vegetable peelers and sticks for making caramel apples.

PROS AND CONS

Companion products are appropriate for produce, because they encourage consumers to buy more, says Mary Beth Cowardin, director of brand marketing for the T. Marzetti Company, a specialty foods company that was founded in 1896 and is based in Columbus, OH. Cowardin says salad greens can look more appetizing if consumers see interesting toppings or croutons to go along with them. A mother may be more inclined to purchase apples if she sees caramel dip, or strawberries if she can buy shortcakes instead of having to make them.

"The benefit for consumers is having meal solutions all in one location," says Cowardin. "Everyone is time-pressed. Everyone wants to get in and out of the store." If a shopper needs

"Many of our ShopRite stores have team meetings about their promotions, and they often talk to one another about ways to cross-merchandise with other departments. Management also often looks at the circular to determine the best tie-in opportunities."

— Derrick Jenkins, Wakefern Food Corporation

to make a veggie tray for a party, as an example, it helps to have the salad dressing in the same place as the carrots and broccoli.

Paul Eastman, House Foods America's senior sales manager, says the advantage of carrying tofu in the produce department is that it offers a rare protein option. Consumers with plant-based diets — who are inclined to spend most of their time in produce anyway — will appreciate the convenience of having the tofu available.



Paul Eastman, House Foods America's senior sales manager, says the advantage of carrying tofu in the produce department is that it offers a rare protein option.

"Non-produce tie-ins add interest and variety to the produce department," says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager for Brockton, MA-based Concord Foods, which supplies retail food products and custom ingredients to supermarkets, manufacturers and foodservice operators. "Shoppers will spend more time in the produce department. As a result, more time and money is spent in the store." In addition, there is little to no shrink with tie-in products.

The biggest risk with carrying non-produce items is they'll become an eyesore, says Schneider. "If they're not merchandised correctly, they can 'junk up' the department and take away from your fresh presentation."

There may be times when merchandising companion products in produce will confuse consumers. Eastman points out many natural food stores merchandise tofu in dairy. Shoppers

may expect to find other items, such as cheeses and olives, in the deli department.

CHOOSING PRODUCTS

With all the quality products competing for space in produce, it can be hard to choose the ones that will be the best fit. But non-produce items shouldn't be added to a department willy-nilly. One of the keys to ensuring the right mix of tie-in products is to track how well they're selling.

"These items should have assigned planograms to better ensure stock levels and the item mix are consistently maintained," says Haaraoja of Spartan Nash. "Planograms will also allow for better tracking of item movement and known loss, and will help to maintain product space allocation and determine future SKU rationalizations."

Two of the best resources for finding the right products are store and grocery managers. "Store managers are on the front lines and they understand what our customers want," says Derrick Jenkins, vice president of the produce/floral division at the Wakefern Food Corporation, the largest retailer-owned cooperative in the United States. Stores in the Keasbey, NJ-based company are operated under the ShopRite name and located in nine East Coast states. "They can identify a sales lift very quickly on a non-produce tie-in."

"Team meetings are a great way for department managers to share information and collaborate," he says. "Many of our ShopRite stores have team meetings about their promotions, and they often talk to one another about ways to cross-merchandise with other departments. Management also often looks at the circular to determine the best tie-in opportunities."

Haaraoja has a similar opinion about the value of collaboration with other departments. However, he shares this word of caution: "It should be understood throughout the store that the store manager and/or produce manager have the final say when determining the items and how many. That will prevent a 'free-for-all' of non-produce items being displayed throughout the department."

Rotating tie-in products seasonally can help departments boost sales of produce and non-produce items. “We like to position fruit dips near the apples in the fall,” says Jenkins. “You might see a non-food item like a steamer being sold next to asparagus in early spring.”

When selecting tie-in products, “focus on items with high sales volume and velocity, such as bananas and avocados,” says McCaul. That increases the likelihood consumers will pick up extra items during shopping trips.

DISPLAYING TIE-IN PRODUCTS

The size of displays varies depending on the size of the department and what products it carries. Eastman with House Foods America says 8-foot displays are ideal. Schneider gives a general guideline: “Make sure the produce does not look overpowered by tie-in products.”

What matters more than the size of the display is how products are displayed. “We found the retailers with the best sales will



merchandise the non-perishable tie-in and the relevant fresh produce item together,” says McCaul.

That’s the consensus among produce managers. “Refrigerated dressings and dips should be displayed in between the salad and cut vegetable sections,” says Haaraoja. “Croutons and other salad toppers should be displayed on the backs of tables near your packaged salads. Put guacamole and salsa mixes by your avocado display; powdered smoothies near fresh tropical fruits and berries; and hollandaise sauce kits next to asparagus.”

Similar products should be kept together as much as possible. “With regard to tofu specifically, we like it to be kept together to highlight the different varieties and flavors,” says Eastman.

That being said, “there are ways to cross-promote even if items can’t be physically located next to each other,” says Cowardin with the T. Marzetti Company. “We sometimes work with retail partners to offer discounts; for example, a free bag of lettuce if you buy one or two jars of dressing.”

In terms of the actual displays, “we do not recommend displaying any of the tie-ins on top of produce display tables or bins,” says Haaraoja. “Shippers and/or side-stacks next to your fresh produce displays are encouraged if shelving is not available. Clip strips can be very useful when displaying different seasonings and baking mixes.”

“I find that having a shipper tastefully displaying products on the side of your fresh display, rather than on the display itself, works better,” says Acme Markets’ Schneider. “You get to keep the fresh look of the display without having any of the product on it. I find with

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berry displays, bakery products can easily overtake the display, because the products are large.”

No matter what options a produce department chooses for displays, “make sure you stick to the planned merchandising layout, and keep the displays full,” says SpartanNash’s Haaraoja. “It doesn’t take long for a produce department to become cluttered with half-empty displays of kitchen gadgets and grocery products unless you have the proper planning and execution in place.”

MERCHANDISING TIPS

Opportunities for cross-promotion between produce and non-produce items abound. “It can help with sales while also helping customers by giving them a practical meal solution or recipe idea,” says Wakefern’s Jenkins. “Our produce manager might, for example, position Mozzarella cheese between tomatoes and fresh basil in our produce aisle. Shoppers see that, and they get an idea for serving fresh Mozzarella and basil with some wonderful Jersey Fresh tomatoes.”

Eastman offers another suggestion for cross-merchandising: “We recommend displaying tofu with a packaged stir-fry vegetable medley to make a complete meal.”

Developing a quarterly promotional calendar that includes ways to connect companion products with seasonal produce promotions will help increase sales. “Promotions are a great way to let your customers know what you have to offer,” says Haaraoja. “After a promotional plan is assembled, put together your merchandising plan for the department, and be sure to update it on a monthly basis.”

“We’ve done successful promotions such as coupon offers, demos and contests with

fresh items,” says Concord Foods’ McCaul. “In particular, instantly redeemable coupons work very well for our products. When we launched a blueberry muffin mix, we gave a discount on the purchase of fresh blueberries and our mix. This offer encouraged product trial for our new item and also sold a lot of blueberries.”

Another important opportunity for promoting non-produce tie-ins is to let foodies know when the department is carrying something really different. “People are looking for

new flavors and new items, so having a balance of the tried and true with new and unique flavors gives consumers an opportunity to mix up the products they’re using,” says T. Marzetti’s Cowardin.

“My advice to managers is to get to know the non-produce tie-in products on their shelves,” says Eastman. “Try them at home, so when their customers are looking for recommendations, they can offer suggestions based on their experience.” **pb**

Grow Root Vegetable SALES FROM THE GROUND UP



PHOTO COURTESY OF BROOKS TROPICALS

As the once obscure category receives more love, retailers have lots of merchandising options.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Root vegetables, from traditional staples such as turnips and beets to ethnic favorites such as yuca and malanga, are the unsung heroes of the produce department. Yet, celebrity chefs turned the less popular of these ugly ducklings into stars on the plate. For example, there's Mario Batali's Roasted Turnips and Aaron Sanchez' Yuca Fritters with Pickled Red Onions. Add to this the consumers' sweeping culinary interests from world cuisines to locally grown (even in the depths of winter) and demand for root veggies is increasing at retail as well.

"For us, roots are definitely on an upswing and are on trend," says John Savidan, produce director at Bristol Farms & Lazy Acres, a 15-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA. "Pre-cut root vegetables seem to be trending higher and dominating sales. A lot of this has to do with seasonality and weather."

"As people become more informed (and enthusiastic) about making healthier choices, many vegetables are being thrown into the limelight," says Natasha Shapiro, marketing manager for Bala Cynwyd, PA-based Love Beets. "Luckily enough for us, beets are definitely one of those vegetables that have reached a newfound level of appreciation, largely due to their amazing health benefits."

ROOTS MOVE OUT OF THE CELLAR

Several factors are fueling consumer desire for root vegetables. Nutrition is one.

"Root vegetables are relatively low in sugars and calories. They are very versatile when it comes to healthy eating," says Savidan.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BABE FARMS

Doria Blonder, sales and marketing director for New Limeco, LLC, in Princeton, FL, agrees. “Our society is now looking to eat healthier, cleaner, with less processed foods and no GMOs. This makes Caribbean root vegetables a good choice. These foods are rich in complex carbohydrates and dietary fiber and are gluten-free. Plus, there’s not a lot of waste in preparation, which is a hot button with many consumers today.”

Flavor and versatility are two other demand drivers.

“In addition to the increased awareness of the healthful benefits of root vegetables, exposure to new culinary ideas through various social media is the single largest factor growing demand,” says Peter Leifermann, director of sales for Brooks Tropicals, LLC, in Homestead, FL.

Root vegetables offer a host of flavor profiles from earthy to sweet, can be enjoyed with skin off or on, hot or cold, and even raw, according to James Macek, president of Coosemans-Denver, Inc. and partner in Coosemans Worldwide, Inc., headquartered in Christiansted, Virgin Islands. “For example, ice-cold crudité creations that incorporate baby roots, radishes, and other veggies are in vogue — their versatility and application is virtually limitless.”

The popularity of root vegetables is high during the winter months, because they are perfect to make soups and stews. Therefore, in addition to common ingredients like potatoes, carrots and onions, Ricardo Echeverri, vice president of tropical for the Turbana Corporation, in Coral Gables, FL, suggests retailers promote other roots that are cooked or used in soups such as yuca, yams, malanga and eddoe.

“We have felt a significant growth in the demand of ethnic tropicals from our retailers within the last year,” says Echeverri. “We believe this could be the result of the adventurous palates and evolving taste preferences of consumers. In addition, the changing demographic composition of the United States, with the highest growth rates among Hispanic and Asian Americans, has also played a role in the recent spike in the popularity of ethnic tropicals.”

Finally, two additional points make root vegetables attractive on the retail side.

First, “consistent availability is the single most important factor to growing and maintaining popularity of root vegetables,” says Brooks Tropicals Leifermann.

Secondly, “many root vegetables are not highly perishable and can last for weeks,” explains Robert Schueller, director of public

relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles.

WHAT’S HOT

Root vegetables, including radishes, jicama, beets, parsnips, malanga, turnips, rutabaga, yuca, celery root, taro root, horseradish root, parsley root and other root vegetables, contributed only 0.3-percent to produce department dollar sales during the 52 weeks ending July 2, 2016, according to data supplied by the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group. These findings show there is plenty of room for category growth.

The other segments to watch are dollar leaders and largest dollar gainers. Four roots represent more than three-fourths of category sales: beets (40.3 percent), parsnips (12.9 percent), malanga (11.6 percent) and turnips (11.4 percent), based on the same Nielsen Perishables Group data.

However, fastest growing in terms of dollar percent change versus a year ago (albeit some from a small base) are beets (76,859 percent), parsley root (8,778 percent), taro root (2,724 percent) and turnips (2,596 percent). On the other hand, the two biggest losers were rutabaga (-428 percent) and parsnips (-308 percent).

“The elements that make certain roots more popular than others are the available volume, color and uses,” says Donald Souther, vice president of marketing and sales development at the Los Angeles-based Vision Produce Co.

Traditional U.S. Roots: “We’re seeing good demand not only for root vegetables like beets and radishes, but for different varieties of these items as well,” says Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral at South Bend, IN-based Martin’s Super Markets, a chain with more than 20 stores.

Similarly, Savidan of Bristol Farms says, “We carry a wide assortment of beets, organic as well as conventional. We have a full line of baby beets and every radish and baby carrot grown under the sun.”

Mainstream root vegetables grown and marketed by Lakeside Organic Gardens, LLC, in Watsonville, CA, “include beets, both red and golden, turnips, parsnips, rutabagas and celery root,” says Brian Peixoto, sales manager.

Consumers’ desire for variety and eye appeal in their meals are driving interest in varieties.

“Red beets are most popular, but customers are now starting to look more for golden and candy cane beets,” says Todd Linsky, principal and owner of Todd Linsky Consulting, speaking on behalf of Soledad, CA-based Braga Fresh Family Farms. “Likewise, they



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA’S

want red and Easter egg radishes too.”

One up-and-comer is the Purple Ninja Radish, according to Matt Hiltner, social media and marketing assistant for Babé Farms, Inc., in Santa Maria, CA. “Its unique flavor and spicy kick make it the perfect addition for a variety of ethnic cuisines.”

The Black Spanish Radish and Watermelon Radish are marketed by Lakeside Organic Gardens.

“Turnip root was our primary food crop when we started 12 years ago, and we continue to see the business grow,” says Heath Wetherington, director of operations at Baker Family Farms, LLC, in Norman Park, GA.

Today, the company offers a 1-pound package of clean, polished turnip root that makes a nice presentation on display and is a convenient serving for a small family. The pack contains either two large/medium or 3.5-inch diameter or three small/medium 2.5-ounce diameter roots.

“We since added beets, daikon, kohlrabi and now rutabaga. Our goal is to be a one-stop shop for root vegetables,” says Wetherington.

Baby root vegetables have a humble following.

“Baby turnips are trendy in restaurants and Baby beets are now available in mainstream retail markets,” says Melissa’s Schueller. “However, we tried baby parsnips last year for six months and didn’t get good reception. On the other hand, we do offer baby kohlrabi. It sells few and far between, but better than the baby parsnips.”

There’s been a resurgence of interest in

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“We merchandise roots together in categories on our wet racks and have large root bins for bulk, beets, rutabagas, parsnips and turnips.”

— John Savidan, Bristol Farms & Lazy Acres

Sunchokes, also known as Jerusalem Artichokes, over the past three to four years, according to Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. “We package them in 1-pound bags with recipe information on pack.”

Hispanic & Asian Roots: “Ethnic staples that crossed into the mainstream included jicama on the Latin front and daikon on the Asian. Popular Latin ethnic specialties are yuca root and malanga, while Asian specialties include taro root,” explains Schueller.

Yuca root, also known as cassava, is offered in almost all supermarkets in the U.S., according to Turbana’s Echeverri. “Many retailers have been introducing yuca to their customers over the years and encouraging them to try it in many different ways.”

The reason why yuca is so popular, says Phil Quintana, sales executive at Vega Produce, LLC, in Doral, FL, “is that it’s enjoyed by everyone — from people in the Caribbean, Central Americans, Cubans, Africans and Anglos. We sell 2,000 to 3,000 cases per week.”

Second to yuca, “Malanga blanca is the big seller,” according to Luis Cintron, director of sales and procurement J&C Tropicals, Inc., in Miami. “We also sell Malanga lila, Malanga islena and Malanga coco.”

Malanga and Boniato supplies have become more limited and sporadic over recent years, therefore eddoe, which has consistent availability, is growing in acceptance, according to Brooks’ Leifermann. “Eddoe is increasingly popular as it lends itself to the widest variety of uses.” Taro root maybe growing in sales, “however is still mostly available only in Asian specialty markets,” says J&C Tropical’s Cintron.

PUT DOWN ROOTS IN PRODUCE

“Root vegetable sales will continue to grow. The larger question is how to maximize growth? Displays showcasing the variety of shapes and colors, along with promotional pricing, will help bring more and more customers into the new reality of enjoying roots, regularly. Recipes with pictures are great. Highlight nutrition information. Tout their versatility and edibility, bottom to top,” recom-

mends Cooseman’s Macek.

More specifically when it comes to display, Bristol Farms & Lazy Acres Savidan says, “We merchandise roots together in categories on our wet racks and have large root bins for bulk, beets, rutabagas, parsnips and turnips.”

Beyond this, “when large ethnic communities live nearby, stores should merchandise root vegetables together on large and attractive displays to invite these consumers into their stores. Also since these products are staples for them and most likely purchased on a weekly basis, we recommend retailers price it competitively. Also, creating bilingual displays and adding staff knowledgeable in tropicals is key,” says Turbana’s Echeverri.

Turbana offers produce executives a mobile app to learn about the ethnic tropicals and make the management of the category easier for their store managers. Retailers can discover the demographic breakdown of consumers living in the nearby area simply by using the app. With this information, says Echeverri, retailers are able to customize the assortment of their products to meet the specific needs of their market. The app also highlights the upcoming ethnic holidays so retailers can capitalize on promotional opportunities that involve the tropicals.

Recipes and cooking demos are great ways to educate customers what to do with both traditional or trendy roots, says Babé Farms’ Hiltner. “These aid consumers about who are otherwise intimidated by certain products, because they don’t know how to cook them. We look at recipes like instruction manuals. For example, you wouldn’t sell someone a TV without also giving them a manual on how to use it.”

Shapiro from Love Beets says the company has sales and merchandising representatives who travels through various regions and cultivate relationships with produce accounts.

“We supply retailers with product guides, educational information, recipe cards, shelf strips to draw further attention to the products, and coupons,” she says. “We are also very enthusiastic about doing in-store demos as we feel it’s important to drive trial at the individual store level and helps increase sales.” **pb**



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Berries From Afar

Imported product ensures year-round customer satisfaction.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

As important as the locally grown movement has become to retail produce, year-round consumer demand requires the importation of berries into the United States. By capitalizing on the efforts of importers and marketers as well as the fruit's well-known health benefits, retailers can keep berries moving out of bins and into baskets 365 days a year.

POINT OF ORIGIN

The average consumer may not give much

thought as to where their off-season berry varieties are sourced, but they travel from both North and South American growers. "Chile is a major supplier," says Mark Villata, executive director for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, based in Folsom, CA.

"Argentina is as well, Peru is coming on, and Uruguay is also an importer," says Villata. "We're seeing more imports year-to-year from those South American countries. The winter market increased with volumes, and it's been a good thing, because it makes blueberries now a year-round fresh option for folks here."

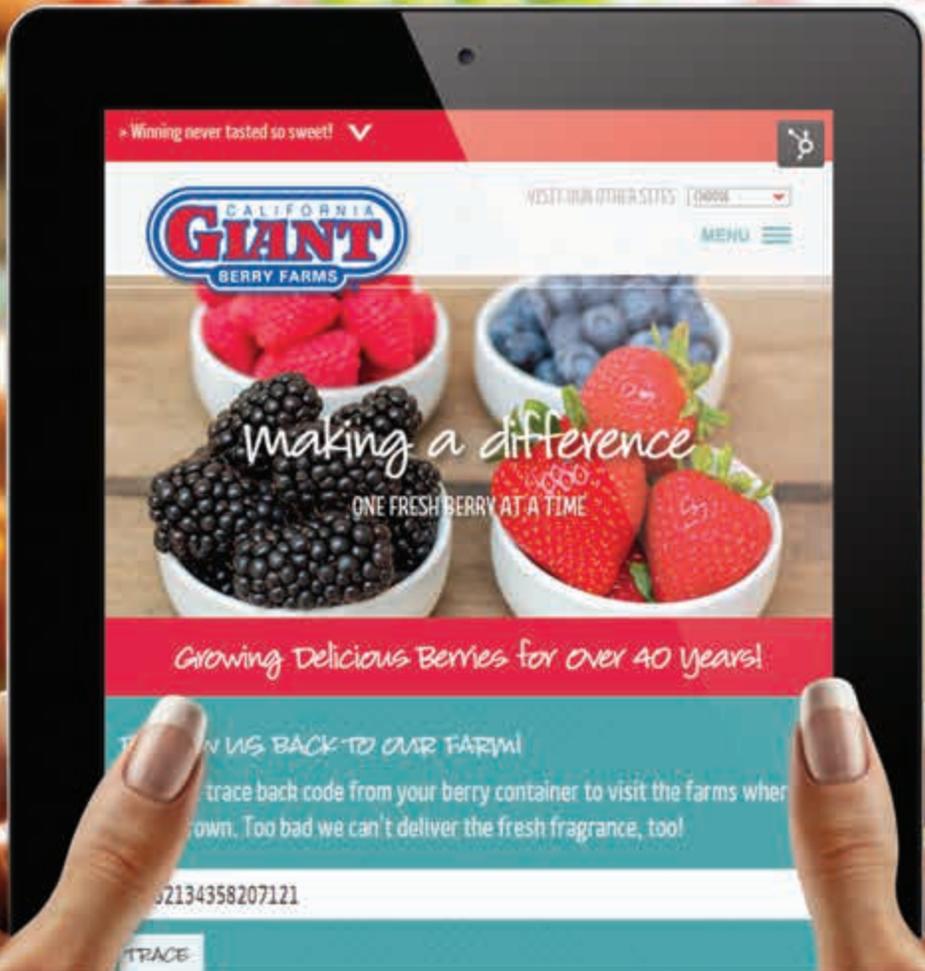
Karen Brux, managing director North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association, headquartered in Santiago, Chile, backs this statement with numbers. "Chile exported 32.7 million boxes (91,038 tons) of fresh blueberries during the 2015/16 season," says Brux. "Market share of the U.S. and Canada grew from 67 percent in season 2014/2015 to 69 percent in 2015/16."

While origin may not be a consideration, quality is something that will always matter. "I'd say the consumers have a general idea that berries aren't being grown locally, and that the available berries are imported," says Matt Curry, president of Curry and Company, based in Brooks, OR.

"We found consumers simply prefer nice quality berries and will gravitate to the best product they're seeing. We don't think they're looking for a particular country, unless the quality is exceptional and they say, 'Wow, these Chilean berries are great this year, I need to go get more.'"

Brux recognizes this as well. "I believe when a consumer picks up a container of blueberries, they are looking first and foremost at the quality of the blueberries inside: large, firm berries with a consistent deep blue color. That being said, if there's a strong story to communicate about the grower or origin of





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the berries, that's another strong selling point."

Clay Wittmeyer, director of international sales for Naturipe LLC, based in Salinas, CA, thinks origin matters. "We included the Canadian flag on our label for shipments coming from British Columbia for sales distribution both in the U.S., Canada, and into export markets," says Wittmeyer.

"With our imports from Chile, which make up a substantial volume of our fresh blueberry distribution in the winter months, we clearly state the origin of the product."

Craig Casca is a 50 percent owner and vice president for Red Blossom Sales, Inc., headquartered in Los Olivos, CA. He stresses the importance of the certificate of origin label (COOL) for consumers when choosing berries.

"It is important that COOL is always known for the consumer. They want to know where the product is sourced, and consumers should be informed at all times."

BERRY VARIETIES

For Chilean blueberry exports, North America continues to be the primary destination. According to Brux, the volume shipped to this market continues to grow year-on-year. "In 2015/16, North America received 69 percent of all exports," says Brux.

"While total exports decreased from 92,089 tons to 91,038, due to weather conditions, and volume to East Asia and Europe fell by 7 and 14 percent, respectively, volume to North America increased by 3 percent."

The fact the market went up in what was overall a down year reflects the strong demand for fresh blueberries in winter. "Fresh blueberries are no longer a seasonal item," says Brux. "Consumers just can't get enough of them, and

"Mexico is filling the hole left from the acreage decreasing in Oxnard, CA, over the past four years. Because Mexico grows under hoops, retailers can count on excellent quality and supply during the winter now."

— Craig Casca, Red Blossom Sales, Inc.

retailers know that."

"Naturipe imports fresh blueberries from Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico," says Wittmeyer. "We also import fresh blackberries from Guatemala. The primary source of our blueberry production is from our farms located in most districts of Chile." Naturipe turns south to ranches in Mexico for imports of fresh strawberries during the winter months.

"There is growing consumption of nearly all berries worldwide including blueberries and blackberries," says Tom Richardson, vice president global development for the Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles.

"There are many factors related to this growth. The high antioxidants in berries are an important aid to good health. Due to greater production in increasing geographic areas, a more consistent supply of berries facilitating growth and varietal development is giving us more good eating experiences."

For strawberries, Mexico is ready and able to provide U.S. consumers with fruit that lasts from October to March. "Mexico is filling the hole left from the acreage decreasing in Oxnard, CA, over the past four years," says Casca of Red Blossom. "Because Mexico grows under hoops, retailers can count on excellent quality and supply during the winter now."

Mexico also produces high-quality black-

berries from October through May. "Volume is very good, which means the retailers can run ads anytime they wish and get a great quality product in stores."

CONSUMPTION TRENDS

Berry sales certainly increased due to the health halo, but availability helps bolster those numbers and keeps them steady. As Naturipe's Wittmeyer explains, "I think the growing year-round supply and availability contributed to the increased consumption of fresh berries. Naturipe Farms offers a continuous supply: six months of the year from North America, and six months of the year from South America. Our domestic chain store buyers appreciate the continuity of supply in keeping this superfood on the shelves all year."

While blueberries gained in popularity and sales in recent years, they aren't the only fruit with great berry appeal. Consumers are spreading the love. "We are seeing growth in all four berry categories," says Wittmeyer.

As an example, he references research on growth from Chicago-based IRI: strawberries - 3 percent, blueberries - 7 percent, raspberries - 9 percent, and blackberries - 17 percent, which is based on the 52-week ending June 12, 2016 *FreshLook Marketing, Multi-Outlet* (or MULO: Multi-outlet reporting includes an aggregation of the grocery, mass, club, drug, dollar and military channels).

"Given many consumer choices at the fresh produce department, berries are the bright spot in a healthy diet," says Wittmeyer.

Curry of Curry and Company has also seen strong numbers. "Currently all imported berries are growing in consumption, and it continues the trend of overall berry growth. Our small, but growing Mexican blackberry program has had strong demand in late spring, and part of this growth is fueled by the continued popularity of organics."

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

"Red Blossom coordinates very closely with our customers to ensure they know when volume is peaking for ads and when volume is waning, and to stay out of trouble," says Casca. "Our goal is to help the retailers be set



up when the volume hits, so they can run great promotions and move the volume.”

For Naturipe, larger packaging sizes drive sales. “We found that a move to a larger pack size increased sales and overall volume, not to mention the efficiency of distribution,” explains Wittmeyer.

He also believes shelf space is a good way to increase sales. “We found that some out-of-country retailers have very little shelf space allocated for berries; however, when the consumers can see more fruit, they end up taking more home, and retailers see a spike in sales.”

Brux points out there are many effective merchandising and marketing tactics produce executives can use for both in-store and online promotions. “Our retail partners are the most successful when they run an integrated campaign with online and offline components,” she says. “For instance, they might cross-merchandise Chilean blueberries with pancake mix for National Blueberry Pancake Day (January 28); hold demos where they hand out blueberry pancake samples; announce the demo dates/times on their Facebook page; and also run a contest where their shoppers can win a pancake griddle.”

Mike Parr, president and chief executive of Team Produce International, headquartered in Miami, likes what he saw from retailers when it comes to displays and promotions of berries.

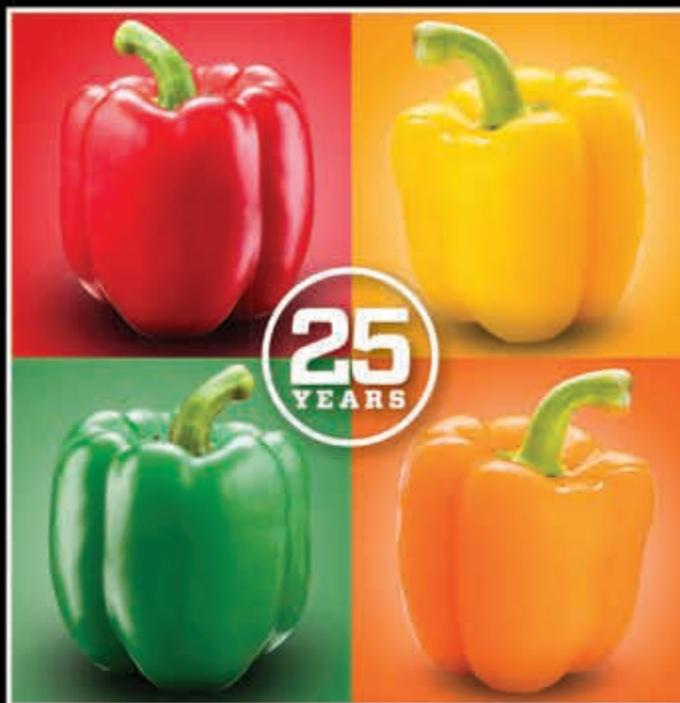
“What I see Southeast retailers doing, which is what I recommend, is tying the berries together. You’re mixing and matching, so the consumer has a choice of taking two blueberries or one blue, one raspberry, two for five or three for five — if they can mix and match, that gives the consumer a better variety at the same price point. Once people are buying one berry, often times they’ll buy different berries to complement desserts.”

Wittmeyer recommends highlighting berries as recipe ingredients for compotes, glazes or toppings on meat dishes and pizza. “By presenting the versatility of berries and encouraging out-of-the-box uses, it’s a good way to promote usage.”

SPECIAL EATING OCCASIONS

With imported berries available in the winter, seasonal holidays present sales opportunities. In addition to the holidays, retailers should not forget the football tailgating season.

Villata at the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council sees these as great opportunities for promotion, noting, “One thing we’re seeing as a way to promote year-round consumption is marketing them with other products like



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Mason jars for folks who are thinking about making jam or chutney. You can team them up with plasticware and other things that folks are using for tailgate parties. That works in the fall for football.” He also recommends pairings with yogurt, smoothies and hot cereals like oatmeal.

Brux sees the start of a new year as a great time to focus on healthy eating. “The

heart-healthy properties of blueberries can be promoted during February, which is home to both American Heart Month and Valentine’s Day.”

“Thanksgiving, Christmas and Valentine’s are obvious,” says Luciano Fiszman, vice president of blueberry procurement for Gourmet Trading Company, headquartered in Redondo Beach, CA. “However, what hasn’t

been explored deep enough yet has been school meals for children. Retailers, and the market in general, should focus on this and sales will jump through the roof. There won’t be enough fruit once this kind of healthy promotion takes place. Some great times to promote are when kids go back to school in September, after Christmas, New Year’s break or spring break.”

pb

■ PROMOTE OR PERISH

The high perishability of berries can give retailers and consumers pause, but growers and importers have faith retailers are up to the task of keeping stock rotated and fresh.

Mark Villata, executive director for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, based in Folsom, CA, readily acknowledges: “I think they (retailers) do a good job already. One thing we’ve seen a couple of retailers do as far as cross-promoting is use small, rolling refrigerated cases as a secondary display and move the unit to the cereal area or with yogurt.”

These mobile refrigerated cases allow for increased visibility of berries while addressing perishability concerns.

Matt Curry, president of Curry and Company, based in Brooks, OR, sees success with proper displays as well.

“When retailers know they have the right price and the right quality, and that the fruit is moving quickly, it is okay to make a large display outside of the coolers,” he says.

“Berries have a longer shelf life when they’re cool of course, but during the peak of the season, you need large displays to get through the volume, and there often isn’t enough space in the refrigerated coolers.”

Curry recommends retailers get their teams ready to keep up with proper berry rotation. “Berries are one of the leading impulse buys, so setting up a secondary display in the department is another successful way to move more berries.”

For Luciano Fiszman, vice president of blueberry procurement for Gourmet Trading Company, headquartered in Redondo Beach, CA, “Communication is key.”

Fiszman recommends retailers prepare and take advantage of peaks in production. “Understand when quality is excellent and when it is not due to weather conditions or any other factor that may affect

shelf life. Rotation becomes imperative in crops like berries. Planning and cold chain are fundamentals of the business, however, everything starts with the way fruit is produced, and genetics.”

“Ordering product on a daily basis is always the best bet with delicate fruits like berries,” says Tom Richardson, vice president global development for the Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles. “Large displays front and center of the produce department are sure to catch the consumer’s eye and drive sales.”

“There is a well-known consumption increase of blues in general due to its fantastic health benefits as a superfruit,” says Manuela Leyba, commercial manager at EarlyCrop South America, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“We do think it is a great idea to promote the health claims of fruit on the shelves, and of course, I think there is much more to be done. Getting more information is always good. We do know blueberries have a lot of phytonutrients which are good for our health.

“Having the highest antioxidant capacities among many fruits and vegetables is a great characteristic. I think retailers know how to market the ‘blues.’ Of course, we always suggest blues should be on refrigerated shelves, as eating them fresh is much more pleasant and tasty. In addition, what is being seen now is promoting the consumption of blues for snacking. It is a great idea and has important potential growth,” says Leyba.

For Karen Brux, managing director North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association, headquartered in Santiago, Chile, creativity is key to promoting berries year-round.

“One of our customers built a blueberry display with a Willy Wonka theme — remember the girl who turned into a giant blueberry? She was floating above the



display and little Oompa Loompas were marching around it. Definitely eye-catching, and it generated double digit sales increases.”

The Association also used short videos to drive sales. “We started producing 45 second usage videos last year, and retailers love them,” says Brux. “One of the largest nationwide retail chains posted one of our usage videos on their Facebook page and it generated more than 46,000 views in less than a day.”

This kind of out-of-the-bin thinking works, but so does focusing on the basics of cross-merchandising, recipe cards, holidays and other POS tools.

Curry also recommends produce managers get the most up-to-date information on all berry crops to fully capitalize on the popularity of berries year-round. He points out that, despite year-round availability, there are still peaks and valleys.

“During peak volume times, one of the best strategies is to carry multiple clamshell sizes, giving customers a choice between an 18-ounce and a pint-size container, for example. During the non-peak times, when availability is tight, you might only carry a 6-ounce clamshell. You need to have a plan that allows the capture of all possible sales during peak volumes and then adjust it for tighter times.”

pb



CALIFORNIA CITRUS IS PRIME For More Space

With increasing supply of the prized category, growers have a simple message for produce retailers.

BY BOB JOHNSON

California citrus growers have steadily shifted production toward sweeter, smaller, easier peeling varieties that continue to capture the eyes and taste buds of consumers nationwide. These growers have one main request for retailers.

“We need more shelf space,” says Dave Roth, president of Cecelia Packing, Orange Cove, CA. “You go into a store and see 16 varieties of apples, and all we’re getting is a couple 2-foot bins. We need more space; more visibility would pay off.”

Cecelia Packing ships a total of about a million cases of citrus a year, including the harvest from its own 2,200 acres in Tulare and Fresno County in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley.

“Build compelling waterfall displays front-and-center that shout ‘Buy me,’” instructs Bob

DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing, Pasadena, CA. “Four to 12-foot wide displays can all be effective, use available POS to call out the product and draw in the consumer. Display contests capture the creativity and the competitive spirit of your produce managers. A price that offers your customers good value is always a plus.”

THE EASY PEELER REVOLUTION CONTINUES

Much like the Navel orange drove the category a generation ago, today, Mandarins and other easy-peeler varieties occupy top status in the citrus category.

“Mandarins remain very popular among consumers for their convenience,” says Joan Wickham, director of communications at Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA. “They are a healthy, delicious snack that families can feel

good about and are also a tasty addition to recipes.”

California growers are continuing to replace their older Navel orange trees with new blocks of the popular Mandarin and tangerine easy peelers, with a special emphasis on varieties that extend the season.

“A lot of people are planting Murcotts and Tangos (the Mandarin varieties),” says Roth. “Valencias have dropped, and there is Navel acreage that has been pulled out, because there was poor return on old trees with small fruit.”

Statewide, growers are devoting increased acreage to Mandarins, which should mean supply will be robust for years to come.

“Mandarins are where the real activity has taken place,” says Alyssa Houtby, director of public affairs for California Citrus Mutual, Exeter, CA. “*The California Citrus Acreage Report* from the USDA’s National Agricultural

Statistics Service (NASS) shows a 20,115-acre increase since 2010, which is a 52 percent hike.”

As a result of this planting boom, there are now nearly 60,000 acres of Mandarins in the state, according to Houtby.

Much of this new acreage is in easy-peeler varieties that extend the period of time they are available domestically.

“Varietal development extended the season for easy peelers, with high-quality, late-season varieties now available through late spring (such as Gold Nugget variety Mandarins and Ojai Pixie tangerines),” says Wickham. “Late season Navel varieties, like the Barnsfield, also helped extend the season of that very quintessential variety.”

As Mandarins have become the citrus variety of choice, California has come to supply the lion’s share of that growing market.

“California has been capturing market share since the inception of the crop approximately 14 years ago and holds about a 89 percent share of the U.S. market,” says DiPiazza. “California grabbed predominant market share from Spain and Morocco, and the volume they import today is dramatically less than 15 years ago. The summer imports coming from the Southern Hemisphere during our off-season. While

these summer imports are growing, they currently amount to approximately 15 percent of the easy peelers produced in California and imported from Spain and Morocco from November thru April.”

There are standard packages for this most popular citrus, as they are rarely sold loose.

“Mandarins are sold in mesh 2-, 3- and 5-pound bags, and 5-pound boxes,” says DiPiazza. “Three-pound bags and 5-pound bags and boxes are the most predominant. There is little to no bulk.”

DON'T FORGET THE CO-STARS

Mandarins are the undisputed stars of the category, but there is also a growing list of intriguing co-stars ready to play important roles in the citrus department.

“We see real and growing interest in premium products like our Vintage Sweets Heirloom Navel Oranges,” says DiPiazza. “Cara Cara oranges, Clementine, Tango and other specialty variety Mandarins continue to grow in popularity.”

Another development is a series of new Navel varieties intended to extend the season.

“Late Navel varieties like Barnfields, Powells and Autumn Golds are increasing

for the export market,” says Roth.

Both Navel oranges and Mandarins will be available out of California over a longer season, because of this new variety development.

“Late season Washington, Barnfield and Powell variety Navel oranges have extended the California Navel orange crop into July,” says DiPiazza. “Murcott, Tango and other specialty Mandarin varieties extended the California season into May.”

One particularly popular specialty fruit is a sweeter version of Navel oranges with a distinctive reddish hue.

“Cara Cara Navel oranges have the same round shape and bright orange rind as traditional Navels,” says John Chamberlain, director of marketing at Limoneira, Santa Paula, CA. “What really sets these oranges apart is their distinct pinkish-red and orange flesh. Compared to traditional Navels, Cara Caras are sweeter, slightly tangy, and less acidic, with a hint of red fruit (like cranberry or blackberry). Cara Cara’s pair exceptionally well with shellfish.”

The recipe blog on the Limoneira website includes grilled shrimp salad with heirloom tomatoes and Cara Cara orange vinaigrette, as well as a Cara Cara orange and beet salad that



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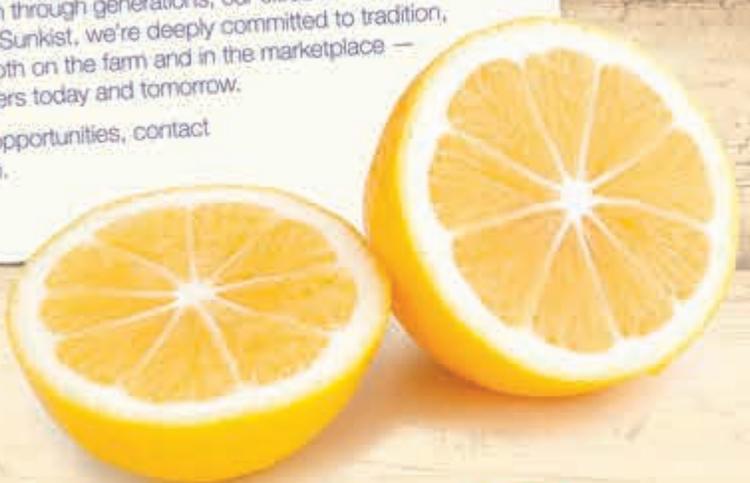
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Limoneira is one of the state's largest lemon shipper, and is emphasizing one new and one classical variety.

"Our pink lemons have been very popular," says Chamberlain. "Their striped to blush exterior and pink interior make them an attractive option with consumers who are looking for unique garnishes. Blue Apron, one of our customers, creates some delicious recipes with them including Za'atar Chicken and Pearl Couscous with asparagus and pink lemon, and asparagus and arugula pesto pizza."

A more familiar lemon is sweeter, because it is actually a cross between a lemon and an orange. "Meyer lemons are also great," says Chamberlain. "They are sweeter than regular

lemons with a complex fragrance that is reminiscent of Mandarin orange. Meyer lemons pair best with herbs and spices that have a similarly bright profile, but earthy flavors balance the citrus notes, too. Delectable pairings include cardamom, cilantro, dill, lavender, dark chocolate and ginger."

While grapefruit and Navel acreage declined, according to Houtby, lemon acreage is up slightly in recent years and regained 2010 levels.

Meyer lemons are already available 12 months of the year, and Limoneira's pink lemon is shipped from February to August.

Although Navel oranges are now the No. 2 citrus fruit, they remain an essential part of the citrus display.

"Navel oranges are also of course a classic favorite among consumers," says Wickham. "Seedless, sweet and bursting with juice, Navel oranges are named for the small, Navel-like formation on their blossom end."

Across the board, there is also particularly increasing demand for organic citrus of all types and varieties.

"Organics are the fastest growing segment in agriculture," says Wickham. "To meet this demand, Sunkist's organic portfolio expanded with more organic acreage coming into production. Sunkist is pleased to be offering our customers a broad portfolio of organics including Navel, Cara Cara Navel and Valencia oranges, Mandarins, Minneolas, grapefruit, lemons and limes."



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SALES ARE UP

Citrus as a whole is increasing, as all the leading varieties are still showing robust growth.

“The citrus category is performing very well with two of the top three sub-categories seeing double digit growth,” says DiPiazza of Sun Pacific. “For the second year running, Mandarins are the top sales producer and surpassed oranges. For those retailers that report their sales, Mandarins are 40 percent of total citrus category sales and are up 14 percent from prior year. Oranges represent 28 percent of category sales and are flat with the previous year. Lemons are 17 percent of category sales and are up 11 percent to the previous year.”

Citrus is displayed in both bulk and bagged, and both the ratio and the sort of bag used depend on the variety.

“For oranges, 45 percent is loose, 55 percent is bagged; for lemons, 64 percent is loose, 36 percent is bagged,” says DiPiazza. “Navels are sold in 4-, 5-, 8- and 10-pound mesh or poly/



mesh bags, and one-third cartons. Navels are also sold in bulk. Generally, limes and grapefruit are sold both bulk and bagged.”

Some convenience consumer bags of citrus

are growing more popular in some areas.

“Retailers have various preferences when it comes to packaging but bags, and pouch bags in particular, are becoming more popular, because they offer real estate to catch the eye of consumers and also educate about flavor profiles, nutritional information and usage ideas,” says Wickham. “Bulk or package sales of citrus vary by retailer based on unique customer base and store format.”

Some major shippers go the extra mile to help retailers build and maintain displays that move citrus.

“We have a number of tips from experts on merchandising on the Produce Buyers/Merchandisers section of the Limoneira blog to help sell more produce,” says Chamberlain. “Giving an appearance of abundance, color combinations, natural displays and rotating/interesting signage, as well as an attention-getting visual or two are just a few of the 16 tips mentioned. We have lemon and citrus lifestyle tips for different consumer uses — recipes and health are obvious. Less obvious, but still important, are beauty, green cleaning and décor.”

As newer varieties come to the forefront, it helps to relay information about them and how they are best used.

“Educating consumers, particularly about newer citrus varieties like Meyer lemons and Cara Cara oranges, is very important to driving purchase,” says Wickham.

“We recommend retailers leverage displays and signage to promote seasonality, flavor profiles, nutrition benefits and usage ideas,” says Wickham. “We also recommend retailers merchandise citrus together — instead of using it as a color break — to help promote and build the category.”

pb

■ WATER MATTERS

With California hosting such a dominant source of fresh market citrus, fruit availability nationwide depends greatly on rainfall and water policy in the Golden State.

Most shippers report that the relatively normal rainfall last winter made for a good citrus crop.

“We had a great season, aided by some rainfall from the El Nino,” says Joan Wickham, director of communications at Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA. “As for next year’s season, it is early to make any predictions, but we are optimistic for another strong season.”

There are cases, however, especially in Southern California, where even under El Nino conditions, water shortages impacted fruit size.

“The water shortage has had an effect on fruit sizing, strength and volumes,” says John Chamberlain, director of marketing at Limoneira, Santa Paula, CA.

There are longer-term water issues that could seriously impact the cost of fresh citrus.

“Water district charges increased three to four times for water usage, and in many cases, wells had to be deepened,” says Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific Marketing, Pasadena, CA. “While production costs per acre were impacted by water, fortu-

nately the bulk of the citrus crop received enough water, and Navels and Mandarins were both in good supply last season. We don’t expect that to change for the upcoming season, but we do predict about a 10 to 15 percent reduction in Clementines and Navel oranges, and an increase in the Murcott and Tango easy peelers beginning later in mid-January.”

In the short-term, growers compensate for a lack of rainfall or state and federal project water by pumping from underground sources.

But over the long run that strategy could cause trouble as a recently enacted state law will lead to restrictions on groundwater pumping.

This year looks to have brought some respite from the recent trend of over pumping groundwater to make up for shortages in surface water — a pattern that is not sustainable in the long run, because surface sources were generally adequate.

“We had almost a normal run for surface water this year, so we didn’t turn the pumps on much,” says Dave Roth, president of Cecelia Packing, Orange Cove, CA. “We’re hoping it will help the underground water. We could use three or four years as a minimum of this, but ideally we’d like to double it.”

pb



RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES

Devastating weather poses challenges that growers are wading through.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

The multitude of buyers and consumers who enjoy the famous fresh potatoes from the Red River Valley of North Dakota will find that the potatoes' availability will be less plentiful this season, as devastating

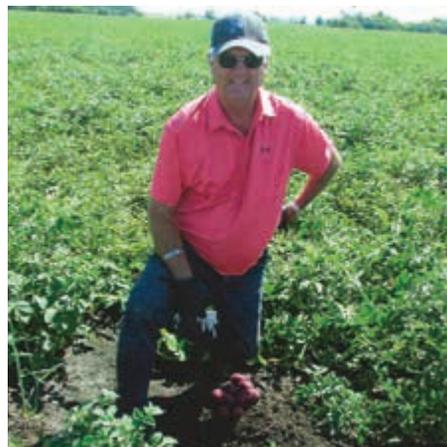
weather, especially in the northern areas of the growing region, has reduced the crop significantly. Growers and shippers predict both volume and the length of the shipping season will be shortened.

Growers in some areas of the Red River

Valley and Minnesota were bombarded with double the amount of rainfall they normally receive during the growing season, and others were victims of severe hailstorms in July and August. One hailstorm in northeast North Dakota in late July was devastating, with



Paul Dolan of Associated Potato Growers Inc.



Greg Hall of J.G. Hall & Sons



Randy Boushey of A & L Potato Company

baseball-size hail that lasted more than 30 minutes, reports Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the East Grand Forks, MN-based Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA). Continual high winds and relentless heavy rains pounding some fields and leaving standing water intensified the problems.

Overall, losses are estimated to be at least 30 percent, says Paul Dolan, president of Associated Potato Growers Inc. in Grand Forks, ND. The rains hit hardest in the northern parts of the valley, where Associated Potato Growers Inc. has two packing sheds. Damage was not nearly as bad south of Grand Forks. "What really helps us in a year like this is that we have 16 different growers in three different growing regions," says Dolan.

Steve Tweten, president and sales manager of Buxton, ND-based Nokota Packers Inc., echoes that sentiment. "Our crop is spread through about a 120- to 140-mile area, so some of the fields look great." Although rains in the region have been unprecedented, "Our growers in the south end will do well, with good quality and good yields." Potatoes south

"What really helps us in a year like this is that we have 16 different growers in three different growing regions."

— Paul Dolan,
Associated Potato Growers Inc.

of Grand Forks appeared to be in great shape.

Some of the growers who plant the majority of their acreage in the northernmost parts of the valley took bigger hits. "It's as bad as I remember — ever," says Dave Moquist, owner of Crystal, ND-based O.C. Schulz & Sons, Inc. "At best, we will have half a crop." At the same time, with what is left, "We hope to supply our customers with good quality."

"I've been doing this my whole life, and I've never seen it this bad," notes Randy Boushey of A & L Potato Company Inc., East Grand Forks, MN. Most of A & L's crop lies in the northern region of the valley. "We may have

25 to 30 percent of our normal volume," he predicts, adding the company will probably have to obtain product from other regions to meet customer needs.

The Red River Valley historically has been the largest red potato shipping area in the country, but the devastating weather factors may change that for the 2016-17 shipping season. Some were able to extend shipping into July this year, but most predict they will probably be out of this season's product by late May or early June of 2017.

QUALITY, FLAVOR REMAIN

Despite being victims of extreme Mother Nature conditions this summer, growers and shippers of the famous Red River Valley red and yellow potatoes maintain spuds from this region are still unparalleled in color, texture and taste.

Marketers invite retail and foodservice buyers to compare their fresh red potatoes to all others produced in any other growing area in the country. A multitude of buyers appears to agree about their superior quality, as they look forward each season to the new crop.

■ WHAT'S NEW IN THE RED RIVER VALLEY?

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS INC., Grand Forks, ND

Tim (T.J.) Johnstone has joined the sales staff, reports Paul Dolan, manager of the co-op, which operates from three locations in the Red River Valley. Johnstone's extensive experience in the potato industry includes sales positions at Grafton, ND-based Campbell Farms, Potandon Produce LLC, and Eagle Eye Produce Inc., both based in Idaho Falls, ID.

"He knows the area and has experience with colored potato varieties," emphasizes Dolan. "It's been good having him on board."

At Associated Potato Growers Inc.'s Grand Forks location, upgraded equipment includes a new potato polisher the company installed last summer. "It has allowed us to put out an even better product," Dolan says.

NOKOTA PACKERS INC., Buxton, ND

The company may be handling a higher volume of smaller packaging this season as a result of the reduced crop vol-

ume. In addition to 3- and 5-pound bags, Nokota Packers also markets part of its crop through San Francisco-based Fresh Solutions Network LLC, according to Steve Tweten, president.

Food safety and sanitation remain in the forefront at Nokota Packers, and the company surpasses the specifications necessary to earn a superior score in the various audits, notes Mike Rerick, vice president of sales and marketing. "All of our farms are GAP (Good Agricultural Practices)-certified as well."

J.G. HALL & SONS, Hoople, ND

T.J. Hall assumed the role of sales manager this season, reports owner Greg Hall. Hall has been an integral part of the operations for several years but has now taken over the management role. Jackson Hall, T.J.'s cousin, has returned to the company and will help with food safety compliance.

KERIAN MACHINES INC., Grafton, ND

Joan Kerian joined the company this year after graduating from college with an engineering degree, according to president and owner James Kerian, who is

Joan's brother. Joan, James, and sister Mary are three of the third-generation members of the family-owned company, which was started by their grandfather in 1967 and will celebrate its 50th year in business in 2017.

The company continues to expand into specialized sizers for an increasing number of commodities, ranging from fruits and vegetables as small as Brussels sprouts to larger produce items such as cantaloupes. In the potato arena, offerings include sizers for mini-tubers. James Kerian explains the three primary advantages the Kerian machines give its customers are gentle handling, precision and simple designs. "We offer precision sizing down to as small as blueberries, and our simple machine designs are both rugged and affordable."

A & L POTATO COMPANY INC., East Grand Forks, MN

A refurbished potato line for more precise and accurate weighing and sizing was installed this year, according to Randy Boushey, co-owner. The upgraded potato line was designed specifically for A & L by Kerian Machines, Inc., Grafton, ND. **pb**



Ted Kreis of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association Inc., is shown at the Potato Bowl with Mr. French Fry.



The sales and transportation staff at Nokota Packers Inc. in Buxton, ND: Mike Rerick, Carissa Olsen, Ron Gjelsness, Steve Johnson, and Steve Tweten.

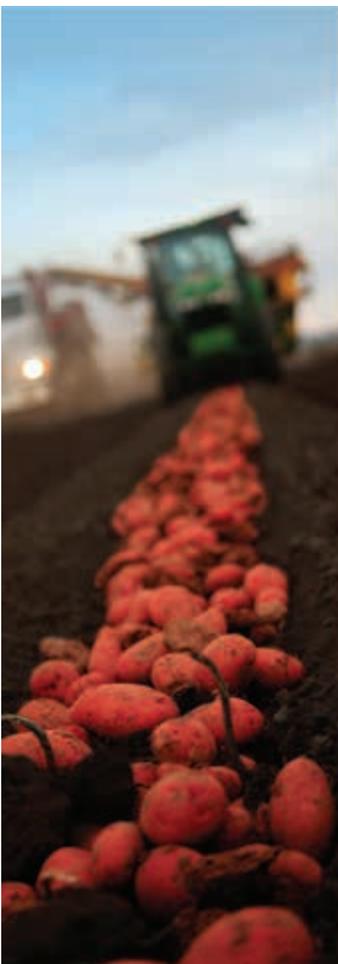
With more than 250 growers producing more than 40 million hundredweight (cwt.) per year, potatoes grown in the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota are used for fresh, chips, seed and processing. Of that total, an estimated 17 percent goes to the fresh market. The region is the third-largest potato-producing area in the nation, according

to NPPGA.

The colorful spuds that reach the fresh market result from growing conditions that are unique to anywhere else in the world. The remnants of what used to be a mammoth glacial lake, the rich black loamy soil of the Red River Valley contributes to the brilliant hues of Red potatoes, along with an increasing

volume of yellow spud varieties. The texture and smooth skin of these potatoes are added bonuses for the consumer.

Although small compared to Russets, which account for more than half of the dollars spent in the retail category, Red potatoes are gaining market share, according to NPPGA's Kreis. Nielsen Scantrack 2015 data shows Red pota-



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“Overall, demand in the red category is increasing. We can get a premium because we still have a superior potato.”

— Randy Boushey, A & L Potato

atoes account for 18 percent of the fresh market, which has steadily risen from 15.2 percent in 2011.

Also noteworthy is the rise in popularity of yellow-flesh potatoes. Five years ago, yellows accounted for only about 4 percent of the fresh total. Today, estimates show that figure has risen to 7.7 percent. Luckily for buyers, the Red River Valley has both reds and yellows, and several area growers report they have increased their yellow plantings to keep up with demand.

Associated Potato Growers, a cooperative, is reported as the largest packer in the Red River Valley and has gradually been increasing its plantings of yellow varieties. Dolan reports the organization’s yellow-planted acreage was up 30 percent this year. However, in spite of that increase, actual harvested volume will probably be about the same as last year because of the losses from the heavy rains. While reds still comprise the majority of shipments, yellows are now about 7 percent of the cooperative’s total volume.

In general, shippers in the region maintain they will still have potatoes for their customers in spite of the reduced volume. Nokota Packers’ Steve Tweten says, “We will still have good potatoes, and the Red River Valley still has the best reds.”

Aside from its 3-, 4-, and 5-pound consumer bag offerings, Nokota Packers also markets part of its crop through Fresh Solutions Network, LLC. Fresh Solutions provides marketing support and category data analysis among its services. In addition to the traditional retail, poly-bagged options, Fresh Solutions offers a line of convenience, gourmet, and fresh-cut potato products.

SUPERIOR QUALITY

“Overall, demand in the red category is increasing,” says A & L Potato’s Boushey. And, despite of the excessive moisture, “We can get a premium because we still have a superior potato.”

At Associated Potato Growers, Dolan notes the fresh potato producers grow their crop on dry land, which is key to producing a tastier

product. Excessive moisture in some fields this year is not expected to affect overall flavor.

“There is a lot of irrigated red potatoes, but we’re probably one of the few areas that doesn’t irrigate. The reds coming out of other areas in Minnesota (Big Lake and Long Prairie) and the South are irrigated,” says Dolan.

Russ Davis Wholesale is a Wadena, MN-based supplier for retail, with five distribution centers in three states. Stephanie Sands, potato buyer and category manager, based in the Russ Davis Inver Grove Heights, MN

location, also affirms Red River Valley potatoes are superior to much of their competition. “I like working with the shippers in the valley,” says Sands. She says they go to an effort to offer a consistent, attractive pack, even with the additional challenges this year.

“They have a nice color, good texture and great flavor.” Sands also emphasizes that, “We want to give the customers what they ask for. Consumers strongly prefer the Red River Valley potato.”

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T.J. and Greg Hall of J.G. Hall & Sons



Ted Kreis of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association Inc.

NE, supplies more than 800 stores in the 16-state Midwest region. Jason Anderson, produce director, says. The Red River Valley provides other plusses in addition to its freight advantage because of its location in the Upper Midwest. “We just really enjoy the color and clarity of the product. They hit the quality market we are looking for.”

STANDING OUT FROM THE COMPETITION

Faced with the common challenges shippers face this year from the fallout caused by the hostile weather conditions during growing, Red River Valley shippers point out what stands them apart from their competition.

“We only do our own potatoes, so we know

exactly what’s out there and can have more control over the product,” explains Greg Hall, owner of Hoople, ND-based J.G. Hall & Sons. “We upgraded our wash plant a few years ago and have state-of-the-art equipment.”

“We’re the grower, packer, and shipper and we can control our quality better,” says T.J. Hall, J.G. Hall & Sons’ sales manager.

RED and YELLOW potatoes continue to gain market share; source from the leader.

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Andrew and Dave Moquist of O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc.



Paul Dolan, Jeff Lazur, Greg Holtman, and T.J. Johnstone of Associated Potato Growers Inc.

O.C. Schulz's Moquist hastens to point out, that, even with the possibility this season of less than half the normal volume for the company, "a dry-land grown Red River Valley potato is still better than any other Red potato."

POTATO PROMOTIONS

Despite this unusual year, the region is in it for the long run, and it is important that Red River Valley potatoes remain foremost

in the minds of buyers, emphasizes Northern Plains Potato Growers' Kreis. He encourages sellers and buyers alike to maintain a long-term marketing program.

"Reds and yellows should all be in adequate supply through the first half of the shipping season and into February," which results in good, promotable volume during that time period, he predicts.

For retail, the region's shippers generally set



James, Mary and Joan Kerian of Kerian Machines

up their own promotions but Kreis says the association can provide additional assistance as requested. "The best thing we can do for our shippers is to help get the best market returns for them," he notes.

The Red River Valley group maintains presence at trade shows and is exhibiting again at the annual Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit, in Orlando this year. Kreis and area grower-shippers exhibited at the Midwest Produce Expo and will have a booth at the New York Produce Show and Conference in December. The association also has an advertising program directed toward retailers, "letting them know that consumers are turning more to red and yellow potatoes than they have in the past — that they should be promoted more," says Kreis.

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SWEET POTATOES SWEEP THE NATION

Here is a sampling of news and products making waves in the category.

BY, CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



Ever since 1992 when the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a pro-nutrition advocacy group headquartered in Washington, D.C., named sweet potatoes as the most nutritious vegetable, demand and sales of this tasty tuber increased. For example, per capita U.S. consumption jumped nearly 80 percent between 2000 to 2010, from 4.2 pounds to 7.5 pounds, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service's May 1, 2015-released *Commodity Highlight: Sweet Potatoes*. In addition, sweet potato dollars have grown 12.5 percent over the past five years and now represent 0.9 percent of total produce sales, based on data supplied by the Chicago-headquartered Nielsen Perishables Group for the 52-weeks ending May 28, 2016.

Here is a sampling of news and products that are making waves in the sweet potato category from a dozen growers, shippers and marketers across the country and in Canada.

FACILITY EXPANSION

"Our sweet potato business last July was twice what our entire year of sales was back in 1975, and that includes the peak fall Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays back then," says George Wooten, owner and chief executive of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company, in Chadbourne, NC.

To feed the current year-round need for sweets by retailers and consumers alike, Wooten will add a new 145,000-square-foot of refrigerated space this fall. This added capacity will help the company to carry more inventory over a longer time frame of the year.

Southern Produce Distributors Inc., in Faison, NC, continues to increase acreage by



PHOTOS COURTESY OF - TOP ROW: NASH PRODUCE, BLACK GOLD FARMS AND MAGLIO; MIDDLE ROW: THE SWEET POTATO COMPANY AND SOUTHERN PRODUCE; BOTTOM ROW: MARKET FRESH PRODUCE AND WADA FARMS

5 to 8 percent annually, according to vice president, Kelley Precythe. "We are adding a new 80,000-square-foot curing and storing facility that will be in operation this fall. As a large grower-shipper, it's important to not run out. We export about 25 percent of our crop and see increased demand in countries like the U.K., Ireland, Finland and the Ukraine that aren't traditional consumers. It's all being driven by news of health benefits in sweet potatoes."

Across the country in California, a place in the nation not as synonymous with sweet potatoes as is the Southeast, facilities expansion is also underway at the Dallas Distributing Co., in Livingston, CA. The company grows most of what it packs on its 400 acres.

"We ran 24/7 last year in the month leading

up to Thanksgiving," says managing partner, Bob Dallas. "This year, we're adding a second packing line. We also have new drive through pallet racking. The five lines, each 10-pallet deep racks with 40-pound boxes, hold 1,100 boxes each or enough for a truckload per line. This comes on this fall too."

NEW HUES

Purple and white sweet potato varieties are a huge hit with consumers as they have a fun and different look, a slightly different flavor profile and look beautiful on the plate, says Laura Hearn, marketing and business development director for Nash Produce, in Nashville, NC, which packs these spuds as PLU loose, in mesh bags, in handle form and

sweet potatoes



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fill bags or in tray packs.

“The purple ‘Murasaki’ sweet potatoes have a purple skin and white flesh,” says Hearn. “They are considered to have a nuttier taste. The white ‘Bonita’ sweet potatoes have a lighter, pale orange skin and white flesh and are considered to have a texture more like a Russet potato and some say they taste even sweeter than a regular orange sweet potato. Nash Produce has increased its acreage for these different varieties for the 2016 crop, and we look forward to seeing them in more retail spaces.”

Purple is also the color of one of the popular varieties of sweet potatoes sold by Frieda’s Inc., a specialty produce supplier based in Los Alamitos, CA.

“Our Stokes Purple Sweet Potato season starts in mid-August,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive. “The big appeal is from fit health-conscious shoppers — especially long-distance runners who like the potato’s firm, rather than soft mushy texture, and its earthy taste. We ship in 15- and 40-pound cartons and 12 3-pound bags and sell organic and conventional. This fall, we’ll have a brand new look to our packaging for this product. Retailers ideally should display these with the rest of the potatoes rather than in the specialty produce section or group them with other items fall like eggplant and Brussel sprouts for a power of purple promotion.”

SMALL SIZES

One of the latest sweet potato products from Wayne E. Bailey is actually an item that has been in development for a long time.

“We’ve always had small-sized potatoes, but there wasn’t a market or desire for them until now,” says Wooten of Wayne E. Bailey. “Our trademarked Sweet Potato Petitelings are very small (1.5-inch in diameter with a maximum length of 4.5 inches). We package them in a plastic bag with a handle in either 1.5- or 2-pound bags for retail. It’s paying off, because consumer appeal is that they’re a novelty, cook faster than the big potatoes and there’s no need to peel them.”

VALUE-ADDED

Making it easier for consumers to put spuds on the dinner table fast is at the center of much of the new product development in the sweet potato category. Many of these latest items make use of novel packaging.

“The newest packaging that we are seeing are different sizes of bagged sweet potatoes; single and bagged microwaveable/steamable sweet potatoes; and cooking kits that include



seasonings, so consumers can just mix everything together and their sweet potato dish is complete,” says Kaylyn Bender, marketing manager for Market Fresh Produce, LLC, in Nixa, MO. “We found that the ease of prepping the product is well worth the additional cost. With this fast-paced world, families and individuals are looking for ease in food preparation.”

Convenience products will grow and drive greater household penetration and increased consumption of sweet potatoes, according to Don Ladhoff, director of fresh sales and marketing for Black Gold Farms, in Grand Forks, ND. “Sales of our Steam’in Sweets microwaveable bag are doubling every six months since its introduction in December.”

Southern Produce Distributors now offers a 1.5-pound steamer bag of small sweet potatoes.

Two new convenience-oriented products now on the market are from the Maglio Companies, in Glendale, WI.

“One is Riverboat Steamers, which are petite sweet potatoes, washed, cleaned and packaged in a special bag that enables consumers to steam cook in the package using their microwave for 8 minutes,” says Sam Maglio, Jr., president. “The second is individually wrapped 7-ounce minimum weight microwavable sweet potatoes ready to cook for 8 minutes in the microwave.”

Alsum Farms & Produce, in Friesland, WI, markets a wide variety of value-added sweet potato offerings for the retail market, according to Christine Lindner, in sales. These include a 6-ounce Microwave Sweet Singles, a sweet potato that is washed and ready to microwave, which was debuted in 2010. In 2014, the company introduced a three-pack Sweet Potato Griller, with individually-wrapped, ready-to-grill sweet potatoes, and a four-pack Ready-to-Microwave or Bake Sweet Potatoes, that are pre-washed.

Wada Farms pioneered a number of value-added sweet potato options such as the single-serve Easy Baker Microwaveable Sweet Potato

and a 1.5-pound steamer bag of Mini Sweets, according to Eric Beck, director of marketing for the Wada Farms Marketing Group, LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID. “Along with value-added products, there has been a steady demand for organic sweet potatoes. While the nutritional properties between conventional and organically grown vegetables remains debatable, the organic market continues to expand in every produce department across the country. Wada focused its organic growth in mostly orange-fleshed varieties, but we see potential in other varietal segments down the road.

Organic sweet potatoes accounted for 8.1 percent of total sweet potato sales at retail, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data for the 52-weeks ending May 28, 2016.

Value-added means a little something different for Bob and Juli Proracki, owners of the Round Plains Plantation & Ontario Sweet Potatoes, in Waterford, ON. The couple grows varieties such as orange Covington, Beauregard, Hernandez, Evangeline and Puerto Rican, as well as white-fleshed Japanese, O’Henry and purple.

SWEETS – PLUS

What consumers want is what’s driving the marketing direction of The Sweet Potato Company, in Savannah, GA.

“Although the category is still growing, many wholesalers, retailers and foodservice companies already have their established sweet potato supplier,” says Ted Copeland, president and owner. “We don’t operate under the business concept ‘if we build it they will come.’ Instead, our initiatives are all customer-driven.

“This year, our customers asked us to do a couple things,” says Copeland. “One is to make our name less confusing. Since our sweet potatoes actually come from the Bruce Sweet Potato Co., we are changing our name to Bruce Farms, LLC. We chose this because customers asked what we could offer them with the same reliability. What is next? Don’t ask us, ask our customers!”

pb

SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATO SHIPMENTS GAIN MOMENTUM

Increased organic acreage and quality crop position the Valley for a profitable season.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

With 350 days of sunshine a year, at an elevation of 7,600 feet above sea level, Colorado's San Luis Valley is situated between the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains and provides a beautiful setting and ideal conditions for growing incomparable potatoes.

This is the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown, and that altitude naturally decreases the likelihood of disease and pests, minimizing the need for pesticide use. This also makes the region more favorable for organic production. Combine those features with a great 2016 growing season, and good water runoff available for irrigation, then the result is a good quality crop with steadily increased volume for buyers to enjoy as the season progresses.

GAINING TRACTION

Although the overall San Luis Valley potato acreage has remained relatively stable in recent years, one notable change is the increase in certified organic acres, according to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC).

Last season, certified organic potato acres made up close to 8 percent of the total. Shippers have been able to respond to the increasing interest from buyers and consumers alike for organics. While Colorado ranks as the second-largest fresh potato-producing state in the United States, Ehrlich points out that it is also the No. 2 state in organic, fresh potato production.

Statistics from CPAC for 2016 show overall planted acreage is down by less than 1 percent, at about 51,000; down about 1,000 from 2015. Within those figures, however, the percentage of certified organics had increased.

"Colorado has an advantage because of reduced disease pressure and the lack of late blight that other areas face," explains Ehrlich, "and now we are one of the bigger players in organics." One grower-shipper, for example, Maverick Potato Co., has converted 100 percent of its crop to organic.

Maverick Potato Co. co-owner Roger Christensen reports he has completed the three-year transition required to certify all of his acreage organic. Production through the warehouse is about 75 percent in Russets, with the remaining in red and gold varieties. Also offering a variety of packaging sizes under the Maverick brand and in private labels, "we're looking to expand more, becoming a year-round supplier in organics," says Christensen.

Skyline Potato Co. in Center, CO, has been marketing organic potatoes for nearly 20 years and has developed a wide customer base and loyal following. "We are a full-service potato company, with a year-round supply of potatoes – both conventional and organic," says Les Alderete, Skyline's general manager.

Purely Organic is a separate packing facility dedicated strictly to organic volume. The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Robinson Fresh (Eden Prairie, MN) using the Tomorrow's Organics label. At the same time, the company sells its own Nature Fresh organic label through Skyline.

Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct of America increased its volume in organics gradually in recent years in response to customer demand, according to Lee Jackson, operations manager. Other Colorado shippers offering organics in their line include RPE Colorado in Monte Vista, White Rock Specialties LLC in Mosca, and Canon Potato LLC in Center.

Whether organic or conventional, more than 80 percent of the San Luis Valley spud volume is in Russets. Among the remaining

acreage, demand for yellow potato varieties has increased the valley's percentage planted in yellows, comprising about 15 percent of the total.

Ehrlich stresses, however, that Colorado

can grow any kind of potato that buyers or consumers desire. Pink-skinned potatoes, purple varieties, and unusually shaped potatoes are getting the attention of a full range of end-users – from executive chefs to “foodies”

to creative home cooks seeking new, imaginative ideas for their families or for entertaining guests.

Fingerling potatoes are getting more notoriety, and San Luis Valley shippers have

■ WHAT'S NEW IN SAN LUIS VALLEY?

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Maverick Potato Co., Center, CO

Beginning its fourth year of business, the company has made the substantial jump to 100 percent certified organic product. According to Roger Christensen, co-owner, the company is handling organic Russets, yellows, and reds.

Packed in 3-, 5-, and 10-pound poly and consumer bags as well as 50-pound cartons, another packing option will probably be added when Maverick purchases “a form-sealing bagger for 1.5-pound organic creamer Russets, yellows, and reds,” according to Christensen. Maverick offers its own label and will also ship under private brands.

The transition to all-organic has been completed in stages, with 15 percent of the company's production organic in 2014 and 50 percent last season.

Among other facility upgrades, Maverick also built cold storage for its Canela-variety potatoes. Harvest and shipping were already in full swing by early fall.

Recently hired as shed foreman/fabricator is Thomas Torres, who oversees continued upgrades at the packinghouse.

Christensen emphasizes, “everything we do to improve the packinghouse is with food safety in mind. That is our number one concern.” Both the growing operations and the packinghouse are USDA Harmonized GlobalGAP-certified.

Among its customer base, Maverick works closely with a major retailer and packs export loads in addition to its domestic sales. Christensen has worked to maintain relationships in the domestic and Mexican markets as well as forge new ones. About 15 to 20 percent of Maverick's potatoes were shipped to Mexico last season.

Meanwhile, with both domestic and international customers, Christensen says he thinks there is still clientele for a smaller growing, packing, and shipping organization such as Maverick Potato Co. “We are more personalized and pay attention to detail,” he says.

Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO

Les Alderete, general manager of all operations, says the company has made upgrades in its facilities and prepares to do more in the near future. A new washer was added at the Horizon facility where both organics and conventionals are packed.

In addition to Horizon, Skyline Potato operates two other packing sheds in the San Luis Valley. The Skyline headquarters facility packs strictly conventional varieties, and Purely Organic is designated for packing organics only. “We're still looking at upgrading more machinery. We want to continue to reduce labor costs and become more efficient,” he adds. “Getting labor in the Valley is tough.”

Skyline Potato Co. markets its potatoes primarily under the Skyline and Green Giant labels, but the company also does private labeling. “We also have a good following in Mexico and do a lot of custom packing,” Alderete says, pointing out Skyline maintains year-round supplies. “We cater to our customers and pack to their individual specifications, and our growers are some of the best in the Valley.”

Farm Fresh Direct of America, Monte Vista, CO

The grower-owned sales and marketing cooperative of multi-generational family potato farms located around the United States has named Jamey Higham as president and chief executive.

Higham was most recently vice president of sales for Potandon Produce in Idaho Falls, ID. Previously, he held several other senior management positions at Potandon, including vice president of foodservice sales and director of new business development.

The beginning of his produce career was with Walker Produce as a logistics manager, and he then became a salesperson at Pillsbury, for Green Giant Fresh. He took a leap into the automotive world and held several management roles with the Ford division

of the Ford Motor Co., “but my heart was in produce, and I came back to potatoes,” says Higham.

Jim Knutzon will remain at Farm Fresh Direct of America as chief executive until his retirement in November.

Higham currently sits on the United Fresh Government Relations Council and was also a member of United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Class 13. He and his family will relocate to Colorado.

Packing an average of 5 million cwt. per season, Farm Fresh Direct of America is reportedly the largest grower-owned potato cooperative in the U.S.

Canon Potato LLC, Center, CO

When this company was purchased late last summer by Palm Beach, FL-based Woerner Holdings Inc., it brought together two well-established potato-shipping facilities that now provide year-round supplies. This acquisition followed the purchase of Springdale, AR-based H.C. Schmieding Produce Co. in April 2015, which also markets potatoes out of Colorado. Canon Potato had been in operation for nearly 60 years when it closed in 2013 but resumed business when it was purchased.

“Colorado has a long history of growing, packaging, and shipping some of the finest quality potatoes in the nation, and we look to continue to expand our operations in the San Luis Valley,” notes owner Lester Woerner.

Canon ships Russets, reds, and yellows as well as value-added microwavable potatoes, organics, and specialties.

For the 2016-17 season, “We plan to carry on with the good reputation that Canon has had since the late 1950s,” emphasizes White, adding that the packinghouse has been upgraded with new equipment. A new Hagan carton machine and bagging equipment offer a variety of packaging that includes 3-, 5-, 8-, and 10-pound poly bags, 50-pound paperbags and cartons, as well as 2,000-pound totes.

increased their acreage accordingly. Farm Fresh Direct of America and Center, CO-based Mountain Valley Produce LLC are two of the fingerling handlers. "There's also more and more demand for petites," adds Ehrlich.

Aspen Produce LLC, Center, CO

A new label that draws attention to its attractive Colorado location is now being test-marketed with a few retail customers, according to Jed Ellithorpe, who manages marketing for Aspen. The label features blue as the dominant color with red and white accents. Ellithorpe explains that research has shown that focusing on the appeal of Aspen's Colorado location will tend to increase customer loyalty.

This is one of a multitude of major changes the company has completed in recent years. Last year, a complete renovation of the offices resulted in a totally new look of the headquarters. The open floor-plan has the bonus of better communication among the staff, according to co-owner Rick Ellithorpe. New equipment in the shed gave the company more sizing flexibility, and about a third of the storage area is now refrigerated. "And we're starting to see the fruits of our efforts," he says, which also included major staff changes.

Mike Bonemeyer, who had worked in Aspen's warehouse for several years, returned and is behind the sales desk. Bonemeyer both works in sales and assists with phytosanitary protocol. Sitting next to Bonemeyer is Jon Gonzalez, who works in quality control and assists in some human resources work.

Ellithorpe emphasizes that Aspen stands above its competition because "We can react to changes a lot quicker and respond to customer needs since our sales force is in the same building as the packing. If we have an issue with a lot, we can walk down there and see it. Other marketing entities are not present — or even in the same state — to see it.

"Most of our sales staff has seen, touched, and maybe tasted what they are selling. They have probably also watched the potatoes while they were growing," he says.

Ellithorpe adds, "We are one of the few remaining independent shippers in the area not affiliated with a larger cooperative or corporate sales organization, which guarantees personal attention to customers." **pb**

FREIGHT ADVANTAGES AND BUYING LOCAL

Adding to the potatoes' allure is the Valley's centralized location in the U.S., which provides a natural freight advantage and is becoming even more appealing with the continued popularity of locally grown. This area is also a natural fit for the multitudes that are "going green."

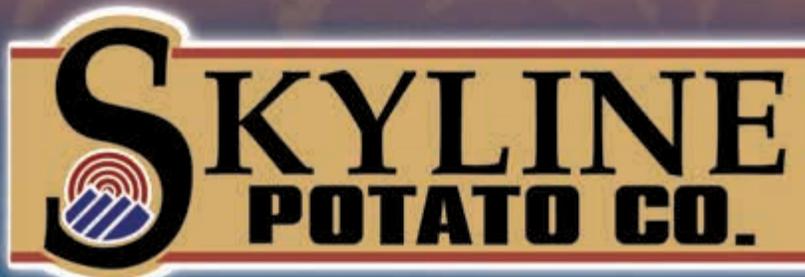
"We are more sustainable than any growing area," stresses Ehrlich. "Buying Colorado equals less 'food miles' and a reduced carbon footprint with our natural freight advantage.

We are justifiably proud of our state and of our unique region."

"People want to support locally grown to help cut fuel usage and cut costs," notes Skyline's Alderete. "That's good for all of us."

One-stop potato shipping available through this single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs. "Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which makes them fresh and reduces shrink," emphasizes Jere Metz, salesman at Farm Fresh Direct of America, which markets

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Les Alderete of Skyline Potato Jim Ehrlich of CPAC



Roger Christensen of Maverick Potato Co. and Steve Cottom of Cottom Farm

both conventional and organic potatoes year-round.

“Delivery can sometimes even be done overnight to Dallas, for example,” continues Metz, describing the 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to some Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points.

Colorado also holds a freight advantage in shipping to Mexico, which has been a good market for San Luis Valley shippers — despite the fact that for years potato shipments have been restricted to a 26-kilometer “buffer zone” inside Mexico’s borders.

As potato harvest was in full swing, shippers were paying attention to the ongoing



Linda Weyers and Savannah Schlaufman of Colorado Potato Administrative Committee



Mike Bonemeyer, Dwayne Weyers, Jon Gonzalez, and Jed Ellithorpe of Aspen Produce

negotiations with Mexico for market openings with that country. It was reported in late summer that Mexico’s President Enrique Peña Nieto issued two decrees that made the potato industry hopeful about further progress toward loosening up Mexico’s borders to allow more export from the U.S.

PRIVATE LABELING

More potato packaging options in the smaller sizes will persist in gaining popularity, according to the predictions of select Colorado potato shippers. Skyline Potato’s Alderete says the shrink of packaging sizes coincides with the shifting buying habits of consumers — especially the Millennials, whom he claims are opting for more convenience and are not buying the larger bags of potatoes.

“You’ll see more of the smaller packaging (the 3- and 5-pound sizes) and smaller-sized potatoes becoming more popular.”

John Pope, vice president of sales and marketing for MountainKing Potatoes, based in Houston with offices in Monte Vista, CO, also notices more packaging size options. “The general trend is an increase in smaller package sizes, more shopping trips to the store, and buying new items for the experience of eating,” he notes.

In addition, the greater percentage of San Luis Valley potatoes being packed under private labeling reflects the trend of retail chains and

strong independent stores choosing to market products with their own brand. Increased brand recognition contributes to consumer loyalty, and packers are working to meet this increasing need of retailers.

“We are definitely moving more of our product in private labeling,” notes Alderete, while adding, “We are flexible and do whatever we can to meet our customers’ needs.” He also notes, “We have a good following in Mexico and do a lot of custom packaging for customers there.”

Whether in large or small packages, conventional or organic, “Potatoes are a good food value — even during market years when prices are a little higher,” says Farm Fresh Direct’s Metz. “And when food prices are high — and they are predicted to continue to increase — potatoes are perceived as an even better value.”

Rick Ellithorpe, co-owner of Center, CO-based Aspen Produce LLC, agrees. “Consumers need to be reminded that potatoes are still one of the greatest values in the produce department, and they need more education relating to versatility.”

According to Ray Keegan of American Produce Co. LLC, a Denver-based receiver that services retail and foodservice accounts, “Colorado potatoes are fresher, they have more flavor and variety, and they are convenient and economical.”

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6 Notable Trends In The West Mexico Deal



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE COURTESY OF GIUMARRA, TA-DE AND VISION PRODUCE

Expansion in volume, variety and seasonality put the industry in position to meet market demands.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Increasing consumer demand for produce reinforces multiplying prospects for the West Mexico deal. “Rising demand for produce in general affects the whole industry including West Mexico” says Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate González Markets in Anaheim, CA. “West Mexico has the availability and will meet this increasing demand. As consumers demand product year-round, this opens new windows for West Mexico to supply product.”

West Mexico already holds a major stake. The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) reports more than 8.2 billion pounds of produce imported via Arizona and California entry points in the 2014/15 season according to USDA Market News data. More than 68 percent of that volume entered through Nogales with a little less than 32 percent entering via the California points.

Continued investment on both sides of the border looks to sustain and grow West Mexico’s

position. “The Mexican government continues deploying significant amounts of resources for growers to invest in farm infrastructure such as irrigation systems, cold rooms, packing equipment and post-harvest processing technology,” says Allan Acosta, vice president of operations for Vision Produce in Nogales, AZ. “Growers in the western portion of Mexico, especially the northwestern region of the country, have benefited from such initiatives, as their crop’s quality productivity per hectare has increased.”

Trends in West Mexico observed by lime grower/shipper Sicar Farms in Mission, TX, include more technology, better infrastructure and greater social responsibility. “One can see changes for the better across the region,” says Dan Edmeier, vice president sales.

Molina Group’s Fresh Farms in Nogales, AZ, believes greater demand for products from Mexico result from outstanding quality and consistent supply. “Products expanded and evolved from Mexico, because growing and packing exceptional quality has been key,” says Jerry Havel, director of sales and marketing. “Retailers learned food-safety protocols in Mexico are top in the industry. Buying quality backed with certifications for food safety makes Mexico a desirable destination for almost all retailers, foodservice clients and wholesalers.”

Based in the current strength of the

West Mexico deal, several growing trends point toward an even more fruitful future. Over the past few years, Giumarra-Nogales has seen significant shifts in the timing of volume surges, overlapping growing areas, and extended production periods. “Much of this can be attributed to new varieties, new growing areas, varying weather patterns, and ever-changing advances in growing practices,” says Gil Munguia, division manager.

Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers, LLC in Rio Rico, AZ, asserts the paradigm for Mexican agriculture is changing. “It is growing and diversifying,” he says. “It’s probably best not to think of West Mexico but of Mexico in general, since growing regions and seasons are expanding.”

TREND 1: EXPANDING GEOGRAPHY

The geographic region of West Mexico is expanding — though Sonora and Sinaloa remain the big players. “The increase in production and the extended season is coming from Sonora and Sinaloa,” says Havel. “In the future, though, you will see an expansion of our season from other states.”

Some production is reportedly moving west to Baja. “Although Sonora and Sinaloa have been the most predominant states in the West Mexico deal, farming investments in Baja

California are becoming relevant for certain produce items and harvest seasons,” says Acosta of Vision Produce. “The Baja deal, however, lags behind due to the limited availability of irrigation water.”

Ta-De Distributing in Nogales, AZ, is mostly shipping from the two states of Sonora and Sinaloa but is also expanding south into Nayarit and other areas. “Nogales’ West Mexico deal has really now become most of Mexico,” says Robert Bennen Jr., president.

Edmeier of Sicar Farms says the states of Nayarit and Colima have exploded with production. “As technology improves, many more items are being produced with protected environments offering greater diversity.”

As the protected agriculture industry in Mexico changes, Ciruli expects more farming further south in Mexico. “This will allow producers to grow fresh items longer from southern states such as Jalisco, Zacatecas and Puebla,” he says. “These states have been farming for their domestic market for years, but as demand for fresh, quality and flavorful products increases, growers will seek to produce more exportable products.”

TREND 2: LENGTHENING SEASONALITY

Expansion of production area and methods has resulted in expanding seasonality. “Mexico’s expansion of growing regions over the past 10 years, both north and south, has meant a longer season for almost all products,” says

Havel. “The vegetable season from Mexico now starts in mid-September and finishes around June first.”

Acosta notes how the expansion of protected crops, encompassing shade houses, greenhouses and macro tunnels enables many growers to extend their harvest seasons. “In many cases now their window overlaps with that of other regions within Mexico and, sometimes, even Central America,” he says.

Lengthening seasonality has become critical for retail. “Consumers expect formerly seasonal items such as grapes, cantaloupe and watermelon to be fairly seasonal year-round now,” says Ray Garrett, owner of Garrett’s IGA Supermarket in Rio Rico, AZ. “Due to the expanding seasonality of Mexico, we have these products pretty much year-round.”

Acosta points out retailers and consumers benefit from extended seasons. “When conditions are there for the harvest season from multiple regions to overlap in the marketplace, buyers find themselves with plenty of available products at very competitive prices,” he says.

Increased seasonality also offers the benefit of consistency in the marketplace. “Retailers are recognizing Nogales as a consistent source for many fruit and vegetable items for a 10-month span,” explains Havel. “With the length of our season we are much more than a seasonal source of supply. We basically are out of the deal for two or three months when California is ‘in’ season.”

TREND 3: INCREASING VOLUME

In response to increasing demand, West Mexico producers amped up volume of exported products. “Tomatoes, chilies and greenhouse vegetables such as bell peppers, cucumbers, eggplant and squash are all increasing in volume,” says Cano of Northgate González. “Growing practices, especially greenhouse, are providing high quality and good pricing.”

“Production has increased on nearly every item in West Mexico,” agrees Edmeier. “Peppers, chilies, tomatoes, limes and pineapples are starting to become more abundant and are being propagated by a few family-growing operations such as Sicar Farms.”

The FPAA 2014-2015 *Nogales Import Report* attributes the volume changes mainly to increases in volume of watermelon followed by cucumbers, grapes and chili peppers and the recovery in volume of mangos and bell peppers (see FPAA Volume by Season chart below). According to the report, watermelon imported volumes particularly are up 23 percent compared with two years ago and up 8 percent compared to one year ago.

Giumarra reports steady growth of 14 to 15 percent every year on its watermelon production. “This year, we are projecting a 20 percent increase in volume for the fall/winter program and a 25 percent increase for the spring/summer program,” says Munguia.

Watermelon is a large volume item for



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS

As the protected agriculture industry in Mexico changes, Ciruli Brothers expects more farming further south in Mexico.

Fresh Farms as well but table grapes represents Fresh Farms' No. 1 product from Mexico. The company also sees growth in other veg products. "Hard squashes are becoming a bigger deal for us including butternut, spaghetti, acorn and kabocha," says Havel. "Green and colored bell peppers and English cucumbers are also increasing for us."

The Western Mexico region offers opportunities for Vision to expand its grower direct deals. "This year, we are increasing our volume on honeydew, cantaloupes, cucumbers, squash, watermelon and bell peppers all marketed through our La Visión brand," says Donald Souther, Vision's vice president of marketing and sales development in Los Angeles.

Ciruli reports expected increases in avocado and berry volume as demand remains strong and as more Mexican states produce and export. "The mango category is also expected to see double-digit growth in 2017."

TREND 4: MORE VARIETY

A more sophisticated West Mexico industry is producing a greater variety of products. "We're seeing more variety coming out of Mexico," says Ciruli. "Whereas the traditional items include tomatoes, bell peppers, squash, cucumbers and eggplant, now we're seeing an increase in items such as broccoli, cauliflower, avocados and berries."

Northgate González takes advantage of growing options in unique products including colored bells, specialty squashes and specialty eggplants. "They're developing these products as alternatives to the mainstream," says Cano. "We're also seeing more development of non-Hispanic ethnic items."

New presentations of market staples create new opportunities. "We see greater interest in innovative packaging such as stoplight (tri-color) peppers in sleeves, totes or clams," explains Bennen of Ta-De. "We had to expand our production to meet customer request."

The more products Garrett's IGA has available for sale, the more sales it does. "The more variety of products in produce the more likely we are to attract more customers," explains Garrett. "Mexican produce provided a big share of this new variety."

Ta-De sees greater interest in ethnic items and ingredients such as garlic. "We expanded our Red Lotus Asian-inspired brand to feature deeper categories in eggplant, peppers and more," says Bennen. "While previously these items were relegated to the back of the department or to small specialty displays, retailers are now bringing these items front and center. This is a good strategy to introduce shoppers

to a new item. For example, putting Chinese eggplant next to the regular Italian variety tells them it's a good substitute."

In retail tests this past season, Ta-De displayed its Rio Sonora Rose purple garlic bulbs next to the standard white at the same price point. "Shoppers typically preferred the purple or they purchased both, perhaps planning to use for different preps," says Bennen. "This increases overall ring in the category rather than cannibalizing SKUs."

Organics represent another tremendous

growth opportunity according to Fresh Farm's Havel. "Over the past two years, we saw an increase for organic product in all of our fruit and vegetable items," he says. "Most good growers expanded their programs to make a percentage of their crops organic."

Vision expects significant response to organic demand by West Mexico producers. "There is a great emphasis on organic crop production," says Vision's Acosta. "Soon, ethnic items including chili peppers and oriental vegetables will be produced organically."

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TREND 5: VALUED COMMUNICATION

The support West Mexico receives from its collaborators north of the border has become a valued asset. "Sales of West Mexico products are mostly done out of locations in the southwest U.S. including Nogales, San Diego and even Los Angeles," says Cano. "The really good communication with these sales people connected to our buyers is an advantage over dealing with offshore growers. The U.S. offices of the West Mexico deal have professional, skilled salesmen making communications on both sides much more effective."

Giumarra emphasizes communication as fundamental for success. "Well informed buyers confidently adjust promotional timelines," explains Munguia. "They move from the traditionally available items to what is now at peak quality and volume. The successful retailers have strong relationships with suppliers."

Continued collaboration between both sides of the border on transportation and staging also increases efficiency. "Mexico has done a great job of staging produce along the northern Mexican border or in the southern U.S. so there is more immediate fulfillment," explains Cano. "This puts us in a better position for success. Our retail model is just-in-time,

so we need to get things in a few days, not a few months."

Reliability and trust are increasing considerations for the deal. "As FSMA becomes 'the new norm' and social responsibility gains relevance, buyers should avoid the temptation of spot buys," advises Acosta. "They should develop long-term relationships with growers committed to produce safe and socially responsible commodities."

TREND 6: NEW TECH TOOLS

Forward-looking West Mexico marketers employ technology to add value to their businesses. "We are seeing technology being adopted by distributors because both the expansion in volume and shipping regions means there is more to keep track of," says Veronica Kraushaar, sales and marketing manager for Continuum Software for Perishables and president of Viva International Partners, Inc., Nogales, AZ.

Kraushaar says some distributors with multiple production areas and growers now keep careful track via software and technology tools. "They want to be able to see, at a glance, the quality of product coming from Grower A versus Grower B, and be able to identify

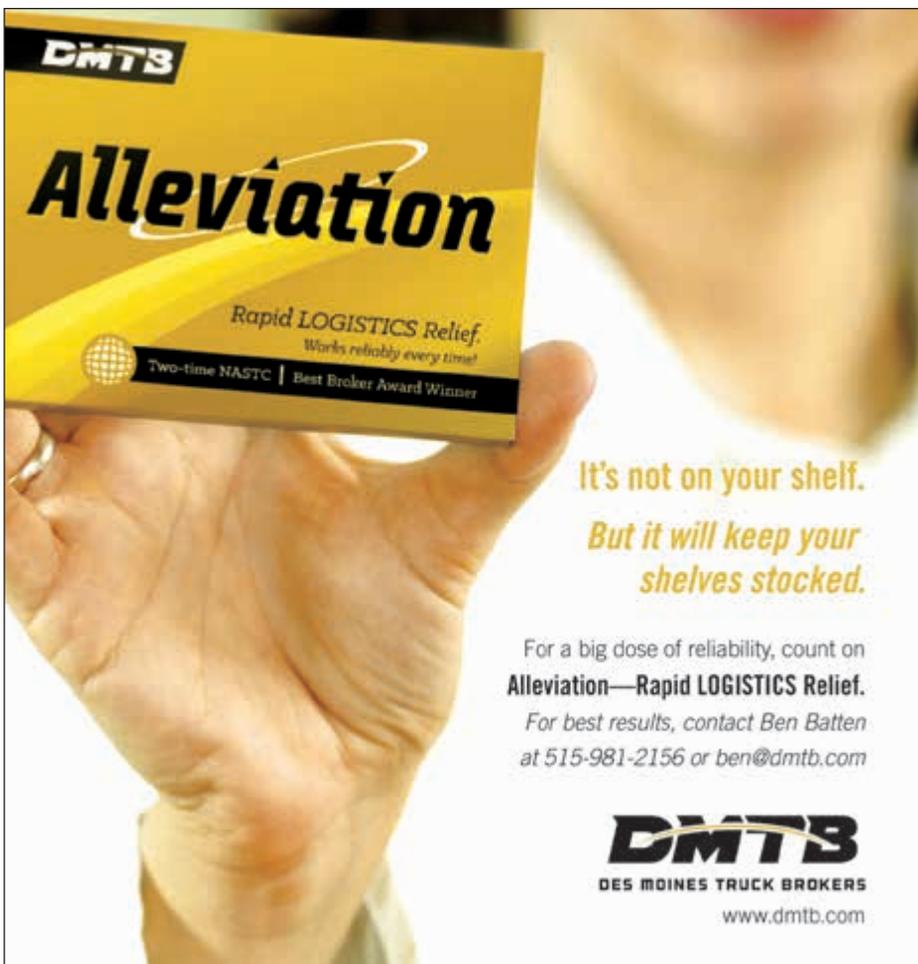
issues to help them make a decision on whose shipments they can rely on," she says.

These software solutions also translate to retail confidence. "Retailers are looking carefully at vendors who are able to deliver consistent quality and identify issues before they become problems," says Kraushaar. "Until now, many distributors and even some major chains have used paper tracking logs. These are not only cumbersome and risk getting lost or damaged but are also often inaccurate. Software apps are clearly the solution, and more distributors are using them."

Another evolving trend is the advent of omni-channel marketing. "You need to get to the customer both in-store and online," recommends Kraushaar. "The old ad circular sitting by the front door is not going to do it alone."

Garrett concurs retail is going more digital at store-level all the time. "Any kind of support we get online from distributors or growers is a benefit," he says.

West Mexico distributors look to online and other innovative activities to support the product. "Increasingly, the savvy produce supplier has both a B2B and B2C strategy via an integrated program that works to pull in the customer," says Kraushaar. **pb**

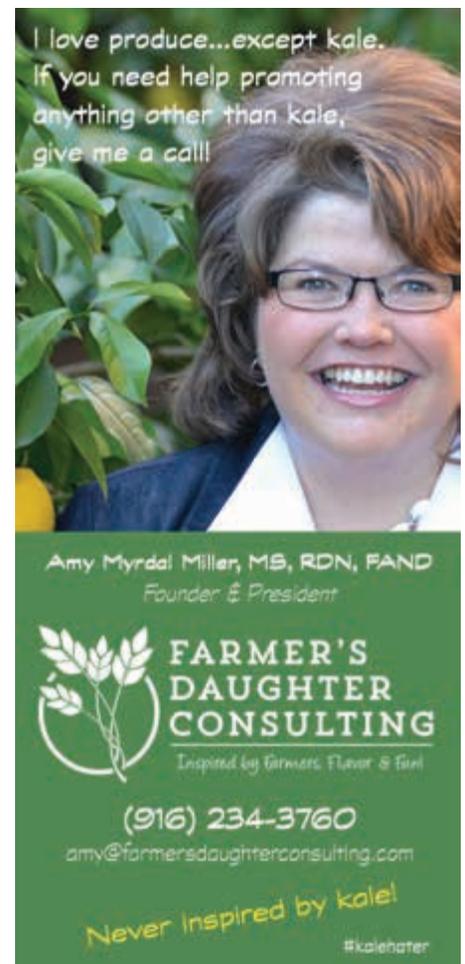


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Clever Year-Round Merchandising Can Put Apples In Baskets



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEMITL

Retail promotions, smart merchandising, packaging and variety are among keys to success.

BY HOWARD RIELL

Merchandising apples creatively — by identifying regions, providing totes, highlighting the seasons, offering usage suggestions, sticking to promotional plans and more — can light sales on fire month after month.

The challenge and opportunity for retailers in the fall is to aggressively promote apples during the harvest season “without totally deflating the category,” suggests Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing for Columbia Marketing International, Inc. in Wenatchee, WA. “What we know from studying consumer purchase behavior is that apple shoppers are heavily influenced by retailer promotions and

merchandising.”

As a result, aggressive promotions have the impact of shifting consumer purchases from one variety to another. Consumers use pricing and displays as cues as to find the

best values, explains Lutz. “That’s all well and good, but overly aggressive price promotions can damage category profitability by moving consumers from planned purchases of high-priced apples to impulse purchases of low-cost



promoted apples. When that happens, category profitability suffers.”

For example, a couple years ago, New York Apple Sales Inc., based in Glenmont, NY, had a major retailer that built huge lobby displays of tote bags of a local apple. The combination of hot pricing with large displays that every consumer had to pass to get into the store shifted a huge percentage of total volume to these cheap apples.

The result, Lutz recalls, was an actual decline in total category performance of nearly 20 percent. “So during the fall it’s important for retailers to have a strategy to do more than just sell cheap apples. They should be actively looking for opportunities to trade consumers up, not down. Rather than just focusing promotions and displays on the cheapest apple, this can be done by highlighting higher-value apples like Honeycrisp Ambrosia, Kiku, Jazz, and others.”

GIVE THEM SPACE

When it comes to merchandising apples year-round, Lutz says, space and location are key. “Apples are a fairly dynamic category because of the number of new varieties. Giving these items space in the store is key to

“I think one of the hottest trends is the remaking of the bag segment of the apple category. Packaging is changing purchase behavior throughout the produce department.”

— Steve Lutz, Columbia Marketing International (CMI)

year-round sales.” In addition, because apple purchases tend to be heavily influenced by impulse decisions, location in flow is critical to triggering consumer purchases.

“I think one of the hottest trends is the remaking of the bag segment of the apple category,” says Lutz. “Packaging is changing purchase behavior throughout the produce department. Products such as packaged tomatoes are completely changing consumer preferences and acceptance of packaged products. We’re seeing this in apples as well, where high-graphic 2-pound pouch bags are leading overall category growth.

“Consumers appear to love these new branded apples such as Ambrosia and Kiku, and the 2-pound pouch bag captures shopper attention and reinforces brand recall once the

consumer takes the produce home,” he says.

Lutz says he is finding that Honeycrisp and Ambrosia are the two hottest apples in the Top 10. “These are literally ‘must have’ apples. After these big two, apples like Kiku, Kanzi, Jazz, and Envy have all seen the strongest growth in the category.”

The other hot trend, Lutz continues, is organics. Supply is up this year “so we will be able to supply retailers longer. But overall there will be more organic apples available to sell, thanks to our increased supply of organics.” Indeed, over the past three years, the strongest growth segment of the apple category has been organics.

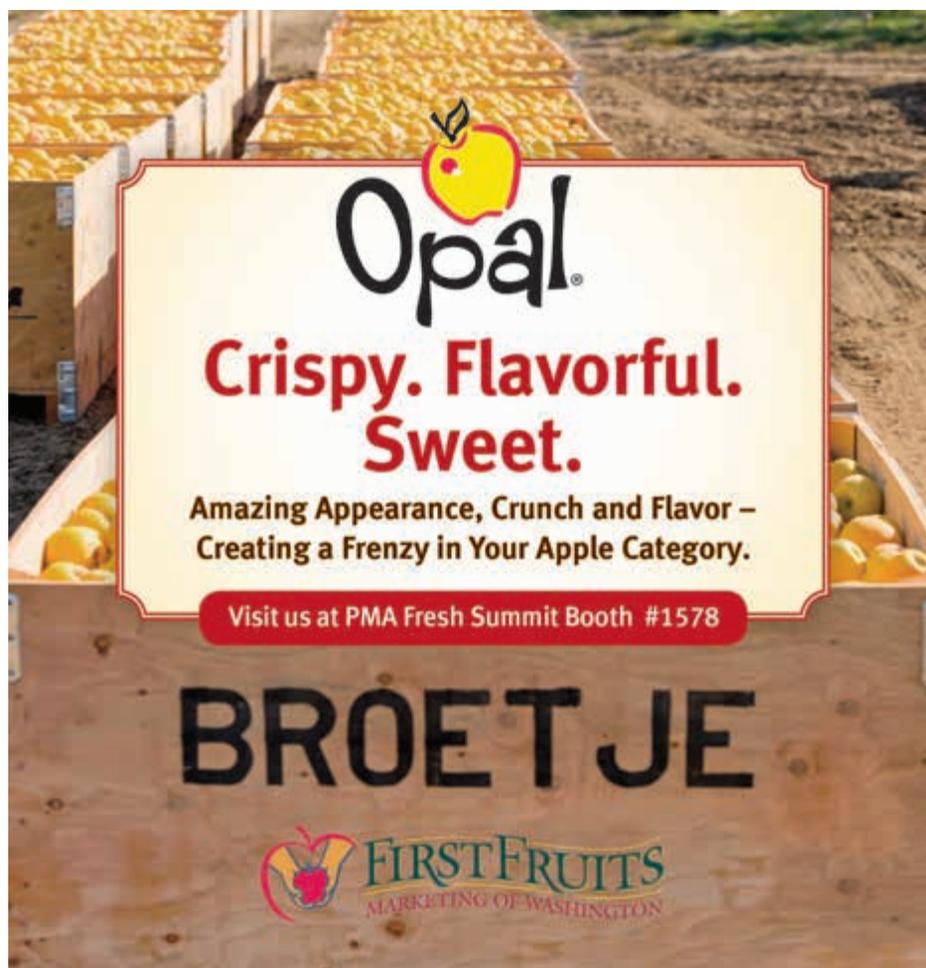
FRONT AND CENTER

Fall display and feature promotion drive sales, says David Williams, vice president of sales and marketing for Fowler Farms Inc. in Wolcott, NY. His advice to retailers is to merchandise apples front and center of the department to take advantage of planned and impulse sales. “Include cider and other fall items in the display to maximize overall department sales and sell through.”

Williams urges retailers to take advantage of the new varieties on the market that have expanded sales beyond the typical fall selling period. “Promoting an apple a month seems to work real well with our more successful retailers. Don’t back away from the category in nontraditional periods, as the apple category is now at the top in terms of sales within the department. Consumers recognize the health benefits and portability of apples, which hold better than bananas.”

Williams is seeing “managed varieties that are new varieties developed, marketed and sold by cooperatives of growers across the nation. Also, pouch bags are popular due to their convenience and sharp look within the department. This follows an overall move toward this packaging within the produce department with other fruits and vegetables.”

Similarly, Williams also identifies Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji, SweeTango, SnapDragon, RubyFrost and other managed varieties as being extremely popular.



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EMBRACE THE SOURCE

An important consumer trend today, notes Jim Allen, president and chief executive of the Fishers, NY-based New York Apple Association Inc., is “to purchase local and support regional produce. Obviously, many items

cannot or will not fall under that umbrella. But for apples in the East, promoting a region such as New York, New England or Mid-Atlantic means something to the massive population centers of Boston, New York, Philly, DC, etc.” Retailers need to embrace this, he says, “to

identify the source at point-of-sale.”

“Apples are now available year-round in all retailers,” notes Allen. “Therefore, retailers should find ways to keep the displays and the merchandising themes fresh and exciting.”

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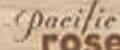
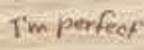
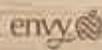
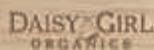
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during the year works. For example, Allen says, in March “promote green apples for St. Patrick’s Day. In January, promote apples as an alternative to snack foods and dips for the Super Bowl. In April, use Passover and Easter as themes to include apples. Thanksgiving offers so many opportunities for baking apples and including them in the dinner, but very few retailers ever include them. It’s always all about celery and turkeys and pumpkins.”

From his vantage point, Allen says the most popular varieties now and going forward are Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji, and newcomers such as Koru, Kiku, SweeTango, Evercrisp and Pazazz. Traditional flavors such as McIntosh and Empire, he adds, will continue to be popular in regional markets.

SET UP A PLANNER

Brianna Shales, communications manager for Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, WA, points out the company grows apples in Washington, “where our year-round supply offers retailers the opportunity to promote apples consistently all months of the year. Fall, winter and spring are big months for apples in the produce department.”

In an average store, she continues, apples make up 8 percent of total produce department dollars each week all year long. “They are an important part of overall produce department success. Because of this, we encourage monthly apple promotions with multi-variety ads, especially during the key fall and winter timeframe.”

Monthly “Apple Ramas,” where several varieties are on sale, are great drivers for the entire category, say Shales. “Beyond that, large apple displays, keeping displays fresh, and using in-and-out packaged items like our Lil Snap-

pers kid-sized fruits or Fresh Blenders apples for juicing/smoothies are great ways to drive up the purchase price and build impulse sales.”

Shales says it’s important to set up a planner for apple promotions months in advance of the actual promotion in many cases. “Having a great plan is the best way to align your merchandising efforts and ensure the four Ps of marketing [product, price, place and promotion] are covered.”

Looping the entire team into the promotion plan — from merchandisers to produce managers — is “a great way to further ensure success at each store. Because apples are available year-round, it’s important to keep the merchandising of them interesting and impactful. Bring new varieties in to mix things up, create a theme based on seasons or holidays, and keep pushing creativity in order to make your apple display stand out.”

Consumers want to know who grew their food and how it was grown, says Shales. “At Stemilt, we’ve long been on this now-‘trend’ by telling consumers about our founding family, and the farm-to-fork story that gets apples from our farms to their table through our merchandising display, signage on our website, and now throughout digital and social media. Storytelling is a great way for retailers to set themselves apart as a store that’s focused on quality and relationships with family farmers.”

LOCAL FAVORITES

Carrying local favorites satisfies loyal customers. Legacy apples such as McIntosh and Cortland in New England add tonnage to the category, according to Tim Byrne, special projects director for New York Apple Sales Inc. “In the Midwest, varieties such as Jonagold,



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“Most every retailer is going to carry Gala, Honeycrisp, Pink Lady, Granny Smith, Red Delicious and ... Golden Delicious. Pouch bags are the new great visual appeal package that resonates well with consumers.”

— Tim Byrne, New York Apple Sales

Jonathan, Ginger Gold and Haralson garner long-time support from their fans. Western consumers resonate with Pacific Rose, Pink Lady, Ambrosia and Piñata.”

Making exciting displays attracts consumers to the department and the category, Byrne has found. “Most every retailer is going to carry Gala, Honeycrisp, Pink Lady, Granny Smith, Red Delicious and, to a lesser extent,

Golden Delicious.” He recommends expanding the number of varieties and SKUs during the slowest apple sales period, from early May through late August. “Pouch bags are the new great visual appeal package that resonates well with consumers.”

Byrne points to Nielsen data that shows retailers stock more than 30 varieties of apples in late September and October, and keep their selection at that peak until about February “when they whittle down both selection and SKUs. Concomitantly, category sales diminish.”

He suggests retailers get more creative about cross-merchandising apples. Departments such as the deli are a perfect location to sell additional tonnage, adds Byrne.

“Apples and cheese are natural partners

for a summer spread. Also, a ‘healthy alternative’ snack display near the checkout could promote impulse sales. Kid-sized apples also represent an important way to build healthy eating habits and generate new category sales: size-appropriate apples for growing hands.”

HIGHLIGHTING QUALITY

“Produce is located and available as soon as you enter most any grocery store in the country,” says Tom Labbe, domestic accounts manager for Jack Brown Produce in Sparta, MI, “and for good reason, because it promotes freshness and is a quality ring through the register.”

Among the opportunities to generate more revenue that organizations may be missing, he

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says, is taking advantage of secondary buying locations and store-education promotions.

“Tie-ins are an easy way to add items to the initial purchase by creating an idea the consumer can bring home for the family,” says Labbe. “A quick example is something I make for my kids called Apple Nachos: slice up some apples and add granola, caramel sauce, chocolate chips and coconut. It’s a healthy ring for the store and new snack idea for the consumer.”

Labbe says retailers could create a farmers

market feel with display opportunities in the produce department. “Crate displays and bins let the customer pick up and touch the fruit. Filling a bag or tote with their harvest — not just a bag on a shelf for sale — makes the buying process more personal and fulfilling.

Highlighting the quality of the product is what Labbe calls the most important way to merchandise apples and be successful all year long.

“Customers demand great products and expect freshness when they purchase Mich-

igan apples.” Controlled atmosphere facilities and packing to order for each customer, he adds, helps maintain quality longer and sustain varieties that consumers want throughout the season.

Labbe sees new bag designs being created, “and are a trend to catch the consumer’s eye.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

As with any produce category, apples can present a set of challenges for retailers, which is when a skillful hand is needed.

Among the major ones that retailers face, according to Tim Byrne, special projects director for Glenmont, NY-based New York Apple Sales Inc., apples tend to require refrigeration at the point of purchase. Mobile refrigerated display units, he says, are not inexpensive. “Also, ringing up the sales from cross-merchandised categories can be a sticking point because they take space away from the department in which they are being merchandised.”

While chips and candy bars are wrapped and packaged, Byrne continues, smaller amounts of apples, “say two or four are not shrink-wrapped here in the States, though you see this throughout Europe and Asia.” He says apple packers and marketers need to get creative and work with retailers to tailor high-graphic and visually appealing new modes of packaging to get real estate at other key places in the store.

“The challenge of the fall is just getting retailers focused on the right opportunities of the crop and then getting off to a fast start,” says Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing for Columbia Marketing International, Inc. in Wenatchee, WA. “Every crop brings unique challenges in terms of sizing, timing, and quality. It requires flexibility.” Getting retailers to embrace the unique opportunities of this specific year “versus simply doing what they did last year is always a key challenge.”

Another is getting a fast start in early- to mid-September, which Lutz terms key. “Retailers like to focus on local apples in the fall, which often don’t hit markets until October. In the West, we start picking Gala in mid-August, so there is plenty of supply for retailers to promote in September.” Many retailers, he has found, miss this opportunity to generate strong early season sales by waiting to promote until October.



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Offering a taste profile on each bag with each variety is a way to educate the consumer.” He says identification of the growing location is “very impactful to the customer and builds loyalty to the brand.”

Promoting the apples is the job of the supplier, he adds, “to create a buzz at store

“The challenge is getting retailers to embrace this by designating appropriate floor space for the product, rather than co-mingle apples from Washington with regional varieties,” says Jim Allen, president and chief executive of the Fishers, NY-based New York Apple Association Inc. “Most all of the large eastern retailers, especially in the northeast, have found success in this practice.”

According to Chuck Sinks, president, sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Company in Yakima, WA, there are many more SKUs in the apple category compared to 20 or 25 years ago, so more are present than ever before. “We see this as a challenge and an opportunity. If we are providing the right products and the consumer has a positive experience, we think we have a chance at earning repeat business.”

“I would say the biggest challenge is to not let off the gas on apple promotions, and adapt to a changing market,” says Brianna Shales, communications manager for Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, WA. “It’s important for retailers to know which varieties to promote and when, so they can capture sales and ensure freshness and quality remain high in their store. When quality is there, consumers will come back for more apples.”

“Space in stores is crowded and time is limited at retail for produce clerks,” says David Williams, vice president of sales and marketing for Fowler Farms Inc. in Wolcott, NY.

“Getting the okay from the corporate level to activate programs and ideas to hit the floor at store level” can prove an obstacle according to Tom Labbe, domestic accounts manager for Jack Brown Produce in Sparta, MI. “It takes time to get new ideas signed off on, but the impact can be very successful once implemented.”

Merchandised properly, apples of all varieties can have a solid impact in produce departments year-round. **pb**

level. Offering a price that gives value and can be advertised is the key. Promoting varieties after the initial harvest has occurred is critical to bring value all year long.”

An apple display needs to be well organized, with varieties and prices clearly labeled. “Many times, from a distance, a Gala apple may look like a Fuji or Braeburn,” suggests Chuck Sinks, president, sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Company in Yakima, WA, “so having good color breaks in the displays can eliminate confusion and create an attrac-

tive display.”

KEEP DISPLAYS FULL

Retailers should also keep displays full and fresh, says Sinks. “Tote bags and pouch bags are excellent methods to increase incremental sales. Most rings on tote bags are roughly five pounds of apples, and pouch bags hold two or three pounds of apples.” Apples on refrigeration will have a longer shelf life than non-refrigerated fruit.

Sinks agrees with his colleagues that apples



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should be merchandised year-round, even in the summer months. “They aren’t going to be the focal point of ads in the summer months, but maintaining full, fresh, rotated displays with clear signage is an opportunity to capture some additional sales as consumers are filling their baskets with summer fruits.”

In the summer months, retailers should make apples stand out by having spillover displays on the apples that they want to move during that particular time period.

Sinks and his colleagues see several methods in merchandising that include pods, Euro tables, secondary displays in lobbies, and

others. “It really depends on the footprint and type of store a consumer visits.”

As far as apple promotion, Sinks usually sees one variety promoted at a time, but “sometimes several varieties, and sometimes the majority of a category if it is an apple-themed ad. It is really a mixed bag depending

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upon the retailer and the market.”

Sage Fruit tries to learn about its retailers’ needs and which promotional strategies are effective for them, and then tailor programs accordingly. “What works in one market may be different in another market, and this is where it is important for us as a grower/shipper

to listen to our customers and ask questions, says Sinks”

SLICE OF LIFE

Sliced apples continue to grow in revenue and tonnage. It was estimated that sliced apple sales were more than \$500 million in 2014,

Byrne of New York Apple Sales points out. “Continued growth will be aided by expanding SKUs to include yogurt dips in the sliced package. Foodservice has aided greatly in the introduction of sliced apples, bringing healthy dessert snacks to the fast-food business. Sliced apples account for about 5 percent of total apple sales.”

The most popular varieties for slicing, Byrne finds, are Gala, Pink Lady and Granny Smith. Others that seem to have gained favor in the slicing trend are Empire, Fuji “and durable — not easy to bruise — selections. In foodservice the single-serve dessert size are tops.”

Larger apples, 10- to 32-ounce for food-service and schools continue to perform well. “The innovative integration of sliced apples and dipping liquids has added to the value proposition.”

Sliced apples offer a great convenient nutritional and portable snack, according to Allen of the New York Apple Association. “The best slicing apple, in my opinion, is the Empire. It is a round, red apple with very white flesh and it slices and holds its slice shape very well. Customers, such as McDonald’s, like the Empire slice.” **pb**

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Cranberries For Thanksgiving And Beyond



Promoting the healthy snack in myriad forms within the produce department.

BY LARRY BERNSTEIN

Before you know it, Thanksgiving will be here. It's the holiday of parades, appreciation, and food! There is a variety of traditional staples that make up the Thanksgiving table: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie. And let's not forget the ever-popular cranberry sauce. Of course, the brightly colored food starts with cranberries.

The harvest season for fresh cranberries began in late September. By the beginning of October, one can find fresh cranberries on grocer's shelves where they will stay until early December.

Ben Johnson is the president and founder of Portland, OR-based Bridges Organic Pro-

duce, a company that specializes in organics. The company works with cranberry growers and acts as an importer. "We're trying to expand beyond Thanksgiving cranberry sauce. We promote for other recipes and cocktails," says Johnson.

HEALTH BENEFITS

The goal of expanding beyond the traditional cranberry season is a common one. However, marketing cranberries starts with an emphasis on the health benefits. The cranberry is well known for its role in helping prevent urinary tract infections, but it has other positive effects upon health.

Bob Wilson, the managing director and co-owner of the Wisconsin Rapids, WI-based Cranberry Network, which serves as the marketing arm of Tomah, WI-based Habelman Brothers Cranberries, is a big advocate of the health benefits of cranberries. Wilson notes that a clinical trial began in September of this year, which studies cranberries impact on gut health.

"Gut health is a vital part of the body as research tells us 90 percent of the body is af-

ected by activity in the gut," says Wilson. He also says recent research shows cranberry consumption creates a positive impact upon gut health, and a study in 2015 reports regular ingestion of cranberry helps with blood flow. Cranberries also act as a flushing mechanism that prevents bacteria from adhering and does not adversely affect good bacteria in the body.

In addition to offering benefits to health, cranberries add a unique taste to food. Sugar Foods Corporation makes the Fresh Gourmet brand salad topping, which utilizes dried cranberries. Cassi Shindelbower is the retail marketing director for Sugar Foods, and oversees Fresh Gourmet in retail for the company.

Shindelbower says Sugar Foods markets cranberries as part of a salad topping. The company offers dried cranberries individually as well as mixed with other dried fruits and nuts. "The cranberries offer flavor and texture and make any salad delicious."

Many people, according to Shindelbower, use the product to recreate salads that they ordered in restaurants. In addition to the added taste, the cranberry topping also adds a vibrant red color to the salad.



“People want to incorporate healthier choices, and our product helps them enjoy their meal and makes them want salad as a more regular part of a meal plan,” says Shindelbower, who adds cranberries are best merchandised in the produce department, because consumers can pick up all their salad ingredients in the same area.

Kristine Esdale is the director of marketing for West Wareham, MA-based Bluewater Farms, a company that represents the vision and harvest of the Canning family, who has been growing cranberries in Cape Cod, MA for three generations.

Besides selling both fresh and dried cranberries, Bluewater Farms also makes cranberry juice, as well as mixes with other fruits. She encourages retail outlets to place the juices in the produce department as a way of emphasizing health benefits.

“We highlight the health benefits and taste, and we appeal to educated consumers who are reading labels and are conscientious about what they are putting into their bodies,” says Esdale.

Bluewater Farms uses both the wet pick and dry pick to harvest cranberries. “The dry pick allows the cranberry to stay on the vine longer and soak up more nutrients,” says Esdale.

Once picked, the cranberries go through an intense three-step screening process before they reach the bag. And once the cranberries do reach the bag, there is no need for the consumer to wash them — they are ready to be eaten. The screening process includes being cleaned by a natural washing process, testing for firmness

and plumpness, and screening for color.

“Because cranberries are identified as a superfruit, customers are more educated about them, which has made our road easier,” says Esdale. Now, Bluewater Farms is focusing on positioning cranberries as not just for the traditional Thanksgiving cranberry sauce.

INSPIRING USAGE AT RETAIL

“Some of the most successful merchandising comes from retailers understanding how people use fresh cranberries,” says Kellyanne Dignan, senior manager, corporate communications for Middleboro, MA-based Ocean Spray Cranberries. “Over 50 percent of consumers use fresh for desserts, so retailers should activate adjacencies with holiday dessert items in store. Over 70 percent use cranberries for sauce in their holiday meal so tie ins and merchandising along with turkey, fresh potatoes, carrots etc.”

She says the brand also communicates a “Cook, Create and Celebrate strategy,” where recipes are showcased in addition to the use of fresh cranberries in holiday décor from cranberry garland to use in floral arrangements and centerpieces.

When most people think of Sun-Maid, they think of the iconic woman who dons a red bonnet and a white blouse inside a circular yellow background. Many people also think of raisins. However, Sun-Maid sells other products including dried cranberries. The Kingsburg, CA-based company is one of the leaders in the dried fruit category in the

United States.

Joe Tamble, vice president of sales execution, says Sun-Maid tries to get across to consumers that dried fruit is a healthy snack. Tamble notes a recent IRI marketing study suggests nearly half of American consumers snack three times a day. Over the past five years, the dried fruit total is up in both dollars and units.

“This subcategory continues to grow, because it’s a better-for-you alternative,” says Tamble, who notes the single serve packages are gaining traction, because consumers appreciate the portability.

“We’ve done cross-promotions with other brands in the produce section with boxed cranberry bread and side dish mixes,” shares Dignan. “Couponing and in-store promotions are always a great way to give back to loyal consumers throughout the season.

“We are very customer-centric and focused on programs, packaging and pricing that meet the needs of each of our retailers,” says Dignan. “Some may include recipe tearpads on shippers while others, we offer a package that most fits the need of their shoppers.”

MARKETING THE CRANBERRY

There are many ways Sun-Maid is getting its message out. One such way is the company’s website, which Tamble notes tells the story of how dried fruit fits into the snacking trend.

The company also works with retailers. “We know people are making an effort to snack healthier and better, so we try to educate consumers and our retailers,” says Tamble. When doing so, he says Sun-Maid emphasizes the best option for dried cranberries is the produce section.

“When in the produce section, the growth rate is 30 percent higher than when in the baking aisle, so we work with retailers to merchandise and put the dried fruit in produce,” says Tamble.

The company also works with in-store nutritionists who support healthy trends. “As more people read ingredients and labels, consumers are becoming more educated,” says Tamble, who adds some people get this information from their phones while in the store.

Wilson of the Cranberry Network, who describes the cranberry as resilient, also has some tips for retailers. Because sales can be slow when cranberries first come out in early October, they should be placed in a cool, dry refrigerated display and not left under misters or in an unrefrigerated area.

Wilson suggests using highly visible freestanding displays in order to generate

merchandising review ▶ cranberries

pre-Thanksgiving purchasing interest and also doing promotions late in October and the first week of November.

MILLENNIALS AND CRANBERRIES

While those in the cranberry industry are anxious to see this fruit accepted as more than just part of a Thanksgiving tradition, one should not overlook this—all important holiday.

In 2015, New York City-based Pollock Communications worked with the Cranberry Marketing Committee and created

an award-winning campaign that set out to engage Millennials through a cranberry social media photo-sharing contest timed to “Friendsgiving,” which is about celebrating the holidays with friends in the days and weeks before and after Thanksgiving.

According to Louise Pollock, president of Pollock Communications, the company did research and found no foods had a Friendsgiving presence on social media sites. “So, we saw a real opportunity for cranberries to own Friendsgiving,” says Pollock.

What Millennials were doing with cranberries beyond serving them with dinner impressed Pollock. These uses include utilizing fresh cranberries to make table decorations, wreaths and even wearing them as jewelry.

“It was an opportunity waiting to happen, and it was the perfect vehicle for the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee to launch a strong social presence with Millennials,” says Pollock.

Michelle Hogan, executive director of the Cranberry Marketing Committee, says the goal is “to keep cranberries top of mind among Millennials and provide them with the recipes and resources they need to include cranberries in their meals and celebrations.”

In order to promote the photo contest, the Cranberry Marketing Committee works closely with retailers and supermarket registered dietitians to bring this promotion in-store and encourage shoppers to enter the contest. By promoting the contest, retailers drive entry and, therefore, purchases.

“We also utilize our many social/digital platforms to showcase the versatility of the cranberry,” says Dignan of Ocean Spray. “We offer a special section of our website with planning tools, pre-set menus, recipes and more.”

This year, the Cranberry Marketing Committee and Pollock Communications created a *Guide to Entertaining with Fresh Cranberries* that feature five recipes and five décor ideas with step-by-step directions.

This year’s Friendsgiving celebration kicks off on October 17 when a national press release will be sent out.

The Cranberry Network is also reaching out to Millennials. The group created new packaging for cranberries last year under the Naturipe label, which they call a “Grab’n Go.” The cranberries are packaged in a stand-up bag with graphics, zipper seal, and handle. The goal is to capture the Millennials who spend less time in the kitchen but are health conscious.

“The next generation of consumer is who we have in mind,” says Habelman Brothers’ Wilson. “We want to get them to buy into the many advantages of regularly consuming fresh cranberries in season and storing extra in the freezer for off-season availability.”

“We want them to use cranberries for grandma’s recipes as well as for smoothies, cocktails, decorations and ultimately making fresh or fresh/frozen cranberries part of their regular diet. Buy four. Freeze three.”

Clearly the cranberry community is hoping to see the bright red fruit brighten up a Thanksgiving table but also provide a healthy snack in many forms throughout the entire year. **pb**



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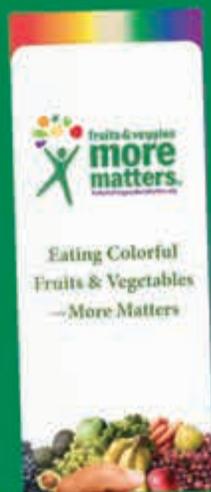
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Mixes, Blends, Bowls And Kits



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Packaged salads offering healthful ingredients, ethnic choices and convenience are how consumers want to indulge within the category.

CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

The influence of food culture and changing demographics in the U.S. is impacting how, when and what consumers eat. More specifically, there is an important overlap between health, wellness and convenience, reinforced by taste. These are among the factors fueling sales of packaged salads, which represented 7.8 percent of total produce sales, during the 52 weeks ending July 2, 2016, according to data supplied by the Chicago, IL-headquartered Nielsen Perishables Group.

“We have seen a change in what consumers are looking for in fresh foods, including packaged salads,” says Tristan Simpson, chief marketing officer for Ready Pac Foods, in

Irwindale, CA. “They want more healthful products, more ethnic choices and added convenience, with a little indulgence thrown in. Consumers are also looking for more functional ingredients, including nutrient-dense ingredients, such as dark leafy greens, ancient grains and seeds, nuts and berries.”

The convenience factor of packaged salads has dramatically increased the consumption of produce, says Vicky St. Geme, vice president of marketing for Taylor Farms, in Salinas, CA. St. Geme cites Nielsen Perishables Group data that shows the total fresh category at retail grew 5.5 percent from 2012 to 2015, a Nielsen Homescan Survey in 2015 that reveals the average basket ring with produce versus without produce is \$62.40 and \$33.55, respectively, and Nielsen Perishables Group statistics for the 52 weeks ending April 30, 2016 that show an 8 percent dollar growth in packaged salads versus the same time a year ago.

WHAT'S NEW

The staples sell best when it comes to packaged salads, says Samantha Cabaluna, managing director of the San Juan Bautista, CA-headquartered Earthbound Farm. “Baby

Spinach and Spring Mix are the top items. They become true staples on regular shopping trips, because they’re familiar to all and people know what to do with them.”

Beyond this, there are particular trends among the sub-categories of packaged salads.

“We have seen excellent growth across most segments, notably blends, kits and organics,” says Fabian Pereira, head of marketing for Salinas, CA-based Fresh Express. “This is driven by consumer need-based innovation, deeper shopper and category insights, customer support and flawless sales execution.”

MIXES & BLENDS. Shoppers at Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA, look for gourmet and baby greens rather than everyday Iceberg lettuce blends, says produce director, John Savidan. “Baby kales, mixed maches, spinach blends, tender leaves and all types of arugulas are most popular. In the future, micro lettuces might be an interesting way to go, perhaps take up the baby greens a notch.”

Consumers want maximum functionality, yet see various mixes differently, according to CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Dole Fresh Vegetables, in Monterey, CA.



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“For example, they look at cut-lettuce mixes as a salad base for lunch or dinner, or as a sandwich topping or meal garnish, and see baby lettuce salads more as a healthy meal choice. Overall, we’re noticing a shift from traditional cut lettuce mixes to baby lettuce mixes like our Baby Spinach, Spring Mix and 50/50 Mix.”

In general, darker colored salad greens are trending as consumers become savvier to the health benefits, explains Jacob Shafer, communication specialist for the Mann Packing Co., in Salinas, CA. “In a Technomic study focusing on lettuce, results showed three-fourths of respondents (77 percent) said the nutritional value of salad greens is important or extremely important to them, and nearly three quarters of

consumers (73 percent) said salad greens with a darker color provide more nutritional value than lighter colored salad greens.”

Dark colored greens, such as red and green kale, are ingredients in Taylor Farm’s June-launched Chef Crafted Salad Blends.

“Each of these premium salad includes a foundation of leafy greens, vegetables, herbs and fruit. The salads are presented to consumers in a rigid tray hermetically sealed for freshness,” says St. Geme.

The six item line includes Kale and Beet (green kale, red kale, beets, carrots and red cabbage) Apples and Greens (spring mix, apples and carrots) and Greens and Sunshine (baby red butter lettuce, romaine, grape tomatoes,

radishes, green onions, broccoli and carrots).

BOWLS & KITS. “Bowls and kits are starting to make a comeback due to retail price points and ‘time starved’ customers,” says Jay Schneider, produce director at Acme Markets, a 110-store chain headquartered in Malvern, PA, which is part of the 2,200-plus Albertsons family of banners.

Salad kits increased in sales from an annual growth rate of 18.3 percent in 2012 to 31.7 percent in 2015, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

“Salad kits are driving the category, because consumers want all components for one-stop-meal-shopping, convenience and simple assembly,” explains Taylor Farm’s St. Geme. “While older consumers typically purchase salad blends and add their own veggies and toppings, younger consumers — especially Millennials and Centennials with their on-the-go, clock-less eating habits — purchase salad kits. Marketing salad kits and bowls tends to be more about a busy, on-the-go lifestyle versus to a specific male or female demographic. More pre-assembled offerings (perhaps smaller single-serve portions of bagged salad kits) will continue to be the trend as consumers’ lives get busier.”

Caesar continues to be a salad kit mainstay, say industry professionals. As a result, Dole added two new Caesar kits: its Chef’s Choice Caesar Kit and Family-Size Ultimate Caesar Kit, which bring its Caesar offerings to six separate SKUs.

“Our new family size Caesar, as well as new Creamy Balsamic and Country Ranch Salad Kits, were designed to be both paired with meals as well as stand-alone as the star of the plate,” says Dole’s Arias.

Apio Inc., introduced two new kits in August: Strawberry Harvest and Sunflower Kale,

QUICK GUIDE TO INTRODUCING NEW SALADS

Ad features and in-store activities, “ensure consumers recognize the new salads at point of sale,” says Vicky St. Geme, vice president of marketing for Taylor Farms, in Salinas, CA.

Tasting is believing, says Anne Byerly, vice president of marketing for the Guadalupe, CA-based Apio, Inc. “Our favorite way to launch new salads is to run demos at partner retailers. Accounts like Costco, Walmart and Sam’s Club have been wonderful in working with us to ensure consumers can try and love our salads — once they try the product, they are hooked. In addition to sampling, secondary displays, shopper loyalty cards and IRCs (or temporary price reductions) are wonderful too. We are featuring more new or special products on our retail partner’s social media sites, often with recipes.”

Yet in a crowded market place, it is

survival of the fittest, says Fabian Pereira, head of marketing for Salinas, CA-based Fresh Express. “In order to survive, new products must fulfill a genuine consumer want, need or desire. It needs to be differentiated enough to drive incremental consumption occasions and make more money for the retailer.”

To assess “fitness,” Jay Schneider, produce director at Malvern, PA-based Acme Markets, and his team conduct four- to five-week and 13-week shrink analysis of the chain’s packaged salad category.

“Anything that does not perform, we take it out,” he says. “It’s a very surgical approach. There are numerous new items that go in and out through the year. However, at the end of the day, the Top 5 selling SKUs always remain the same and that is from where most of the sales are generated.”

pb



as well as Southwest and Asian Sesame kits, which were released in February.

“Both Strawberry Harvest and Sunflower Kale are unique and give consumers a different and excellent tasting experience,” says Anne Byerly, vice president of marketing for the Guadalupe, CA-based company. “Superfoods continue to be extremely popular — consumers are seeking nutrient-dense products where

‘every calories works hard for you’ as they seek to eat healthier diets that are also convenient and delicious.”

The hottest salads out now are chopped kits, says Acme’s Schneider. “These helped to increase the kit category, along with being on almost every restaurant menu. Looks like the chopped salad trend is here to stay.”

Sweet Kale Chopped Salad is one of Taylor

Farms’ fastest growing products, according to St. Geme, yet new product introductions include a Farmhouse Bacon Chopped Salad (Romaine, kale sunflower seeds, bacon and a sweet onion dressing) and Mediterranean Chopped Salad Kit (radicchio, escarole, endive, broccoli, feta cheese, pita-style chips and basil balsamic vinaigrette).

One trend in kits is a variety of distinctive add-ons such as proteins, nuts and fruits, says Fresh Express’ Pereira. “We are introducing Orchard Kit SKUs that are highly unique and leverage on trendy/healthy fruit based ingredients. These will be available in three flavors: Strawberry Fields (baby spinach, dried strawberries, toasted sliced almonds and strawberry vinaigrette dressing), Pear Gorgonzola (Romaine, green and red leaf lettuces, Lolla Rosa, green Tango lettuce, green and red Oak Leaf lettuce, arugula, mizuna, tatsoi, baby spinach, radicchio, dried pears, frosted almonds, and pear gorgonzola vinaigrette), and Apple & Cheddar (mixed lettuces, Granny Smith apples, dried apricots, aged white Cheddar cheese, white balsamic vinaigrette and frosted almonds).”

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at record pace and can account for more than 30 percent-plus of the total bagged salad category and 40 percent of total organic sales in the produce department. I think we will see organics continue to grow and the cost and retails improve," says Acme Markets Schneider.

Millennials, both older with children and the younger segment, as well as Gen Z (or Centennials), are driving the demand for organic, according to Taylor Farm's St. Geme. "Young parents are especially interested in feeding their children food with the cleanest possible ingredients and are willing to pay more for those products."

[Editor's Note: For more information on Millennials, see our cover story on page 33.]

Likely the biggest area of new product

development in the organic arena is salad kits. Ready Pac introduced its four-item line: Caesar, Zesty Greek, Kickin' Southwest and Sweet Kale. Each contains a prepared mix of organic greens, vegetables, cheeses, nuts, seeds and dressings.

"This new line-up was born out of the rising popularity of chopped salad kits and the desire by consumers for cleaner, organic foods," says Ready Pac's Simpson.

Other companies are following this trend in product development. Taylor Farms Organic Chopped Salads in Sriracha Ranch, Asian Ginger and Toasted Sesame started hitting shelves in late summer.

In September, Fresh Express launched its Organic Kits in three flavors: Classic Caesar,

Sweet Dijon Onion and Pomegranate Cranberry. Likewise, this fall, Earthbound Farm introduces its take on organic chopped salad kits with BBQ Ranch, Southwestern and Asian flavors. Dole is answering the demand too by introducing two new organic salad kits — Caesar and Apple Dijon, this month, as well as three new salad mixes. Additional organic salad flavor varieties are scheduled for launch in early 2017.

"Organic consumers want the choices that traditional consumers have enjoyed for years: a restaurant-quality, nutrient-dense salad experience that tastes great and is offered in a re-sealable clamshell, preferred by consumers as the 'gold standard' of organic salad packaging," says Dole's Arias. **pb**

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Caring For Organics At Retail



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOXXY MARKETING

TLC throughout the supply chain ensures quality for consumers.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

Organic produce sales continue to grow year after year. According to the Organic Trade Association, dollar sales of organic produce are up 5 percent in 2016, and more than 80 percent of families purchase organic produce at least some of the time. Retailers play a vital role in ensuring organic produce is at its best and satisfying for the shopper.

CARE IN THE FIELD

Retailers depend on growers and suppliers to uphold quality at the beginning of the supply chain. In theory, organic produce should have similar characteristics and shelf life to conventionally grown produce, notes Terry Feinberg, principal, Moxxy Marketing, a Salinas, CA-based marketing firm for several organic brands. “Maintaining the cold chain is a critical factor in all produce to increase shelf-life and reduce shrink,” he says.

However, field conditions that are out of the retailer’s control can shorten shelf life.

“Some organic pesticides are not as effective as conventional,” says Matthew Caito, executive vice president and chief accounting officer, Caito Foods, Indianapolis. “Additionally, smaller organic farms and suppliers may have fewer resources, leading to longer distribution and cooling cycles for their products and therefore shorter shelf life.”

COLD CHAIN CONCERNS

Cold chain procedures along the supply chain must consider both temperature control and avoidance of contamination by conventional items. The biggest culprit is melting ice,

which can drip or seep from a conventional carton onto an organic one if strict barriers are not maintained, explains Caito.

Retailers should receive produce on a dock or unloading room at 33 to 38 degrees and check temperatures on arrival to determine whether the load was exposed to higher temperatures in transit. “Probe the product with a calibrated thermometer in at least three different locations on the pallet,” advises Samantha Cabaluna, managing director, brand communications, Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA. High temperatures reduce quality and shelf life.

Jonathan Steffy, director, sales and retail services, Four Seasons Produce, Ephrata, PA, notes, “Ice will melt when boxes are held at 33 or 34 degrees Fahrenheit in the warehouse, 38 degrees in a tractor-trailer, or 40 degrees in a store’s backroom. To avoid contamination, organic items can be stacked on top of but not underneath conventional.”

PACKAGING ADVANTAGES

“Pre-packaged organics benefit the wholesaler, retailer, and consumer,” says Caito. “Products arrive at the retailer with the correct barcode, country of origin, and identification. This makes it easier for retailers to separate organics from conventional and





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“In late summer, when the organic stone fruit season is coming to an end, we trim our offerings and transition retailers to a curated organic apple selection.”

— Jonathan Steffy, Four Seasons Produce



lessens front-end shrink from ringing organic as conventional.”

Packaging also protects quality, freshness, and food safety. Earthbound Farms reminds retailers to adjust rock “pushers” to a tension that holds bags or clamshells without damaging them.

STRATEGIES ON THE SHELF

The National Organic Program (NOP)

requires clear separation of organic from conventional products at retail. “They cannot have skin-to-skin contact,” says Steffy. “For example, bulk organic Gala apples sharing a display with their conventional counterparts must be separated by a physical divider, but bags or clamshells of Galas can touch other packages.”

Temperature control continues to be crucial. Cabaluna advises retailers to regularly monitor

refrigerators and cold storage units to maintain recommended temperatures.

STOCKING FOR THE SEASON

Suppliers help retailers boost organic sales by matching supply and grower opportunities with consumer demand. “In late summer, when the organic stone fruit season is coming to an end, we trim our offerings and transition retailers to a curated organic apple selection,”

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says Steffy of Four Seasons. “We help create seasonal excitement by suggesting price, setting up displays, helping write ad circulars, and educating both merchandisers and sales reps.”

“Seasonality overlaps with local,” says Caito. “Retailers can appeal to shoppers with local or even hyperlocal. Local shipping also can mean less wear and tear on products.”

NEW KIDS IN THE CASE

Organic produce is growing in volume and variety, with an increased supply of both commodities and specialty items. Steffy notes many conventional shippers of commodities are adding organic alternatives. “Smaller boutique organic farms have a passion for heirlooms — tomatoes, melons, peppers,” says Steffy. “The season for organic grapes now starts earlier and ends later. Organic hydroponics and greenhouse items are growing. And demand from large retailers such as Costco and Kroger stimulates growth in many organic items.”

Retailers can expect greater variety as growers respond to demand by planting more organic acres. “There can, however, be a lag in supply as it takes three years for a field that has been planted conventionally to be certified for organic crops,” says Moxxy’s Feinberg.

Value-added organics continue to grow. Caito’s FreshLine/Garden Highway fresh-cut processing operation creates its increasingly popular Garden Highway line. Earthbound Farms recently introduced three new chef-inspired chopped kits. “I think these products will surprise and delight retailers and shoppers with quality and flavor,” says Cabaluna.

SOCIALIZING WITH SHOPPERS

Social media is a game-changer. Its ability to connect with shoppers in real time frees retailers from the traditional two- or three-week lead time of traditional circulars. As a result, product quality can heighten as growers may be able to allow items to ripen longer before picking, because retailers can turn around quick sales.

“We take advantage of freshness opportunities and help retailers create flash deals to promote via social media,” says Steffy. “For example, when one of our producers had an abundance of Mexican Kent mangos, we notified retailers, they informed customers via Facebook and email blasts.” Four Seasons also publishes a weekly market news flier that is transmitted via email, the company website and social media, as well as traditional hard copy.

IN SUPPORT OF HIGHER PRICES

To keep products moving, retailers need

to educate consumers on why organics almost always command a higher price — crop yield is lower than conventional, consistency differs, and seeds and cultivation of the heirloom and non-GMO varieties desired by shoppers are more expensive. Higher prices also support innovation in areas such as packaging for better breathing and transporting.

Pricing is becoming more stable. “Many growers and distributors now offer contract pricing and will dedicate a certain amount of acreage to a retailer who commits to buying a certain amount of product,” says Feinberg, of Moxxy. “Overall, the price gap between organically and conventionally grown produce is narrowing. At times, organic produce may be price-competitive or even lower priced than conventional crops.”

“Going forward, consistent pricing from a more consistent supply will help grow the industry,” says Caito. “Fluctuations in supply and cost are smoothing out with improvements in infrastructure, acreage, farming techniques, planning and promoting.” Still, organics are likely to be priced at a premium to conventional.

DISTRIBUTORS OFFER GUIDANCE

The retailer-distributor relationship can boost sales. The full-service distributor Crosset Company, Independence, KY, procures items from multiple suppliers, including Cal Organic, Dole, Earthbound, and Stemilt. It provides buyers with current information on product availability and quality. The company also handles certification processes, maintains organic standards, and supports retailers with merchandising guidance and training. Its training program manages control points such as: receiving, storage and transportation, pest management and sanitation, record keeping and documentation, and separation of organic from conventional.

Four Seasons specializes in direct store delivery (DSD) throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast to retailers and others, helping them gain access to quality, certified organic produce. Support services include merchandising resets, displays and training; expert sales representatives; custom supply programs; and marketing support with ad writing and merchandising tips.

Because the supplier has access to the best information on product availability, its employees serve as the key link between source and shelf. “We want to give our customer, the independent retailer, the best information possible on how items look when they come in and where they fit into the seasonality for

SHOWCASE garlic



CALIFORNIA GARLIC GROWERS

A farmer in a white shirt and hat stands behind a large wooden crate filled with garlic. Two inset photos show a man in a white shirt and tie working with garlic, and a display of various packaged garlic products.

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that item,” says Steffy of Four Seasons.

“That is why most members of our sales staff come from a retail or wholesale produce background. Also, Four Seasons ensures our inside sales staff is well-informed about what we have on hand and what is available in the marketplace.”

Four Seasons tailors its deliveries to the storage capabilities of individual stores, some of which can store a large number of pallets and others that have no back room or dock and need frequent deliveries.

“We have a strong commitment to independents, natural food stores, and organic markets that, unlike large chains, typically do not have their own procurement systems or access to planograms,” explains Steffy. “One compo-

nent of the sales team guides our customers on what to display, trains new staff members, educates on best organic processes and assists with resets.”

KEEPING ORGANIC MOVING

“Retailers need to break up the ‘sea of sameness’ in the packaged greens section so shoppers find what they’re looking for, discover new items, envision meal possibilities, and, in the end, purchase more,” says Cabaluna. Earthbound Farm recently redesigned its packaging and logo to help the shopper navigate the greens section more efficiently.

“Unplanned purchases offer the greatest opportunity to move organic produce,” advises Moxxy’s Feinberg. “Display location is critical

— endcaps, free-standing displays, eye-level in refrigerated cases, displays at store entry, etc. — will increase visibility and stimulate impulse purchases.

“Creating displays with serving suggestions and products that go well together can increase impulse and opportunistic purchases where unplanned items are added to a planned purchase to complete a dish or meal,” says Feinberg. “Point-of-sale materials such as recipe cards, signage, wobblers, and videos can be used to effectively promote products and cater to consumer trends and behavior with messages that include information on local growers, the environmental benefits of organic produce, health benefits of fresh produce, and serving suggestions.” **pb**



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Los Angeles Wholesalers And Marketers Embrace Diversity

THE PRODUCE BUSINESS IN THE CITY OF ANGELS REMAINS MALLEABLE FOR ITS MULTIPLICITY IN CUSTOMERS AND PRODUCT SELECTION.

By Bob Johnson

Nearly half of all the residents of Los Angeles County were of Hispanic origin in 2010, according to the U.S. Census, and an additional 200,000 Hispanics took up residence in the county in just four years following the Census.

At the same time, there was also more than 1.5 million people in the county of Asian descent in 2014, as immigrants from Korea and Vietnam joined longer-term residents whose ancestors came from China or Japan. According to chef Jet Tila, the food television personality who leads a *Flavors of Thai Town Tour*, there are more Thais in Los Angeles than anywhere in the world — except Thailand.

“The LA market continues to be a melting pot of cultures — even more so today than a decade ago,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s, Los Alamitos, CA. “There are more ethnic grocery stores cropping up, and neighborhoods with concentrated immigration populations like Koreatown, Little Tokyo and Little Saigon continue to grow.”

Frieda’s has been offering specialty produce items since Caplan’s mother, Frieda Rapoport Caplan, introduced kiwifruit to the United States in 1962.

This quilt of many colors defines the world of produce in Los Angeles, as markets (small and large) offer fruits and vegetables from Latin America and Asia and wholesalers introduce them to the rest of the nation.

“Diversity defines the LA marketplace more than any other metro market with its close proximity to Mexican growers and one of the largest variety growing areas for the U.S. located in Central California,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melis-



Los Angeles provides the United States a view of where its people, and its produce, are headed.

sa’s/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles. “Los Angeles offers the most diverse marketplace — Hispanic and Asian produce categories are continuing as a growth trend.”

Melissa’s/World Variety began introducing many Hispanic produce items to mainstream supermarkets nationwide more than three decades ago.

Los Angeles provides the United States a view of where its people, and its produce, are headed.

“The market has become more diverse than it was a decade ago — as more people become fascinated with food and become real ‘foodies’ they are apt to explore many different food cultures and flavor profiles,” says Lindsay Barthold, marketing manager for Harvest Sensations, Los Angeles.

Hispanic and Asian foods often enter the culinary mainstream in Los Angeles, as younger consumers become aware of produce from many places and cuisines.

“A shift in our population seems to be a driving factor,” says Caplan. “Pew Research Center published a report last year showing that immigrants and their descendants will drive most of the U.S. population growth in the coming 50 years. Also our collective palates are changing — we’re seeking out more authentic flavors and ingredients, and we’re becoming more adventurous with our cooking and dining.”

The ethnic diversity of the population feeds

a produce sector that is unusually varied in both its fruits and vegetables, and in the size and type of its food stores.

“The diverse, multi-ethnic population makes Los Angeles an ideal market,” says Alan Hilowitz, company spokesman for Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA. “This separates Los Angeles from a lot of other major cities. The choices that consumers have of where to shop in LA are very large, from big chain stores, to big box stores, to the smaller ethnic independent markets.”

Hilowitz finds the area has a tremendous market for healthy foods in general, and, in particular, the salad products that are the foundation at Ready Pac.

“There’s a greater emphasis on eating healthier, and on eating ethnic foods and produce,” he says. “Along with that comes a fabulous selection not easily found elsewhere of fresh foods, produce, both organic and conventional. Our company began in the LA market, servicing foodservice customers with fresh-cut produce and salads. Today, we grew into a fresh foods company, featuring not only fresh-cut produce, but also convenient, single-serve salads, complete salad kits and bagged salad blends.”

Another national demographic trend also comes into focus in Los Angeles County, as residents are increasingly divided into a relatively affluent minority and a stubbornly large number of impoverished, or near impoverished

This economic division gives birth to produce retail segmentation that allows relatively high-end specialty markets, and ethnic stores serving low-income communities, to both flourish.

residents.

Nearly 30 percent of the households in the county make more than \$100,000 annually, according to the U.S. Census 2014 estimate.

At the other end of the spectrum, more than 21 percent of families with children were living below the poverty line, which was up from 18 percent in 2010, even *without* taking into account the high cost of living.

This economic division gives birth to produce retail segmentation that allows relatively high-end specialty markets, and ethnic stores serving low-income communities, to both flourish.

STRATEGICALLY LOCATED

The location and proximity to the highway and air transport infrastructure make Los Angeles a hub, receiving produce from significant growing areas both within the state and outside the country.

Just as the region is situated to serve as a port of entry for immigrants, it is also a hub in the increasingly global system of produce production and distribution.

“Los Angeles is a good location for consolidating and shipping produce as it is near the California, Arizona and Mexico growing regions, as well as a large international airport and two commercial ports,” says Barthold.

Many produce distributors and processors find Los Angeles to be an ideal location. It is both close to some of the most productive agricultural areas, and within easy access of shipping facilities to anywhere in the world.

“We distribute all across the U.S. and beyond,” says Ray Davis, owner of Pacific Sun Distributing, Inc., Los Angeles. “We consolidate and ship produce. We’re close to the growing areas like Oxnard, Santa Maria, Salinas and Mexico; we have access to the produce. Los Angeles is a great hub for trucks, it has the port, and LAX is one of the biggest airports in the world.”

The area is a natural hub for tropical fruits



Mayra Arias, Joselyne Niebla and Tomas Aramburo of Aramburo produce, Inc



Fernando Pantoja of Rain Forest Produce



John Meert and Jeff Osugi of Maui Fresh



Francisco Clouthier of Maui Fresh

coming from Mexico and Central America, and heading to the rest of the country and beyond.

As a global hub for highly perishable fruits and vegetables, the Los Angeles area is a natural for produce logistics companies.

“We provide real-time visibility on supply and demand on a daily basis, which is critical when you consider the very short shelf life of many fruits and vegetables,” says Robert Frost, Group chief executive for Linkfresh, Ventura, CA. “Los Angeles is an ideal location for our U.S. operations for several reasons.”

“Los Angeles has a large and thriving Fresh Produce Terminal,” says Frost. “California alone produces more than 50 percent of the U.S. fresh produce production. Los Angeles provides excellent transport links with multiple local airports to the most fertile production regions within California and other states.

“Los Angeles has a diverse population which embraces many cultural tastes,” he says. “It is also well educated and strives toward healthy eating and understanding the benefits of knowing exactly what you are eating and where it comes from, including the carbon footprint.”

RETAIL CUSTOMER DEMANDS

According to Chain Store Guide’s 2015 *Market Share Report*, Kroger, with Ralph’s Supermarkets and Food 4 Less, has nearly 25 percent market share in the greater Los

Angeles area.

Kroger, Costco and Safeway combine for almost half of all the retail produce sales in Los Angeles County.

“We have expanded,” says Mark Carroll, senior director of produce and floral at Gelson’s Markets, Encino, CA. “We’ve grown this year from 18 to 25 stores. We mainly expanded by acquiring some of the former Haggen stores that closed. We go all the way down to northern San Diego County, and we’re as far inland as Rancho Mirage, out in the Palm Springs area. We offer top quality. We think we have the freshest produce and top-notch service. We’re probably not associated with serving ethnic groups, but I wouldn’t exclude them,” says Carroll.

There are numerous smaller independent chains or stores, many of them catering specifically to the 60 percent of the residents who are either Hispanic or Asian.

As ethnic fruits and vegetables have gone mainstream — which likely happens earlier in Los Angeles than most other locales — there has been a blurring of the distinction between produce departments in independents serving Hispanic or Asian neighborhoods, and in large mainstream supermarkets.

“The biggest change in the retail landscape is that retailers who used to be referred to as ‘ethnic retailers,’ such as Northgate González Markets, which primarily appealed to a specific

LOS ANGELES MARKET PROFILE

ethnic demographic, now have selections in their stores that rival the conventional and gourmet retailers such as Ralphs, Vons and Bristol Farms,” says Caplan of Frieda’s. “These former ethnic markets now attract gourmet shoppers and foodies because of the vast selection of hard-to-find and specialty ingredients.”

Specialty importers that wholesale a relatively short list of products handle some produce items at the wholesale level.

“Do we get calls for chili peppers?” asks Chuck Anunciacion, division manager for Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co., Los Angeles. “No, because there are specialty chili houses. We also don’t get calls for bananas. We have departments for fruits, melons, wet vegetables, dry vegetables, tropicals and tomatoes.”

“We do a lot of tropicals — like bananas, mangos and limes,” says Jim Alvarez, president of Olympic Fruit and Vegetable in Los Angeles. “We are wholesalers, ripeners, shippers and growers. In LA, we’re mostly wholesalers shipping from Oxnard to South Orange County. We sell to retailers, wholesalers and foodservice. We sell to big, small, and in between retailers.”

Alvarez finds the wholesaling and shipping business has become more competitive, and

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRIEDA’S



more subject to food safety record-keeping requirements.

“In the last 10 or 20 years, people are working on lower margins,” says Alvarez. “The food safety and labeling laws are changing all the time,” he says. “We can’t really buy from people who don’t have the right labels.”

Giumarra’s 96-year-old wholesale division has a 50,000 square-foot warehouse just two blocks from the Los Angeles Terminal Market and uses a network of growers from California, Mexico and South America to receive and ship a long list of fruits and vegetables, many of them available 12 months of the year.

“Our business is a mix,” says Anunciacion. “We are going to a few retailers, but not all of them. We have walk-up trade as well as our backdoor established customers who come to us as secondary suppliers or consolidators.”

A major part of Giumarra’s business is consolidating produce for relatively large retailers. “We do cross-dock consolidation,” says Anunciacion. “We receive their product, and then it is dispersed out of our facility. We put together a consolidation department. We are a secondary supplier for a major retailer. Whatever shorts their distribution centers have, they call us, and we deliver directly to their stores. We also do consolidation for other retailers in Hawaii.”

As evidence of an expanding higher end market this spring, Giumarra added an organic vegetable line including lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, celery, cauliflower, beets, chard and kale, along with a variety of specialty vegetables, greens, and herbs.

“We became certified as an organic facility in May, and we are a handler of organic produce,” says Anunciacion, who worked previously as a head produce buyer for Whole Foods Market. “There’s been a large increase in demand for organic since we became a certified facility.”

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LARGE HUB FOR ORGANICS

Long-time organic wholesalers agree the demand is still doing nothing but increasing. “I was talking to an established retailer with a large organic program who said, ‘With all the organic produce we buy, we are only satisfying two-thirds of our demand at the store level. We need more than we can find,’” says David Weinstein, marketing director at Heath & LeJeune, a major Los Angeles-based organic produce wholesaler. “The supply cannot keep up with the demand.”

Weinstein believes the next surge in organic produce will be in some of the tree fruits that have not yet developed mature markets.

“For the longest time, everyone was buying organic vegetables, and it became a mature category,” he says. “On the fruit side, it’s still developing. But with most tree fruit, we only have two or three established organic shippers, when there is probably room for four or five.”

Los Angeles is traditionally the place where California’s many organic farmers send their fruits and vegetables for shipments.

“Los Angeles has been the place in California where farmers sent their produce,” says Weinstein. “LA has been the consignment location. San Francisco wholesalers pay cash; San Diego wholesalers pay cash; Seattle wholesalers pay cash. But Los Angeles has always been the consignment center.”

This tradition made LA an ideal candidate to serve as the original large hub — receiving and shipping organic produce.

“LA developed the infrastructure to ship mixed loads,” says Weinstein. “When people started distributing organic in the 1970s, they just piggybacked on this ability to ship mixed loads. Now you have large, sophisticated distributors in Southern California with the ability to ship loads of organic produce. Probably a majority of it goes outside the state.”

“The diversity of Los Angeles helps us move different qualities, quantities and pack styles,” says Francisco Clouthier, owner of Maui Fresh, Los Angeles. “We have access to different types of customers, so we can use produce from growers in California, Mexico, Canada and Holland. If you are dealing with just one or two types of customers, then you can’t do that. We sell to local foodservice and national foodservice, to high-end stores and discount stores, to national chains and local ethnic chains.”

Clouthier witnessed the inventory he handles grow more complex as additional varieties of familiar fruits and vegetables become relevant. “Ten years ago, tomatoes were Romas, Cherries, and Beefsteaks,” he says. “Now there

are 20 different items, and I don’t know how many different packs.”

THE NEW WORLD OF FOODSERVICE

In this modern digital world special intermediaries handle most of the restaurant produce trade that was once conducted face-to-face in the wee hours between wholesalers and restaurateurs.

“We do a fair amount of business with the purveyors, such as Nationwide Produce,

Sunrise Produce Company and California Wholesale,” says Anunciation of Giumarra Bros. “They are the ones that are going to the restaurants and foodservice. We have several different things going on here at Giumarra. We sell to large retailers, purveyors who supply restaurants and foodservice, small chains of one to five stores, and single-store grocers.”

A huge volume of produce goes from the wholesalers, to the purveyors and on to foodservice establishments. One-third of all the

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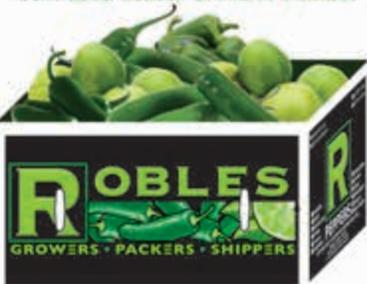


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■ NEW AGE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Many of LA's wholesalers are helping to improve both efficiency and freshness by consolidating produce from numerous California shippers.

"Companies that are moving to single consolidation points, like Harvest Sensations, are saving between \$50 and \$100 per stop simply by asking their vendors to quote them off of a consolidation dock, or asking us to provide that service for them as opposed to having a truck make multiple stops for multiple products," says Lindsay Barthold, marketing manager for Harvest Sensations, Los Angeles.

"It also maintains the freshness of their product better when their truck doors are not opened at every stop."

One Los Angeles wholesaler built its entire business around sourcing produce from the nearby Central Valley and consolidating shipments for retailers in the Eastern United States.

"We're based in Los Angeles, but most of our customers are not," says Jawaid Ismail, chief executive of JM International Produce, Los Angeles. "We buy from California growers, but we ship to ethnic stores on the East Coast. Our niche is Asian stores — Chinese, Korean, and we have one Indian customer. Rather than deal with a lot of different suppliers, they can just deal with one wholesaler."

JM International's location is ideal to offer smaller retailers across the country logistical services the giant chains can do for themselves.

"Our customers would not be able to buy a few boxes of something from a grower, but if their total order is two to six pallets, we can put that together for them," says Ismail. "The large supermarkets pretty much have their own distribution chains. Our customers tend to be smaller stores that don't have the infrastructure to do that. We can buy in volume. We try to buy as much local from the Central Valley as we can."

Some area wholesalers found consolidation, regulation, and lower margins make for a more difficult business environment.

"The market is less diverse now than a decade ago," says Jose Robles, president and managing partner at Diversified Distributors, Vernon, CA. "As retailers keep consolidating and taking into account all new regulations and safety protocols, I believe it's driving out and literally abolishing the smaller and independent start-up companies that once

flourished in the Los Angeles area. This results in a much smaller pool of competitors that now unsuccessfully try to dabble in many more fresh commodities rather than specialize in the product that they do best."

Diversified built a quarter century of relations that it relies on to survive in this more difficult atmosphere.

"We are in a unique situation in that we have been in this industry for more than 25 years, and we have at one time or another sold to most retailers," says Robles. "But we have seen many retailers consolidate, and it has been our good fortune that on the ones we don't directly sell to now, we somehow end up selling to the vendors that do sell to them. So our product is still indirectly reaching those retailers. The ethnic markets are growing rapidly, and it happens to be the basis of our success as they are the core clientele whom we catered to for the past 25 years."

Despite these connections to the area's retail community, Diversified is looking for a better territory to continue produce wholesaling.

"My brother, Frank Robles, who is also my business partner, and I concluded that LA is no longer the place for our business," says Robles. "We noticed that throughout the years, the major players in the produce industry have not hesitated to leave the LA area, and have done so successfully. Whether it is the government agencies and high taxation in Los Angeles; or the simple fact that new technology and less expensive lease rates are available outside the area; or a simple combination of these and many other factors; Frank and I concluded that it is in our best interest to look elsewhere for our future endeavors."

Another way that Los Angeles reflects the changing produce times is the switch from face to face encounters to digital transactions.

"It's always changing, whether it's for better or worse, is hard to say," says Alan Pollack, general manager at Coosemans LA Shipping, Los Angeles. "We don't have the walk-in traffic we did years ago. Every year it's less and less. This new generation doesn't walk in so much. They do more with texting and emailing. The requirements of computer inputting and outputting is taking more time — so they don't have as much time to get out to the market."

Pollack has been part of Coosemans since

the company began flying Belgian endive into Los Angeles International Airport in the late 1970s and delivering it to restaurants and specialty markets in the area.

For the past 30 years, Coosemans maintained a prominent spot at the Terminal Market not far from the airport and continues to wholesale specialty produce items from around the world, as well as from nearby Central Valley fields.

Pollack is not particularly enamored by the new digital way of doing business, but Coosemans has been able to more than hold its own.

"Sales are brisk. There are always new items, or different ways of packaging old items," says Pollack. "It hasn't cost us business, because we picked it up in text, email or phone business. It is a lot harder to show them new items, and it's harder to communicate. This has been going on for 10 years or more."

"Produce purchasing has become more electronic," says Dale Firman, president of Cooseman's LA Shipping, Los Angeles, CA. "There's not as much contact face to face, not even as much contact on the phone.

I've got a lot of younger people coming in to purchase for companies," says Firman. "I'm not sure how much they know about even what produce should look like. That varies from house to house; some of them are hands on. We are hands on; we even eat the produce."

"For existing companies the new technology has made it easy," says Firman. "Our business continues to grow. We've worked hard on talking to our customers about quality, seasonality and flavor, and we've used our website."

Continue from page 177

restaurants in California are located in Los Angeles County, according to the Sacramento-based California Restaurant Association, which improves the business environment for restaurants, advocating on a slate of national, state and local issues.

The 2010 U.S. Census counted far more full-service restaurants in Los Angeles County than any other in the country, with nearly as many as New York and Chicago's Cook

Counties combined. And nearby Orange and San Diego Counties were also both in the Top 6 nationally, as each of them have significantly more full service restaurants than San Francisco.

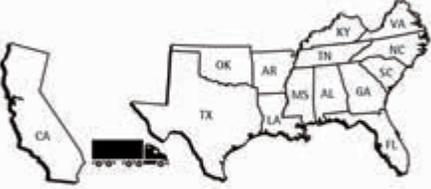
There is a network of middlemen, or purveyors, who buy produce from the wholesalers for this legion of restaurants.

"The restaurant purveyors still do the lion's share of the purchasing," says Jeff Weisfeld, president of Fruit Distributing Corp. of

California, Los Angeles. "We don't see many restaurants down here at the market. It's not convenient if you're buying a box of this, and a box of that. You would need your own truck or refrigerated van. You would also need a guy who's willing to get up at one in the morning."

Fruit Distributing handles a significant amount of produce that goes to restaurants. "My brother is a purveyor, and I do business with him," says Weisfeld. "Maybe 15 percent of our business goes to restaurant purveyors." **pb**

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www.umina.com

Akasha's

WHERE THE MENU IS HARVEST-DRIVEN.

By Bob Johnson

When Akasha Richmond opened her restaurant in a restored historic building in downtown Culver City on Los Angeles' west side in 2008 she was committed to a menu reflecting the changing seasonal harvest from nearby farms.

Most of the vegetables and fruits served at Akasha's are sourced during regular trips to a series of nearby farmers markets.

"We buy from three or four farmers markets a week," says Richmond. "We go to the Santa Monica market on Wednesday; and we also go to Santa Monica on Saturday. There is one in Culver City that we love. I love the Hollywood Market, but it's pretty far away."

The Akasha menu calls out a list of "Local Farms We Support," and several of the names are familiar to many of the restaurant customers who also frequent the farmers markets.

"Our customers love the local produce," says Richmond. "I run into some of them at the market, and they know the tomatoes from Mark Carpenter. He is Coastal Organics, and he has great tomatoes. They know the lettuce from Coleman Farms. Even if they don't know the farmer, they want the local produce."

The restaurant fills out their supply needs through LA & SF Specialty, a wholesaler delivering farm products to fine restaurants throughout California and a bit beyond.

Despite once working at the yogi-owned Golden Temple — a vegetarian restaurant once popular amongst Hollywood's health-conscious elite — Akasha's menu is not strictly vegetarian.

"We are not vegetarian, but we have a lot of vegetarian dishes," says Richmond. "We have Asian, Mediterranean, Indian and some Spanish dishes. We have a Bali curry on the menu, and Indian chicken wings. We have a lot of clean, healthy dishes."

Richmond refers to her cooking as "California cuisine" or "new American cuisine," but tries to maintain an inclusive menu.



SALAD: Thao farms snow peas, red watercress, arugula, meyer lemon, avocado, tarragon vinaigrette



FLATBREAD: squash blossom flatbread with mozzarella & spring garlic chimichurri



Akasha Richmond photographed by Christin Rose for the LA Times



SPANISH OCTOPUS: helling bean ragú, fennel soffrito, pickled fennel, caper salsa verde, smoked paprika

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AKASHA'S

"We try to have dishes for everyone," says Richmond. "We might have a family come in and one person is a vegan, another wants a burger, another a fish and vegetable dish, and the 10-year-old wants mac and cheese."

Richmond discussed her approach to cooking and food on the Food Network, Access Hollywood, Entertainment Tonight, and nationwide news programs, but Akasha's is, at its heart, a familiar place that attracts locals who come regularly to eat.

"We have a lot of customers who come in two or three days a week," says Richmond. "We built it as a neighborhood restaurant. During the day, it's business lunches."

When they come to this establishment near the nation's second largest metropolis, the diners can count on a connection with what is happening *now* on farms just up the road in California's fertile valleys.

"Our menu is driven by what's in season," says Richmond. "A lot of our produce comes from Santa Barbara or Ventura counties; but we also get some from Fresno or the San Fran-

cisco area. We don't usually go further away than San Francisco for produce, except when we sometimes get rhubarb from Oregon." **pb**

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Sunday: 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.

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Monday – Friday
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DINNER - THE DINING ROOM

Monday - Thursday
5:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Friday - Saturday
5:30 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Sunday
5 p.m. – 9 p.m.

Armen Market

CATERING TO THE AFFLUENT SHOPPER WITH PRODUCE VARIETY.

By Bob Johnson

In a relatively affluent corner of Pasadena, a suburb just a few miles removed from downtown Los Angeles, a small independent supermarket developed a loyal clientele of customers looking for the best.

“Every store has a different style,” says Armen Gharibi, owner and produce manager at Armen Market, Pasadena, CA. “I’m working on quality; I’m not working on quantity.”

Residents of this neighborhood are, if not affluent, ready and willing to pay for the highest quality: Half of Pasadena’s 142,000 residents are college graduates and the average home goes for a bit more than \$600,000, according to US Census statistics.

Those numbers may understate the well-being of the neighborhood as Armen’s is just a few blocks from Altadena, an unincorporated area of 43,000 residents with a median household income the US Census pegged at more than \$80,000 in 2010.

“I’m working on the quality of the produce,” says Gharibi. “Some brands of produce have longer shelf life. With the berries, some of them have longer shelf life, more sweetness, and better size. You have the good, the fancy, the extra fancy, and the premium. I always go with premium.”

Gharibi’s catering menu includes Armenian favorites beef or chicken lula kebob, hummus, tabouli salad, red quinoa salad, and eggplant ikra, a Russian spread.

A recent Armen Market flyer featured at the top, next to the beef chuck roll and hot buffalo party wings, ground lamb, lamb shoulder and chicken lula kebob.

But despite the Middle Eastern ethnic touches to parts of the catering and deli menus, Armen’s produce is best described as high-quality mainstream.

“We have produce for everyone, not just one ethnicity,” says Gharibi. “At Armen Market, you’ll find an awesome array of hand-selected fresh fruits and vegetables from around the world. We also handle some of the wide variety of fresh local produce throughout the market season.”



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARMEN MARKET

Just 12 miles away from the Pasadena store, Armen has a smaller store serving another suburb that is more than 70 percent Anglo and, according to the US Census, and just a bit less affluent than either Pasadena or Altadena.

“We have another small store in the Glendale area,” says Gharibi.

At both of these neighborhood markets, the hallmark is the best quality produce possible.

“Nothing’s sweeter than a fresh red apple or crisp cabbage from your own backyard,” the Armen’s website promises. “Our market’s the next best thing.”

pb

ARMEN MARKET
1873 N Allen Ave,
Pasadena, CA 91104
(626) 794-2999
armenmarket.com

Monday – Friday: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Saturday: 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sunday: 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Atlanta's Produce Scene

THE ATLANTA STATE FARMERS MARKET PROVIDES RENEWED WHOLESALE BUSINESS.

By Lisa White

Georgia's fruit and vegetable climate is about to get healthier. As the state looks to expand opportunities for its ag businesses, some Atlanta-based wholesalers are looking for additional produce overseas.

In a recent article titled, "Creating Opportunities for Georgia's Produce Industry," on the USDA's blog, posted by Ed Avalos, USDA's under-secretary for marketing and regulatory programs, Avalos notes Atlanta produce wholesaler J.J. Jardina received the market's first direct import of stone fruits from Peru via the Port of Savannah as the result of talks between Atlanta State Farmers Market's manager Paul Thompson and officials at the port.

It was Atlanta's unique location that enabled the shipments to be delivered from the port in less than five hours before being distributed to other locations along the eastern seaboard. With adequate cold storage, J.J. Jardina is able to break down and distribute shipping containers of produce that would have passed through Atlanta on its way to nearby poultry houses.

It is the goal with this new venture that Peruvian stone fruit imports will yield new opportunities for the market.

"We're dipping our toe in the water to see what's possible in terms of money to be made and savings," says Thompson.

There have been other recent developments focused on enhancing the produce industry in Atlanta and the state. In the past two years, the Atlanta State Farmers Market underwent two major updates. The wholesaler buildings are currently being reroofed, while six sheds will be removed to create additional selling space.

Thompson also expanded the market's cold storage section to include closed refrigerated wholesale space, according to Avalos. Cold storage was a major factor in the agreement to accept the Peruvian imports, and the market hopes an expansion will lead to similar opportunities.



The approximately 150-acre market opened in 1959 and currently houses 30 wholesale vendors, with an additional 60 retail and garden businesses.

"We're serving as a terminal wholesale market for the Southeast," says Thompson. "But we also offer retail outlets, a garden center, two restaurants.

As another part of strengthening Georgia's local ag economy, the state's agricultural commissioner Gary Black is increasing marketing efforts through the state's Georgia Grown brand. The brand includes a federally licensed trademark that allows the entire Georgia ag community to use the logo and branding to support their business, according to Avalos. In four years, more than 600 businesses used the branding to help gear up marketing efforts.

There is much potential for produce growth in the city. Atlanta is a blend of neighborhoods that include Downtown, Midtown and Buckhead. It's population totaled 463,878 in 2015, and the demographic is more than 60 percent African American and 33 percent Caucasian, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

On the retail front, the major players in Atlanta are Kroger, Publix, Ingles, Wal-Mart, Whole Foods, Aldi and Food Depot, according to the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

The restaurant scene is as diverse as the population, with the city eateries offering American and an eclectic mix of ethnic fare.

A CHANGING CLIMATE

In recent years, produce industry changes and consolidations have altered the landscape of business in the region.

Seven Stars, a brokerage house that handles potatoes and onions, has been in business since 1993 and has been impacted by the shift.

"We used to be a full-line brokerage house, but the California brokerage business went away, so basically we now warehouse and distribute product," says Richard Sutherland, president. "The bigger houses are getting bigger and the smaller ones are going way."

He attributes these changes to technology and also the mindset that bigger companies are more viable and better to do business with.

This factor brought a whole new set of challenges to companies like Seven Stars.

"Between contracts and people making buy/sell agreements, we end up getting locked out of new business," says Sutherland. "Companies are working off certified vendor lists; many times, the end users bypass the middleman for a contract price. The result is that local vendors here just receive a delivery fee."

One aspect of the program business is that



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when there's an oversupply of product, prices get lower; but if the market is tight, prices will rise. This means, if there is a short crop, and 80 percent is already contracted for sale to designated companies, there is only 20 percent of the product left to go around in the open market, which drives prices up.

"Over the past five to six years, particularly with onions, we have been experiencing really high prices," says Sutherland. "For example, in mid-January, onions would go from \$9 FOB to \$18 in just a few weeks."

He attributes the cause to the new way of doing business in the produce industry. Shippers that have 80 percent of a crop contracted at \$8 are more motivated to drive the price up for the remaining product to compensate for the lower price point.

Despite these issues, the business climate in Atlanta and the state is on a positive track.

"The economy in Atlanta is back on track, with the city growing again," says Sutherland. "We're maintaining our business, even in a very competitive marketplace."

Further proof of this is Forest Park, GA-based Nickey Gregory Co., which recently added a new fleet of tractor trailers to expedite delivery of its products to 11 Southeastern states.

The 16-year-old, family-owned full line wholesaler is located on the Atlanta State Farmers Market and also has operations in Miami, FL.

"In the next year, we will be expanding our Miami warehouse and adding more than 30,000 square feet to our existing 75,000-square-foot facility," says Andrew Scott, director of marketing and business development. "We have had a warehouse in Miami now for six years."

The company supports locally-grown produce, as a member of Georgia Grown.

"The trends we're seeing are centered around locally-grown produce, with local greenhouses being built in and around our region," says Scott. "There is also more private labeling on more fresh produce items as well as additional traceability and transparency of all packaged produce to adhere to FSMA."

Nickey Gregory increased its ethnic and specialty produce offerings due to the prevalence of restaurant concepts seeking these products as well as the diverse demographic of the city.

The company also expanded its customer base in response to an increase in convenience stores, gas stations and traditional drug stores carrying fresh produce, both packaged and bulk.



"The most exciting thing right now is that the market is improving, which will be beneficial to food safety and technology. The floor improvements alone allow us to be compliant in other arenas."

— Bryan Thornton, Coosemans Atlanta Inc.

Tom Lange Co. (a Springfield, IL-based distributor with a regional office in Marietta, GA) expanded its ethnic produce lines to meet the needs of the city's changing demographic.

"We attribute this to an evolving population and increasing number of immigrants, the majority of which are Latino," says Eric Hoffmann, vice president of sales for the company's Atlanta division.

The company also has seen continuous growth in prepackaged and pre-cut produce as well as organics.

With outlets in Alabama, Georgia and Florida, the company is currently expanding its office and customer base, along with its transportation division.

Another local company, Bruce Newlon Co. was initially located on the Atlanta State Farmers Market in 1967, but moved to its current location in Ellijay in 1992.

The potato and onion broker continues to operate as a family business.

"In terms of trends, we used to do a big business with white potatoes, but now, it's mainly red and gold varieties as well as Russets," says Terry Newlon, general manager. "One reason is that white potatoes tend to turn green quicker under supermarket lights."

He adds that sweet onion imports from Chile increased the popularity of this vegetable, as it's now offered year-round.

Wholesalers on the Atlanta State Farmers Market, such as Coosemans Atlanta Inc., look forward to the Market's improvements to what many say is an antiquated building.

"The most exciting thing right now is that the market is improving, which will be beneficial to food safety and technology," says Bryan Thornton, Coosemans' general manager. "The floor improvements alone allow us to be compliant in other arenas."

The company handles specialty items and continues to see a big run on locally grown produce.

Many of its commodities are grown in Central and South America, including baby squash and French beans, with specialties brought in from Europe and New Zealand. Local produce includes heirloom tomatoes and herbs.

"The overall market is improved when we bring in different worldly commodities into one location," says Thornton. "This allows chefs to differentiate or revamp their menus."

Coosemans works with a number of independent retail outlets in the city, including Indian, Chinese and Vietnamese grocery stores.

"The competitiveness of the Atlanta marketplace is beneficial for everyone, since it keeps us alert and in tune with what's going on," says Thornton. "Without it, we would become stale."

Atlanta Foodservice Climate

By Lisa White

According to the most recent statistics from the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association, in 2011 there were more than 16,000 eating places in Georgia,

and these restaurants were estimated to register \$16 billion in sales in 2013. Restaurants accounted for almost 380,000 jobs in the state in 2013, with projected job growth

of 14 percent by 2023.

This healthy climate resulted in a number of produce-centric eateries in the city in recent years. **pb**

Café Sunflower

A noteworthy Atlanta restaurant with a menu centered around produce is Café Sunflower, which opened in 1994.

Owner Edward Sun has been in the restaurant business for close to four decades, starting with a steak and seafood operation in South Padre Island, TX, then running a Chinese restaurant in Asheville, NC, for six years.

“I got out of the restaurant business for a bit, traveled for two years, and moved to Atlanta in 1993,” says Sun. “We noticed it was difficult to find a vegetarian restaurant in the city, with most shutting their doors shortly after opening.”

When Café Sunflower first opened its doors, business was slow. Many residents were leery of vegetarian fare, says Sun, fearing it was flavorless and boring.

Bringing his experience from the other restaurant concepts, along with a French chef, Sun set out to change that perception.

“Now, we even have chefs from different restaurants in the city coming here to eat,” says Sun.

The restaurant was so successful that a second location opened in the Buckhead neighborhood in 1996.

The romantic ambiance of this location is the antithesis of what many would expect of a vegetarian restaurant.

Café Sunflower’s menu is centered around organic produce sourced from a local high-end chain and farmers markets.

“I try to use special produce that is not as popular with customers, like Asian cabbage and kimpora carrots, along with traditional vegetables like zucchini, broccoli and mushrooms,”



Quinoa Bowl



Pad Thai



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAFÉ SUNFLOWER

CAFÉ SUNFLOWER
Buckhead
2140 Peachtree Road
Atlanta, GA 30309
(404) 352-8859
cafesunflower.com

says Sun. “We design each dish to include a protein, starch and fiber.”

The dishes don’t fit any one type of cuisine, as the chefs’ specialties range from European to Asian. Examples include: Fiesta Enchilada with soy chicken, sautéed onions, red

bell peppers, Granny Smith apples, a flour tortilla, Romaine and corn salsa; and Hand-made Ravioli with kabocha squash, tofu ricotta, topped with grilled mushrooms, spinach, tomatoes, green beans and roasted shallot marinara. **pb**

Atlanta Retail Climate

By Lisa White

Atlanta's retail landscape remains competitive. Although there have been a number of supermarket chains that left the area in recent years (such as Cub Foods, Great Atlantic &

Pacific Tea Co., Harris Teeter Supermarkets, and Winn-Dixie Stores Inc.), two independents picking up the slack: Sprouts Farmers Market and Sweet Auburn Curb Market.

Also, many big players are staying put and experiencing strong sales. These include Kroger, Publix Super Markets Inc., Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Aldi, and Food Depot. **pb**

Sweet Auburn Curb Market

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SWEET AUBURN CURB MARKET

The big chain is a dominant player, but the city also has non-traditional markets that fill a key niche for residents. Established as a municipal market in Atlanta back in 1918, Sweet Auburn Curb Market has been in its current location since 1924.

The market totals 35,000 square feet, with another 15,000 square feet in the basement designated primarily for storage with coolers and freezers.

The city-owned operation began as a trading post for farmers selling produce, livestock and eggs, but evolved into a self-sustaining entity comprised of 24 independently owned businesses. These include seven restaurants, retail shops and specialty shops with sweets, fresh meat and seafood and produce.

Traffic averages between 1,500 and 2,000 customers a day, with the focus during lunchtime. The operation recently expanded its hours to include Sunday.

This fall, the largest space in the market will be operated by a grocery store.

"We're located in a food desert, so the new store is needed to better serve area residents," says Pamela Joiner, the market's general manager. "It will prominently feature local and organic produce, and will really be part farmer's market, part food hall."

Sweet Auburn Curb Market's four current produce vendors sell both wholesale and retail, with locally grown fruits and vegetables available. The goal is to attract produce vendors with a section of Georgia-grown and/or organic fruits and vegetables. "We also have a relationship with a local organic distributor that delivers to the market," says Joiner.

One business Sweet Auburn Curb Market partnered with, Preserving Now, offers canning



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classes at the market. Using a water-bath canning method, its four-hour workshop is hands-on, preparing three kinds of products that will vary with the seasons, including a tomato product, a pickle and a food product. Complete information is provided as well as a notebook covering all the lesson and the recipes. Participants leave with three jars of the

newly canned products. Occasional specialty canning classes also are offered throughout the year.

Also driving traffic to Sweet Auburn Curb Market is a new public transportation system. As a result, within the past two years, a streetcar stop has been created in front of the market, which helped increase the tourist traffic. **pb**

Cincinnati: The Queen City Feeds Its People

THIS HISTORIC CITY OFFERS A RANGE OF PRODUCE WITH ECLECTIC TASTES.

By Chris Auman

Cincinnati was founded in 1788, just north of the spot where the Licking River meets the Ohio. The city became a boomtown in the early 1800s with the arrival of steamboats and has a rich history as a port and stopover for settlers traveling along the Ohio River to points west, according to Ohio History Connection's OhioHistoryCentral.org. Today, Cincinnati has a growing population of nearly 300,000 people and is the third largest city in Ohio, according to the city's website.

Cincinnati is split demographically with 49 percent white, nearly 45 percent black and a mix of Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic groups comprising the rest. The median household income from 2010 to 2014 was \$34,000 with many area residents working for the Kroger Company, which is the city's largest employer with more than 21,600 workers, according to the results of a 2015 survey published in the *Cincinnati Business Courier*. The University of Cincinnati comes in second by employing a little more than 16,000 workers. Other corporations based in the city include Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, TriHealth Inc. and Procter & Gamble.

Cincinnatians are proud of their local sports teams, which include Major League Baseball's Cincinnati Reds and the Bengals NFL team. They are just as proud of their unique take on chili. Cincinnati chili, which is a spicy meat-based concoction served over spaghetti, is a local favorite with a reputation that has grown far beyond both the city's and Ohio's borders, according to travel site *Fodor's Travel*.

Cincinnati also has its fair share of fine dining options such as Jean-Robert's Table, named for its owner/chef and three-time James Beard Award nominee for Best Chef in the Midwest. Other culinary attractions include the Orchids at Palm Court, located in the



CINCINNATI MARKET PROFILE

Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza. Todd Kelly, executive chef and director of food and beverage, created the menu here as well as for The Grille at Palm Court and The Bar at Palm Court. Kelly helps uphold the legendary fine dining tradition of this historic hotel, which first opened its doors in 1931.

More casual places can be found throughout the city, such as the Melt Eclectic Cafe. Melt was recently purchased by Cincinnati company, Wellmanns Brands, which operates five other food and drink concepts in the city, including the Old Kentucky Bourbon Bar, Japp's, Myrtle's Punch House, Famous Neons Unplugged and Bottle & Basket.

Cincinnati is ringed by the Interstate 275 beltway — with interstates that spoke off northwest to Indianapolis, northeast to Dayton, OH, and Columbus, OH, southwest to Louisville, KY, and south to Lexington, KY. This makes the city an important hub of transportation. This also helps local wholesale distributors, with long histories in the city, such as Joe Lasita & Sons, Fries Brothers, Castellini Company and Crosset Company, provide fresh produce to foodservice and retail customers both large and small. Local growers also thrive here in the Ohio River Valley where they can sell their produce at the Hyde Park Farmers Market, Findlay Market and Northside Farmer's Market.

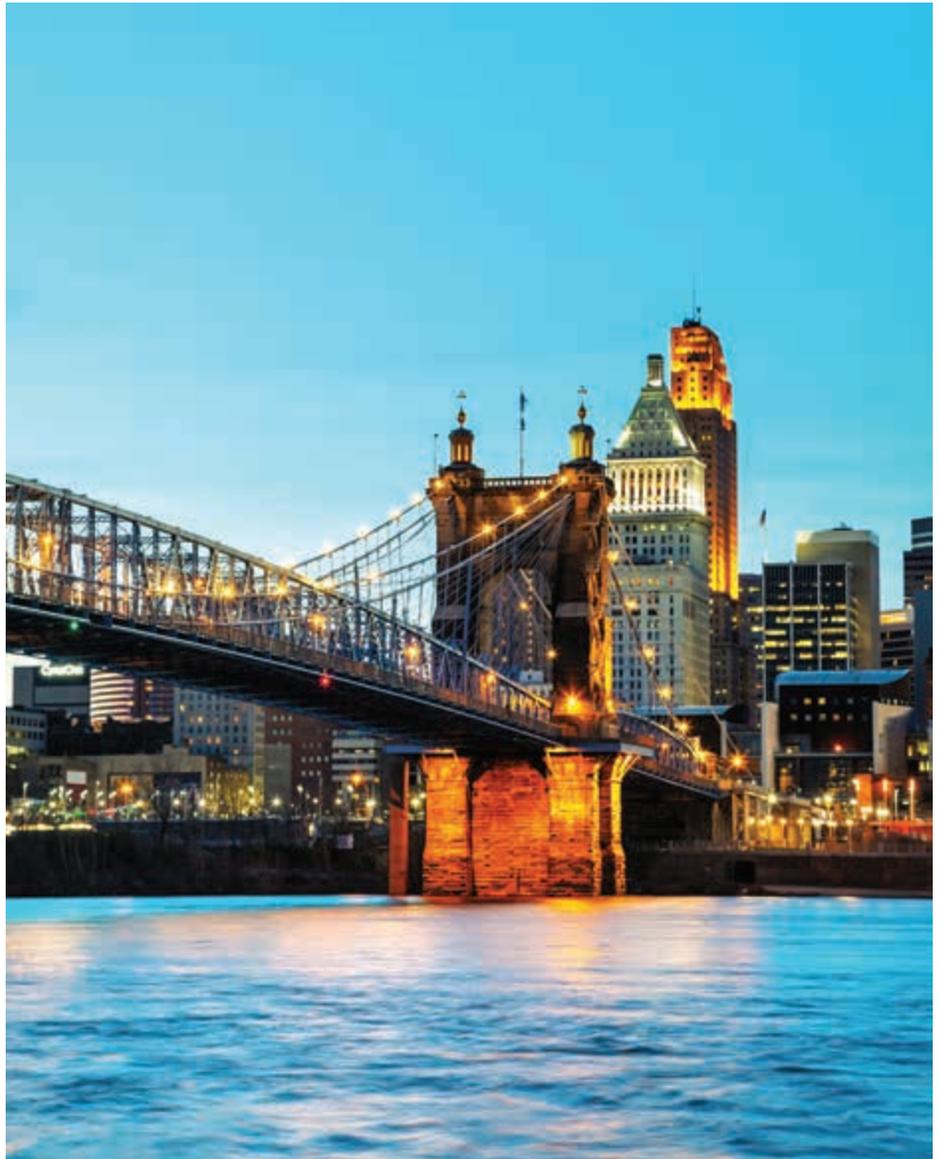
MEET THE WHOLESALERS

Joe Lasita & Sons, Inc. services its foodservice customers with 28 trucks within a 100 mile radius of the city. While Lasita specializes in fresh produce, it also carries a line of frozen, groceries and specialty items.

"We are a fourth-generation, family-owned company that has its history date back to 1918," says Jerry Lasita, vice president and chief operating officer. The company is a part of the Produce Alliance, the Buffalo Grove, IL-based premier procurement/management organization that provides assistance with IT functions, online ordering, and contracting with growers/shippers across the country.

"We also formed a partnership with Sirna & Sons, another Produce Alliance member, to expand our delivery coverage for customers who want one contact point for a very large geographic area." The company has plans for expansion of its office and facility space in the next year.

Growth does not come without challenges, however, and Lasita says that weather patterns across the country have been an issue for the company in terms of product availability, quality and price.



"The other major issue is finding qualified people to work in any area of our company," he says. Implementing new technology and systems helps the company meet these and other challenges including food safety concerns.

"Our food safety practices monitor all incoming and outgoing product for quality and safety issues. Market trends, shortages or quality issues are shared with our account base through weekly market reports."

The company also uses third-party annual audits, company-wide training on food safety practices, electronically monitored facility temperature, GMPs, full recall and HACCP plans, and the use of security cameras both inside and out to ensure safety.

"Next plan is to be GFSI-certified by end of 2016," says Lasita.

Caruso Logistics is a full-service distribution center and a repacker of potatoes, onions and corn. While based in Cincinnati, Caruso also has a distribution center in Ephrata, PA,

and satellite locations in Richmond, VA, and Indianapolis. The company services national retail chains across the Midwest as well as the Mid-Atlantic area of the East Coast.

As the company expands, it still focuses on issues important to everyone in the industry. "We have a big program for food safety," says Jim Caruso, chief executive. "I just hired a director of safety, which we never had before. It's quite a concern. It's taken center stage for us."

As big of a hot button issue as food safety is for foodservice and retail nationwide, food safety isn't anything new. What's new is the technology that's used to ensure it.

"We have several ways to track temperature to make sure the cold chain is never broken," says Caruso. "It's not new, but we're going a couple steps further with it. We're as interested as the customer in delivering product that is safe. We track it well, record it and keep records."

The company also tries to support area growers whenever possible. "We're always looking for good, locally grown products. We try to find it all the time. It's such a short season where we're at, we want to support the local guys."

Caruso plans on expanding the fleet and expects it to double in the next year and a half. It is also modernizing the company's invoicing system. "We're in the process of going paperless with invoicing and using a driver's app. We work with [Woodridge, IL-based] Produce Pro Software on that. It's a great system."

The Fries Brothers' story is similar to many in the business. "We've been in business since 1919," says its president, Donald E. Goetz, Jr. "Most produce places were started with pushcarts before the Depression. Kids were pushing them and all of a sudden they bought a warehouse."

According to Goetz, Fries Brothers' primary customers are "small independent foodservice guys." While the produce wholesale landscape changed over the years, it is still possible for smaller independent companies to survive.

"When we started there were about 40 companies in Cincinnati. We're the last ones of our size."

Fries Brothers is a full line produce wholesaler with three trucks. The company delivers primarily within the Interstate 275 beltway. "We're small potatoes in a big world," says Goetz. "The contract business and the huge chain business is taking over, but in every town there's still a lot of small independents."

Despite being a smaller player on the market, Fries Brothers must still meet the same challenges as the bigger fish. Food safety is important at all levels. "We're GAP audited," says Goetz. "Food safety is a big player in this world. You can't sell to certain people if you don't have the GAP audit and USDA inspection, but we're mostly just a redistributor. We basically take a package off one truck and put it on another one."

There are some advantages of being a small company. With just 13 employees, Fries Brothers can keep things simple. "We're old school," says Goetz.

"We get customers in and out fast. Everything is handwritten. We have a computer system in the back, obviously, but it's not computerized out front which gets everything in and out a lot quicker. As a small company we can get away with our system, a bigger company could never do it," he says.

Dave's Specialty Imports has had a presence in Cincinnati since the company's founding by Dave Bove in 1992. His son Mike started his

own company, B&B Imports in 1996 and in 2015 the two merged with the younger Bove serving as president of both companies. "Most of our business is in retail and located in the Southeast," explains Mike Bove. "We have a small amount of foodservice, but we're looking to increase that side this year into next."

Bove sees trends like organics still experiencing growth, and the company has worked to meet this demand. "Organics is growing," he says. "We are increasing our organic supplies, but I am starting to see some overproduction

at certain times of the year, which causes some pricing issues at the marketing end."

Dave's is a leading marketer and shipper of fresh berries in North America. Its Mexican strawberry project will be starting up this month and will run through until May of 2017. As the company focuses on sourcing the best berries available, safety is also a concern. "Food safety is a major issue for us, like everyone else in the industry. We aren't doing anything different, just implementing processes from the farm to table." **pb**



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, analytics and much more.

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Melt Eclectic Cafe

HOW ONE RESTAURANT GREW FROM NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORT.

By Chris Auman

Melt Eclectic Cafe has been delighting its loyal customer base for more than 10 years. Originally opened by Lisa Kagen in 2005, the cafe, along with its sister location Picnic & Pantry, was purchased by the local Wellmanns Brands company in 2016. Wellmanns is known in Cincinnati for its many fine drinking establishments, but Melt is the company's first foray into restaurants.

Seating is available at tables and counters line the walls adorned with works of local artists. The cafe gets bustling for dinner, lunch and Sunday brunch. Melt's tasty vegan-friendly menu is also budget friendly, which may be another reason it is so well-supported in Cincinnati's Northside neighborhood.

"The growth of Melt began with neighborhood support and has blossomed from there," explains Kagen, who serves as Melt's executive chef. In addition to a reasonably priced menu and great soups, sandwiches and salads, it is Melt's commitment to using the freshest products from as many local purveyors as possible that has endeared them to their customers.

"We have always ordered our coffee from a local roaster, our breads from two local bakers, and we initially sourced the majority of our produce from local farmers during the best seasons," says Kagen.

While using local growers worked well for the restaurant in its early years, a marked increase in business means they had to develop relationships with local wholesalers as well. "As volume has significantly increased, we are now ordering through major distributors such as Pic's Produce and Lasita (Joe Lasita & Sons)," says Kagen.

"Our volume is so high now that it can only be supplemented with local produce, which we like to use in our revolving menu at our downtown store, the bar menus, and through catering orders." Kagen is referring to Bottle & Basket by Melt, which is the rebranded Picnic & Pantry.

Bottle & Basket, located in Cincinnati's



Melt's Apple Beet Salad and Southwest Hash

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELT

Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, offers catering, take-out sandwiches and salads. The acquisition of a liquor license made it possible to offer a variety of craft beer and wine as well. 'Bites by Melt' items are also featured on the bar menu at Myrtle's Punch House and a satellite Melt location can be found at the beer garden at Famous Neons Unplugged, which are both at Wellmann's establishments.

Melt's philosophy when it comes to using whole, unprocessed ingredients and produce is to source fresh regardless of which distributor they use. "The majority of our prep utilizes fresh produce," says Kagen. "In addition, we do not allow food dyes, trans fats, high fructose corn syrups and preservatives in any of our recipes."

Melt's menu offers a choice of melted sandwiches, wraps, soups and salads, which have earned the cafe recognition as Best In Cincinnati from CityBeat readers for four consecutive years. To please its vegetarian and vegan customers, Melt uses a variety of plant-based proteins. The kitchen makes seitan and marinates and bakes the tempeh served in the veggie dishes. The restaurant also makes Rinotta (vegan cheese) from a mix of cashews and tofu with garlic, as well as blended herbs and spices.

With special events, catering or a featured special, Kagen always make a point to focus on local sourcing. When a locally grown item is featured on the menu, Melt makes sure customers know about it.

"We always highlight the locally grown ingredients when describing the specific menu item." Some of these local purveyors include

Sallie, Carriage House Farms, and Our Harvest Cooperative. Kagen trusts these local growers to deliver great products.

"We do not personally go to the facility to examine the produce. We place trust in our relationship with the farms and local suppliers. We have always been very happy with the quality of the ingredients."

Melt goes through more than 80 cases of produce in an average week and uses many of the same growers that can be found at farmers markets around the city. "The farmers markets in Cincinnati feature the same suppliers who come to us or — Findlay Market, specifically — and are just vendors buying from the same major suppliers as our distributors."

Melt's commitment to sourcing fresh ingredients, including produce, and a desire to offer clean, healthy menu items has helped to ensure its continued success in Cincinnati. **pb**

MELT ECLECTIC CAFÉ

4165 Hamilton Ave
Cincinnati, OH 45223
(513) 681-6358
meltcincy.com

Hours of Operation

Mon - Thurs

11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Friday & Saturday:

11 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Sunday

Brunch: 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Regular Menu: 2 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Remke Markets

SOURCING FRESH AND FOSTERING COMMUNITY

By Chris Auman

Remke Markets is an independent retailer with 10 locations in Southern Ohio and Northern Kentucky. The company's headquarters is located just southeast of Cincinnati in Erlanger, KY.

The Remke story begins in 1897 when William Remke opened a meat market in Covington, KY, just across the river from Cincinnati. The store quickly expanded into larger and larger locations, with the third store remaining in a single location for nearly seven decades. Other locations were opened as well. Control of the Remke's operations has been passed down from one generation to the next, and today Matthew Remke represents the fourth generation to run his family's business.

Remke receives produce from its main supplier, Eden Prairie, MN-based SuperValu, but also purchases from local wholesalers. "We have a warehouse attached to our corporate office here in Erlanger," says Dennis Adelsperger, director of produce and floral. "We bring in and support local products as much as we can."

The chain's main supplier delivers direct to stores but Remke also buys from suppliers who deliver to its warehouse where it is then redistributed. "We deliver five days a week consistently, so we keep the product fresh for customers at all times," says Adelsperger.

To get produce departments on track across locations, Remke employs a universal sales plan. "We have a variety of stores with different format size, so depending on the square footage of the store, that's how they (produce managers) plan their sales," says Adelsperger.

"We have a master sales plan we send out weekly, but as far as a produce manager in the Remke organization, we allow our management team to make store-by-store decisions based on their community and customers."

Different stores have customers who are interested in different products so produce managers have the flexibility to cater offerings to their customer's tastes and that holds true for displays as well. "The stores have the ability to build their displays as their sales warrant,"



Cross-Merchandising Display at Remke Markets

PHOTO COURTESY OF REMKE MARKETS

says Adelsperger.

To merchandise items in produce, signage is created at both the in-store and corporate level which highlight seasonal items. Remke also classifies certain unique products as 'story items' and uses signage to tell that story and to call out what makes it unique to Remke.

"A perfect example would be a snapdragon apple," says Adelsperger. "We brought in that item direct, and it was something that was only available through us, so we told the story of the unique apple to help educate the customers on something new."

Store associates are also familiar with the story behind these items, which further bolsters a personal connection with customers. "For the consumer who is used to the same apple or the same variety of fruit everyday, in order to educate them, we challenge our employees to really sell that to the customer and explain what's unique about it."

Each store holds weekly management meetings where associates and store managers outside the produce department are able to sample new products. This practice, according to Adelsperger, makes sales associates better educated, better in their work and helps build a better, more personal relationship with customers.

Salad bars featuring new and unique items on a daily basis can also be found in most Remke locations. "Most stores do have a salad bar and it does feature hand-cut product that is done by a designated employee in charge of the salad bar," says Adelsperger.

"Some stores will do a lunch calendar where they will have a unique salad every Wednesday

and then they'll change it up on Thursday just to add uniqueness to the salad bar."

Remke puts out a circular each week featuring produce items. The circular and other advertising presents further opportunities to tell a product's story.

According to Corey Strotman, director of marketing for Remke, "When we are featuring some of the exclusive or local products, we'll do a story on that product in the ad as well. On occasion, we'll do digital billboards with produce. We always include a produce item when we do TV commercials or radio. We do a little bit of everything. Produce is a big selling point for the company in general."

Community is also a big part of the Remke organization. "We've been around for more than 100 years in a very competitive market and what has got us to where we are today is our associates and the relationships they've built with the community," says Adelsperger.

The company's long history in Southern Ohio and Northern Kentucky, combined with the relationships the company has built with customers and employees and its reputation for fresh products, has helped Remke Markets grow into a thriving business that has now spanned across three centuries. **pb**

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Produce In Stadium Foodservice Scores Big



PHOTOS BY AMERICAN LAMB BOARD

Gourmet food items reach upper-level status with game-goers.

BY HOWAD RIELL

Americans in previous generations were satisfied with hot-dogs, peanuts and pretzels when they went out to the ballpark — not anymore.

Highly trained chefs are creating upscale dining experiences that rely heavily on high-quality produce and gourmet items, and sports fans are more than willing to pay more for these culinary delights heading up the menu lineup at stadiums today.

“Obviously, fresh produce is a huge component of what we are doing on club menus and in suites and catering,” says Christopher DeJohn, CEC, AAC, executive chef for Centerplate at Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium in Denver.

“Our live cooking action stations — where chefs prepare ingredients and finish the dish live in front of guests — rely on attractive, high-quality fresh produce to add to the appeal. We even offer salads in the stadium. It isn’t just

your classic Iceberg lettuce.”

For example, the popular game-day salad features chopped Romaine, shredded red and green cabbage, julienne carrots, julienne red peppers, snow peas and Daikon radish root tossed together and garnished with crispy wonton strips. It is served with sesame vinaigrette.

Local sourcing is very important to this community, reports DeJohn. “Denver is a progressive area with a real love of nature and natural products, and a desire to support home-grown businesses.”

When it comes to some products, seasonality can be a challenge, he confesses. “But increasingly, we’re working directly with local farmers and producers to plan menus around the supply. It does often cost a little more, but it’s worth it for higher quality and fresher ingredients,” he says.

The stadium environment “is all about volume,” explains DeJohn. “We have a lot of folks to feed, very quickly, once a week. Sustaining that level of supply, particularly for a season that stretches from the agricultural abundance of August into the cold winters of

Unlike some restaurants, which might plan menus with a few weeks’ notice, Christopher DeJohn, CEC, AAC, executive chef for Centerplate at Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium in Denver, and his staff plan the menu six months in advance. He says knowing when produce items will be available, and on what delivery timeline requires suppliers you can really trust.





(L-R) Two Colorado Lamb dishes served in Club Level at Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium in Denver.



PHOTOS BY AMERICAN LAMB BOARD AND COURTESY OF CHEF CHRISTOPHER DEJOHN AT CENTERPLATE

February, can certainly be a challenge for local and artisanal producers.”

These venues are also purpose-built for live entertainment, “so you don’t have the same layout, storage, or pace for food preparations that you might at a restaurant, where dining is the primary function. So that difference introduces a logistical component that requires careful planning around the number and type of ingredients, how they’re prepared, stored and finished.”

Unlike some restaurants, which might plan menus with a few weeks’ notice, DeJohn and his staff plan the menu six months in advance. Knowing when produce items will be available, and on what delivery timeline “requires suppliers you can really trust. It’s just not okay to have core items fall off the menu mid-season, or run out of a product because the supply wasn’t there.”

DeJohn found speed is very important in a stadium, “so making sure you can execute your menus quickly and safely is really important. Nobody wants to stand around in line and miss the winning play. Waiting for re-stock can really hurt your business.”

Around the National Football League, stadiums like the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans have always had unique and premium options, says DeJohn. “Levi’s Stadium [Santa Clara, CA] has really taken food to a new level: the entire stadium has fresh cooking capacity, and offers options from all-local to

vegan and Indian. The Clevelander at Marlins Park in Miami jumped to an extraordinary level of luxury that you can really only expect in a city like Miami, complete with raw bars and bottle service.”

In Denver, “we really started the trend years ago with the renovation of our club spaces, and we have certainly been keeping pace,” says DeJohn. “Obviously, the club and premium levels have always been a place for a great, restaurant-quality meal, which I’m really proud of. We have really talented culinarians producing three-course meals and themed menus that include all-Colorado products.”

The logistics of handling fresh produce are made even more complex by the addition

of local celebrity chefs. “That is great for us, because it’s fun and exciting to cook alongside James Beard Award winners who love the team and bring excitement to game day menus,” says DeJohn.

“It’s also great for the fans to get up close and personal in this setting with someone they might only read about or recognize from a menu headline. Now, every game, we have a local chef from the best restaurants in Denver do a live demo and prepare a few courses at one of our club action stations.”

Indeed, that upscale sensibility certainly has come to life everywhere in the stadium over the past five to 10 years with an interest in local foods, global flavors and variety.

LIST PROVIDED BY LEVY RESTAURANTS

KENTUCKY DERBY PRODUCE

A list of the produce purchased for the annual event included:

1. Strawberries (Van Meter Farms) — 500 crates
2. Green Beans (KHI Co) — 400 lbs.
3. Diced Tomatoes (KHI Co.) — 600 lbs.
4. Diced Butternut (KHI Co.) — 200 lbs.
5. Radishes (Courtney Farms) — 200 lbs.
6. Mint (Dohn Farms) — 300 crates
8. Hydro Bibb (Ky Hydro Farms) — 100 crates
9. Sorghum (Apple Valley) 21 gal.
10. Tomatoes (Ky Grow Farms) — 300 crates
11. Zucchini/squash (Courtney Farms) — 200 crates
12. Melons/Peppers (Courtney Farms) — 150 crates



Chef Christopher DeJohn of Centerplate

RELEVANT AND EXCITING

“First and foremost, Levy Restaurants elevates the game day for fans by creating a relevant, exciting food and beverage experience

“We’re always looking to customize menus to mirror the local flavors and traditions fans love.”

— Chef Lou Bastian, Levy Restaurants

no matter where they sit,” says Lou Bastian, corporate executive chef for Chicago-based Levy Restaurants.

“By experience, we mean more than just the menus served at a concession stand. We build out luxury lounge and club spaces where fans can watch the game while grabbing a bite or beverage, even placing clubs where fans can see the players walk onto the field as seen at Ford Field (Detroit) and Barclays Center (Brooklyn, NY). We use fan feedback to update menus regularly and test new dishes based on the latest culinary trends diners are seeking outside the sports world.”

Locally relevant tastes, ingredients and menu items are a big focus for Levy, whether it means bringing in hot Chicago restaurant Big

Star to offer its signature tacos at the United Center, or sourcing 40 percent of the ingredients used to serve 700,000 tennis fans at the U.S. Open each year. “If it’s a local ingredient or flavor profile,” notes Bastian, “we’re thinking about it for our guests.”

Bastian and his staff take the time to develop menu items they know fans crave. “We’re always looking to customize menus to mirror the local flavors and traditions fans love.”

At the University of New Mexico’s University Stadium, menus this fall will reflect New Mexico’s love of local green and red chilies. Live fire-roasted green and red chili peppers will be available on condiment carts, as toppings for every sausage and will be a specialty burger item in concessions.

At Ford Field in Detroit, fans can try a house-made giant apple cider doughnut that speaks to Michigan’s apple season traditions.

“We look for the best quality produce, and we look to local producers where we can,” says Bastian. “In general, we bring local farms, vineyards, brewhouses and meat/cheese purveyors into every location, whether for concessions with a local partner like Moo Cluck Moo at Ford Field, or adding Kentucky’s Dohn & Dohn Gardens as our exclusive mint purveyor for 128,000 mint juleps at the Kentucky Derby. At the 2015 Kentucky Derby, we worked more than 10 local purveyors to source everything from strawberries to sorghum and best of all, bourbon.”

“Some operators might worry about the sustainability of the produce they use each season,” says Bastian. “While it varies by location, we typically work with local food pantries to donate any leftover food after each game or we partner with the university or team to eliminate waste through recycling programs. Earlier this year, our efforts with the University of Colorado-Boulder, U.S. Open (New York City), American Airlines Center Arena (Dallas) and BBVA Compass Stadium (Houston) helped these locations win the Green Sports Alliance’s Environmental Innovator Award.”

And it is the innovators who will use produce to stir sports fans’ interest most effectively.

pb

SHAREABLE POTATOES

Philadelphia-based Aramark serves more than 6 million football fans annually — more than any other hospitality company that provides food and beverage services — at 11 NFL stadiums. Each off-season, its culinary team works to elevate the offerings at stadiums.

“When designing menus, the Aramark experts look to food trends and local flavors for inspiration, and translate those insights into items suitable for a stadium setting,” says Carl Mittleman, president of Aramark’s Sports and Entertainment division.

This season’s lineup highlights potatoes and includes a wide variety of shareable, loaded French fries. Among the offerings:

B’more Stak (M&T Bank Stadium, Baltimore): French fries topped with shaved Baltimore pit beef, Maryland crab dip, aged Cheddar cheese, green onions and cherry peppers.

BBQ Stak (Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas City, MO): Waffle fries topped with Pepper Jack cheese sauce, slow-smoked beef brisket, charred corn and sweet potato poblano relish, and roasted apple crunch.

Chicago Combo Stak (Soldier Field, Chicago): Flash crisp, celery salt dusted

kettle chips topped with Italian beef, Italian sausage, marinara, au jus, melted Provolone and giardineira.

Chicken & Waffle Fry Stak (Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia): Crisscut fries topped with breaded chicken bites, smoked Gouda gravy, maple glazed bacon and green onions.

Cuban Fry Stak (Raymond James Stadium, Tampa, FL): Skin on fries topped with smoked ham, roast pork, salami, fried pickles, mustard cheese sauce, scallions and smoked paprika.

Fudd’s Burger Fry #Stak (NRG Stadium, Houston): Thick cut French fries topped with crumbled hamburger, crispy bacon, hot cheese sauce and traditional burger fixings.

Go Big or Go Home Stak (U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis): Flash fried chips topped with fresh, smoked brisket, pulled Heritage pork, caramelized Vidalia onions, sweet and tangy barbecue sauce and chives.

Killen’s Famous Brisket Stak (NRG Stadium, Houston): Fresh, crisp waffle fries topped with creamy Pepper Jack cheese sauce, Ronnie Killen’s Famous in-house smoked brisket, sour cream and chopped green onions.

pb



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IT'S POSSIBLE A FILET MIGNON DISPLAYED ON ICE IN THE MEAT DEPARTMENT might make a mouth water with anticipation. A chocolate cream pie in Bakery could tantalize the taste buds. But in the world of Perishables, Floral indisputably wins the blue ribbon for beauty. Savvy retailers seeking increased sales and continued customer satisfaction know the value of boldly presenting flowers and

plants to customers.

When a Tweet, Post or Pin won't do, consumers will turn to flowers and plants to convey their thoughts and emotions. Retailers, if you haven't implemented a floral department mantra, now is the time to consider this one: **Reveal the Appeal**. Don't tuck away floral. Align your floral department presentation with the store's philosophy for other perishables – fresh, abundant and accessible.

In this seventh edition of Floral Masters of Merchandising, the sponsors of this supplement have combined promotion and education to help retailers connect with customers in today's society and sell more floral items. Researchers are finding many consumers will give themselves permission to splurge on items not frequently purchased when a give-back opportunity is offered.

Purchasing patterns are showing more consumers wanting to buy the product when there is an opportunity to support a meaningful cause that is personally relevant.

Sunshine Bouquet Company is Master of Contemporary Floral Merchandising. The bouquet company's message is for retailers to encourage customers to enjoy floral bouquets while supporting a commendable cause – the National Park Foundation. The awareness bouquet program, complete with POS and social media support, is popular with retailers reaching new customers and families celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Parks.

The USA Bouquet Company is Master of Fresh Cut Flower Bouquets and Arrangements. Recognizing the need for retailers to emotionally connect with customers, the bouquet distributor offers new awareness bouquet programs featuring cause support opportunities related to National Pet Month, Autism Awareness, and Make A Difference One Petal at a Time.

While supplies last, we offer to send retailers printed copies of this merchandising guide or we will gladly provide you a PDF of this supplement via e-mail. If you are a floral vendor and would like to see your category in the next FLORAL BUSINESS Masters of Merchandising supplement, please contact me, E. Shaunn Alderman, Floral Department Marketing Strategist, FLORAL BUSINESS, 561-703-4010, SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com.

Reveal the Appeal!

E. Shaunn Alderman
 FLORAL BUSINESS



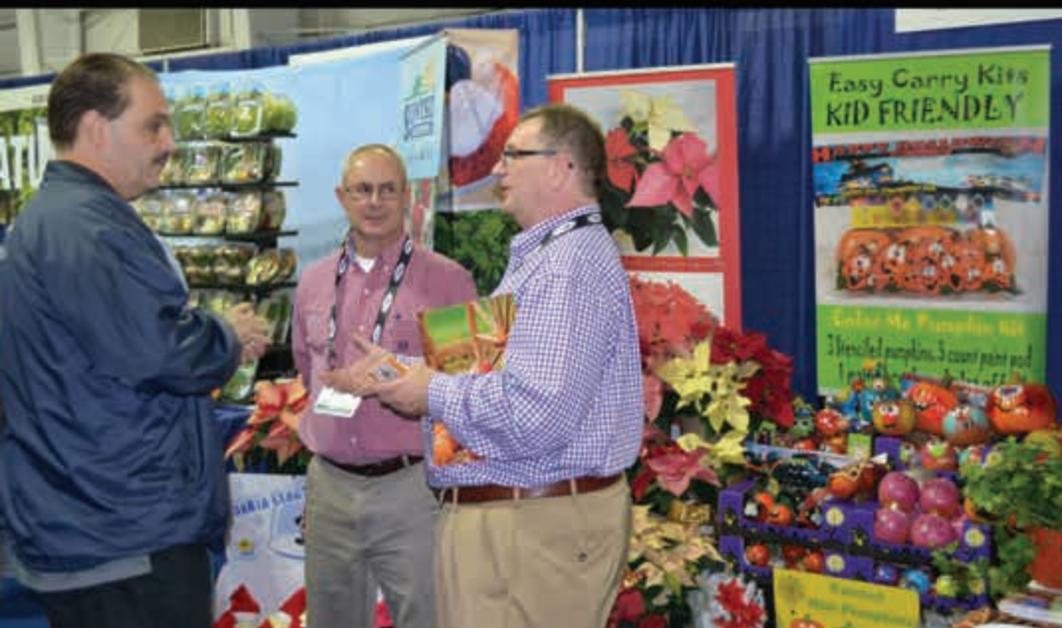
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FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, Sunshine Bouquet has been a manufacturer and seller of fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements. With sole ownership of its farms in Bogota, Colombia, and through Rainforest Alliance Certification, Sunshine exclusively offers floral products with strict attention toward social and ecological responsibility. The company's highly experienced team delivers floral products from facilities in Florida, New Jersey,

North Carolina and Massachusetts.

Sunshine Bouquet partnered with the Washington, D.C.-based National Park Foundation (NPF) to build awareness and raise donations as a part of the national campaign. For retailers to better connect with customers on the "Find Your Park" campaign, Sunshine encourages awareness and implementation of several merchandising methods to ensure strong bouquet sales.



ATMOSPHERICS, the general feelings created by a retail store, are vital for the increase of sales and profit. Atmospherics include services, packaging, advertising, and pleasantries surrounding a product. Packaging, advertising, digital and print content along with the overall environment create an ideal shopping experience that leads to sales.



PACKAGING is a critical component of merchandising, as effective packaging has the power to attract consumers and enhance purchases. For the National Park Foundation campaign, Sunshine provides numerous packaging options such as a variety of visually appealing sleeves, tags and box options.



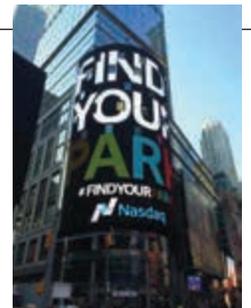
DIGITAL CONTENT is essential to a product's campaign. When updating social media content, retailers have access to promotional material and information posted by Sunshine Bouquet on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and from a dedicated section of Sunshine's website.



PRINT CONTENT, such as colorful, relevant ads or promos for store circulars, is especially important in enhancing relationships with consumers. Retailers have access to the numerous bouquet ads for use in printed circulars designed by Sunshine to promote the NPF bouquets.



SERVICE is one of the most essential atmospherics. Care and handling tags, QR codes and instructional videos are great ways of capturing and holding the customer's interest. Each bouquet for the National Park Foundation campaign features an attached NPF-specific care and handling tag. Customers can look up the campaign on the Sunshine Bouquet website and learn how purchasing the NPF bouquet is contributing toward a worthy cause.



National Park Collection

An earthy collection that evokes the beauty of our National Parks

The National Park Bouquet represents a unique opportunity to associate yourself with a timeless brand that is both national and regional.



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AS A LEADING NATIONAL DISTRIBUTOR of fresh-cut flower bouquets and arrangements, The USA Bouquet Company sources more than 200 million stems annually. Product is procured from several countries, and a large percentage is purchased from

U.S. growers. The company partners with Fair Trade Certified farms and participates in the Rainforest Alliance Certification Program. USA Bouquet has manufacturing and distribution facilities in Florida, Illinois, California, Georgia, New Jersey and Texas.



CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Retailers connecting with customers in March can join global efforts in acknowledging women and honoring women's achievements by promoting International Women's Day (IWD). Officially observed on March 8, clever retailers will offer IWD bouquets the entire month of March.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE ONE PETAL AT A TIME

Consumers often turn to flowers for comfort after a local tragedy or devastating weather event. Retailers might choose to connect with community members by offering bouquets supporting local and regional efforts. The Make A Difference One Petal At A Time bouquet is a program enabling retailers to customize their own bouquets in support of their favorite local charities so consumers can select which charitable effort will receive the funds raised through the designated bouquet sales.



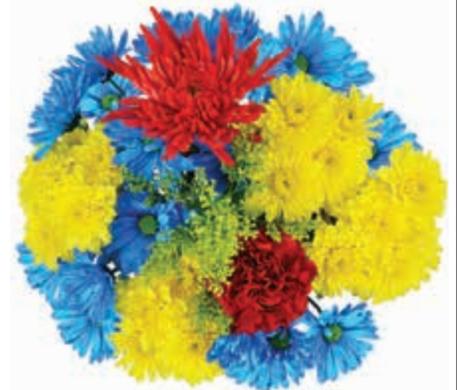
PROVIDE GIVE-BACK OPPORTUNITIES

Floral departments promoting or supporting national, regional or local causes provide customers with give-back opportunities. Retailers offering these bouquets attract attention, connect with customers and generate enthusiasm for bouquet sales — especially when social media postings are in alignment with promotional efforts. USA Bouquet provides digital content for retailers to use on their web sites as well as photos and promotional content for printed store circulars.



NATIONAL PET MONTH

For pet lovers, every day is Love Your Pet Day. Estimations reveal 37 to 47 percent of all households in the United States have a dog, and 30 to 37 percent have a cat, according to the ASPCA. Retailers can promote the popular celebration in May with the festive line of National Pet Month floral bouquets. Enhanced with a variety of decorative sleeves to engage in-store customers, the bouquets are individually tagged with information promoting the benefits of pet ownership and other goals of National Pet Month. For in-store displays, USA Bouquet provides irresistible signage to attract pet lovers. Retailers can designate a local pet shelter or national animal care organization as the recipient of funds raised through the sale of these bouquets.



AUTISM AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

A shopper who doesn't normally buy flowers may do so for a cause such as Autism Awareness. Families, caretakers and teachers involved with children and adults on the autism spectrum will appreciate the floral bouquets promoting awareness and acceptance of the prevalent neurological disorder. Ideal for promoting local fundraising walks and awareness events, USA Bouquet offers this bouquet program and POS material throughout the year. April is Autism Awareness month. Retailers can designate a local autism organization or national foundation as the recipient of funds raised through the sale of these bouquets.





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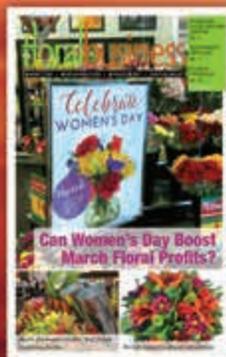


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Pecan Industry Poised for Growth



PHOTO COURTESY OF TROPICAL FOODS

New Federal Marketing Order promises pecan promotion.

BY ANNE LISE KELLY

With their buttery flavor, delicate balance of sweet and bitter, and gentle crunch, pecans have a beloved place at the American table. As North America's only commercially produced native nut, they've earned devoted loyalty. We enjoy them in traditional favorites such as pecan pie, or tricked out in a gourmet-style marinated beet and goat cheese salad or crusting a tender steak of pan-fried halibut.

The pecan industry is poised for growth with increasing domestic and global demand and a newly passed Federal Marketing Order (FMO), which is a self-help program overseen by USDA that provides pecan funds to be spent by pecan marketers for the benefit of its industry. Because pecans are grown commercially in a broad region encompassing 14 states, industry players have historically operated somewhat independently, but the dynamic

will change with the new FMO.

"Walnuts, almonds and pistachios have had FMOs that allowed a lot of exciting opportunities in terms of providing resources to the retailer: display pieces, standalones, point of sale materials, and collateral," says Vickie Mabry, executive director of the National Pecan Shellers Association, headquartered in Atlanta, GA. "This October, they'll start to collect assessments, so there'll be more resources available to the pecan industry promoting proper storage and sales to providing point-of-sale material, and building consumer awareness for pecans as the great-tasting alternative. The pecan industry will have somewhere between 6 to 8 million dollars at its disposal."

Increasing demand in Asia helped keep requests and prices relatively high. U.S. pecan exports increased by 28 percent from 2013 to 2014, according to the USDA. The total domestic crop increased 12 percent during that interval, totaling 264.2 million pounds, as tallied by the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

AN ANTIOXIDANT STAR

The popularity of pecans soared as consumers recognize their healthful quali-

ties. "People are learning pecans are high in antioxidants. People are more health conscious, which influences sales across the country," notes Richard Merritt, owner of Merritt Pecan Company in Westin, GA. "We've seen consumption pick up, and we look for that [increase] to continue."

Mabry agrees. "If you look at all foods for highest antioxidant level, pecans are No. 13. My advice to move pecans is to focus on health-conscious consumers. Look at blueberries, salmon, kale, and pair pecans with other products that are healthy. Group them together, for example, to promote a salad."

PLACEMENT AND PACKAGING MATTERS

Enticing packaging is crucial, experts agree. "Clear packaging: tubs or bags," says Chad Hartman, director of marketing at Tropical Foods and Healthy Home Market grocery stores in Charlotte, NC. "We find consumers are very savvy about pecans. They like what they like, and they want to see a nice big pecan in that bag, so showing them the product is always the best strategy."

"We started packaging nuts in those acetate tubs," says Merritt. "We think it shows the

dried fruits & nuts ► pecans

product better, and it is easier to handle.” In the brand’s Weston, GA, retail store (Merritt Pecan Co. & General Store), the company found great success selling pecans in commuter cups, enabling customers to snack as they drive. The company also offers 5-pound bags, which are popular among bakers.

Mabry points out that stocking a variety of options is key. “In almost every recipe, you’re chopping up pecans, and consumers almost always go for the halves. Pieces offer the same benefits and take less time, so offer pieces and halves in easy-to-grab, 1-pound packages.”

Where should pecans be located in the store? “You must have product where consumers are looking for it,” notes Hartman. “For example, baking supplies and with nuts and produce are two places where people look for them year-round. During the holidays, you should add in the holiday displays.”

A VERSATILE NUT WITH GOURMET APPEAL

Both plain and value-added pecans have an enduring gourmet appeal, and retailers should emphasize the healthy, delicious ingredient all four seasons. “We’re working on recipes and usage of pecans, which is not seasonal, says Al

Pearson, fourth-generation owner at Pearson Farm, in Fort Valley, GA. “With good storage, we can eat pecans all year, from adding them to pancakes to salads.”

Mabry recalls the lessons learned at the Pecan Chefs Summit, hosted by the National Pecan Shellers Association near Atlanta, GA. “In prepared foods in the deli sections, pecans offer great visual appeal and up the game,” says Mabry. “They’re perceived by many, and certainly by chefs, as a high-end, added-value to salads — or other products for that matter.” Chefs at the summit also favored roasting pecans to bring out the flavor, and Mabry notes roasted pecans are also a time-saving alternative to offer at retail.

In addition to roasting, purveyors are exploring an ever-increasing menu of tempting value-added recipes. “If you’re entertaining, getting candied pecans is going to make your life easier,” adds Mabry. “And more and more of our processors are playing with expanding their offerings when it comes to value-added pecans with some of the same flavors that chefs are playing with in their restaurants. Just like the salted caramel phenomenon, there are key lime pecans, for example. They’re playing with flavored pecans in the processing arena

as much as the chefs are playing with them on the plate.”

PEAK FRESHNESS AND QUALITY

To maintain the best quality, retailers must store pecans properly and rotate stock. When a properly stored pecan goes out on the floor, “It has eye appeal,” says Dora Miller, packing manager and quality control manager at Alamo Pecan and Coffee Company, in San Saba, TX. “You just have to put out a good product that’s plump, light in color, full meated, not dry, and has rich flavor.”

At Pearson Farm, the company relies on cold storage. “Long term, they should be frozen, and short term, they need cold storage to stay at their peak,” advises Pearson. “If the pecan has been stored right, it will be easy to sell.”

Mabry agrees. “For pecans, shelf stability is much stronger if they’re refrigerated. So the best way for the consumer to get the best quality and the best tasting pecans is if they’re found in the refrigerated section.”

While Merritt agrees “refrigeration would be ideal,” he recognizes that the realities of retail dictate room temperature storage. “The main thing is to keep them fresh. What you

The advertisement features a background image of a grocery store aisle with various produce bins. In the foreground, there is a wooden display rack filled with small, clear plastic containers of Garden Chips. The chips are arranged in a grid pattern. The text is overlaid on the image in white and black boxes.

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— Chad Hartman, Tropical Foods

see in some of your large grocery stores is too much product on the floor and they don’t rotate the product properly. If it sits too long, it will turn dark.”

A HOLIDAY ESSENTIAL

The fourth quarter brings the new crop of pecans and the bulk of annual demand. According to Hartman of Tropical Foods and Healthy Home Market, consumers and retailers recognize the superior quality of a freshly harvested pecan. “We get people chomping at the bit right up until we have a new crop of pecans arriving in our building. It’s a huge deal, more than I’ve ever seen with any other nut. I would especially recommend sampling after a new crop. The pecans are super tasty, and it’s also right in the middle of the holiday season. As far as price, that fourth quarter is going to be prime time. My advice is, if you’re going to do TPR (trade promotions marketing) or other price reductions, then you should do it during the fourth quarter.”

At Alamo Pecan and Coffee’s retail store, “75 percent of the business is going to be October, November, December. And December is like 50 percent of it. It’s amazing,” says Miller.

Pearson affirms that traditional holiday recipes drive fourth quarter volume. “The holidays absolutely cause a spike in sales as people want pecan pie and sweet potato pie with pecans on top,” he says.

It’s not just holiday baking, says Miller. “If you’re trying to appeal to the gift-giving or the corporate-giving market, we found the natural pecans are by far the best seller for us, because people are so health-conscious. You’re looking again at everyone wanting a healthy, trim, versatile ingredient, which can be used in baking or raw eating or salads or usually any preparation right out of the refrigerator, and it’s a great on-the-go snack too.” **pb**

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Changes Of Season

BY DON HARRIS

As summer fades into fall, discussions in the Monday morning staff meetings turned to the changing of the seasons and the need to change merchandising direction. At this time, management generally focuses on the need to move the merchandising strategy toward the upcoming holidays — Thanksgiving and Christmas. Most departments are in general agreement with this type of approach; however, produce has different requirements, as usual. Management makes the decision to move into the fall and winter seasons rapidly to be ready for the holidays. Once again, management demonstrates “they just don’t get it”!

There has been a transition during the past 20 years to more high-quality late-season fruit, grapes, and melon varieties that extended the season for the summer-time items. Because of this factor and the increased numbers of these new products, there has become an increasing need to expand the selling season for these fruits and melons.

Instead of September and October becoming months to “flip the switch” and jump into winter merchandising, this time period became one more transitional move from full summer merchandising to a combination of late-summer, early-fall merchandising. It is a unique combination of the promotion of fine tasting quality fruit, grapes, and melon items with the harvest of new crop apples, pears, and citrus commodities.

To be successful during this transition, one must think of ways to combine the unique salable and promotional benefits offered by this unusual combination of produce items. It requires the blending of promotional emphasis on each side of the equation. Perhaps it means joint displays of new crop apples and the late-season fruit.

Maybe it would require the display of fall squash along with the late-season melons. You could even include new crop pears and late season grapes. It would seem like during this transition, any innovative or unique solution could be considered. The key point is to ensure the display and promotional activity is equally divided among all the varieties and items.

Over the years, we conditioned the customers to buy what we presented on display. Because we utilize the quick changeover of the seasons, the customers dutifully forgot about the items they were purchasing in order to purchase the new ones on display. As easily as we conditioned them to accept the quick switch-over, we could show them a new way to purchase many late season summer favorites while embracing the new crops as they come on the scene. It will be up to our discretion to present for their purchase the widest variety of late-season and new crop items available.

This type of merchandising would certainly be different than anything they experienced, and it also would add an element of new and exciting discovery during a time that had been dominated by a quick change to fall merchandising. This approach would certainly prove to be exceptional and identify your operation as a forward-looking, innovative retailer making the most of the wide variety of produce available during this unique time of the year.

This type of thinking could become the norm if more retailers would look into maintaining sales momentum from the key summer season as long as possible. It could also be utilized as a transition from domestic fruit, grapes, and melons into the imported supplies available during the winter months. All in all, this transitional strategy as opposed to a quick changeover is a win-win situation for all sides of the equation.

Adopting this strategy not only maintains the momentum of sales built up through the summer for the retailer, but it also helps to move the late-season crops of fruit, grapes, and melons for the growers. It introduces the customer to these newly developed, great-tasting varieties that were introduced in the past few years.

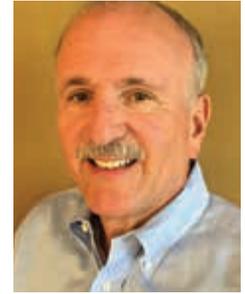
This combination of benefits is somewhat unique in the industry, because it represents a new way of looking at the last months of the year to enable all operations to finish their respective seasons on a successful note. For the retailer, it allows the continuation of the sales drive that began in the late spring into the fall and ultimately the end of the year.

It is this type of opportunity that allows each operation to reach the goals that were set for the year while maintaining a steady pace of growth in sales and the overall operation. This type of growth is much easier to maintain than the up and down cycles normally experienced during this time of year.

While change is sometimes difficult in the produce industry, this type of change in strategy during this transitional season may well provide an excellent solution for all parties involved. This different type of thinking can spur growth in sales, profits, and operational efficiencies that can help any operation reach and surpass its goals. **pb**

To be successful during this transition, one must think of unique ways to combine the unique salable and promotional benefits offered by this unusual combination of produce items.

Don Harris is a 41-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 Few Thoughts On The Election

BY ALAN SIGER

At the start of my career, in 1973, there were two things I was told never to discuss with a customer or supplier: religion or politics. Both topics evoke so much passion; if I were to discuss either, I could risk offending someone and possibly losing a customer.

In the almost two years I've been writing, I've thrown jabs toward all segments of the industry (including my own). As far as I know, all of my industry friends are still talking to me; my hope is that will still be the case after they read this column.

I've been politically active for more than 30 years. I've worked with and contributed to candidates on both sides of the aisle. In my roles as chairman of United Fresh and as chairman of United Fresh's Government Relations Committee, I've met with members of Congress, their staffers, Department of Agriculture officials, and even the Vice President to further the interests of the fresh fruit and vegetable industry. I've been both a registered Republican and Democrat, and I have consistently voted for the person — not the party.

I write this almost 70 days before the 2016 election — an eternity in a political campaign. When I began to layout my outline of this column, my intention was to look at the presidential candidates strictly from a produce industry perspective. After all, this is *PRODUCE BUSINESS* magazine.

I looked at the candidates' positions on immigration and free trade — both of which are important issues to the industry. Donald Trump's intention to build a wall and send more than 10 million people back to Mexico is certainly not in the best interest of growers across the country, who, even today, are having difficulty finding workers to harvest crops.

Likewise, turning our back on international trade agreements would create trade wars where fresh fruits and vegetables exporters could get caught in the early crossfire. On the contrast, the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership would open to U.S. growers a market of middle-class consumers that experts predict will be the world's largest buyers of fresh fruits and vegetables by 2030. Advantage: Clinton on both of these issues.

In addition, I researched the perceived regulatory environment and tax policies for a Clinton or Trump administration — including the death tax and its impact on family businesses and the ability of one generation to pass ownership onto the next. General business regulations, and specifically in the produce industry, are more likely to be tougher in a Clinton administration. On the converse, tax policies would likely be more business-friendly under a Trump administration.

The more I thought about this, the more I realized this election is way more important than issues related to our industry. In fact, this election is no longer about business issues, social issues, economic

policy, political party affiliation, or even potential Supreme Court nominees. This election is about the fitness and competency of the person Americans elect to serve as the next president of the United States. Like them or not, these are the two candidates that their respective political parties have chosen to be on the ballot November 8. With all due respect to the third-party candidates, either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will be our next president.

Hillary Clinton served our country as a United States Senator and as Secretary of State. She has spent her life working to help the working class, children and the disadvantaged. While in the Senate, Clinton demonstrated the ability to get things done by working with members of both parties. She has survived more than 20 years of attacks from those who sought to destroy both her and her husband's careers. She made mistakes, but who hasn't? Most importantly, she has shown the ability to remain calm under fire, and to act thoughtfully in making critical decisions.

Donald Trump falls short on so many of the qualities required to be president that I almost don't know where to start. Trump's knowledge of economic policy and foreign affairs is limited at best. His comments have shaken our allies around the world, and his egotism and inflated self-image are astounding. He stated that he never hires people smarter than he, as he always wants to be the smartest person in the room. A know-it-all who shoots from the hip is unfit to serve as our next president.

Donald Trump's campaign aligns with the worst elements of our society: prejudice, xenophobia, and intolerance. Trump has mocked the disabled and shown a lack of respect to our active military, war heroes, and veterans. When asked how he sacrificed for our country, he equated his job creation to a parent losing a child while fighting for our country. His schoolyard-like name calling should not be tolerated from an 8-year-old, let alone a candidate for the leader of the free world.

We have two candidates to choose from, and neither is perfect. Many voters lament that they will have to "hold their nose" and pick the lesser of two evils. It's not a question of who you dislike less; it is simply a question of competence. I think the choice is an easy one. I cannot vote to give the keys to the car to someone who might drive it off a cliff.

pb

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.

This election is no longer about business issues, social issues, economic policy, political party affiliation. ... This election is about the fitness and competency of the person Americans elect to serve as the next president. ...



UK's Organic Market Presents Opportunities For US

BY JOHN GILES, DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR, PROMAR INTERNATIONAL

The EU organic food and drink market is poised to double in its overall size from around €9 billion at the current moment to more than €18 billion by 2020, with the U.K., French and German markets all leading the way along with smaller markets in countries such as Scandinavia, Spain, Italy and Poland. This presents an opportunity for U.S. suppliers in the fresh produce sector, but only if they pay attention to the basics to understanding as much as they can about how and why the markets are evolving.

In the U.K., the organic market has been one of the success stories of the past 20 years. Year-on-year growth has been experienced, as consumers look to buy food they see as being produced in a more favourable manner compared to conventional growing methods.

Yet, despite this growth, the overall size of the U.K. organic sector is still relatively small at around 1.5 percent of the total food and drink market. After the economic crisis of 2008, the organic market saw a downturn in sales, as consumers looked to cut back on food expenditures. In the past three years, however, the market has returned to growth.

The leading supermarkets in the U.K. dominate the sale of organic produce, but there has also been strong growth in other routes to market, such as box and online-home-delivery schemes, the independent retail sector, and the catering market.

Historically, the consumer profile was somewhat stereotypical — seen as being high income, well educated, up-market shoppers often located in London and South East England (where consumer incomes are typically higher than in other parts of the country), but this has changed over time.

The consumer profile is now more widespread across different consumer groups around the U.K. The common thread though is that organic consumers tend to be those interested in issues such as healthy eating, and a strong ethical, environmental and social conscience; they are likely to be in the younger age groups, likely to be in a household/family situation, and likely to be working professionals with a (young) family.

Latest research issued by the Bristol, England-based UK Soil Association (a non-profit food and farming charity as well as organic certification body) shows a number of interesting trends in the past 12 months:

- The U.K. organic market has grown by 4.9 percent
- Organic product sales in supermarkets grew by 3.2 percent
- Organic product sales for independent retailers increased by 7.5 percent

- Box schemes and online sales of organic products have risen by 9.1 percent
- The organic foodservice/catering sector increased by 15.2 percent

The organic market is led in the U.K. by the dairy category, but the fresh produce sub-sector is all important too. Fresh produce has a market share of the organic food sector of around 22 percent and grew by about 3 to 4 percent in the past 12 months. The three main reasons for the increase in sales have been a combination of promotions on organic products, new product lines, and overall customer demand for organic on the rise again.

Most of the leading supermarkets look to stock a full range of organic produce. The premium supermarket chains often lead the way here, with the likes of Waitrose and Marks & Spencer having a share of the market disproportionately high to their overall market share, but the organic market is not their's alone.

Discount supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl are gaining a share of this market and they are doing so with a small range of organic products. Aldi has grown its range of organic produce, introducing five more lines in 2015/16. It also sells organic in the rest of Europe. There is potential to still broaden the organic choice to consumers at a more affordable price in the U.K. as well.

The organic market in the U.K. is set to continue growing in the next few years. This

This presents the basic opportunity for U.S. growers and exporters who are probably likely to find opportunities in areas where they enjoyed success with conventional products such as apples, grapes, cherries, soft fruit, berries and citrus, as well as sweet potatoes.

presents the basic opportunity for U.S. growers and exporters who are probably likely to find opportunities in areas where they enjoyed success with conventional products such as apples, grapes, cherries, soft fruit, berries and citrus, as well as sweet potatoes. If they are to achieve sustainable business in the U.K. and other European markets, then being aware of what is driving the market and how the routes to customers and consumers are changing is essential.

Strong competition from other suppliers for the organic niche still exists from domestic growers, those in the EU, and other international suppliers from the Southern Hemisphere and Central America. U.S. growers and exporters do not have a clear run at the U.K. market, but the opportunities are clearly there for those prepared to make the effort, time and commitment to service a growing market. **pb**

John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, the value chain consulting arm of Genus plc and has worked on a range of assignments in the fresh produce sector in the U.K., the rest of the EU, Middle East, India, China, the U.S., Canada and Latin America. He is also the current chair of the U.K. Chartered Institute of Marketing and can be contacted at: john.giles@genusplc.com

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Are Potatoes A Vegetable?

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

A client called me at 5 p.m. on a recent Friday, which is never a good sign.

“How can I help?” I asked tentatively. “Are potatoes a vegetable,” he implored. I laughed, assured him potatoes are indeed a vegetable, and then asked why the uncertainty.

It turns out his legal team was advising him to omit information about potatoes on an educational activity for children. Pressure from well-meaning public health officials led the legal team to decide it was in the best interest of my client to not promote potatoes as part of a healthful diet. I sighed and went on to share some of the research that supports the role of potatoes in the diet.

Before I share this information with you, I should disclose that I have a pretty big potato bias. I was born and raised in the Red River Valley of North Dakota. I grew up eating red skin potatoes on an almost daily basis.

These gorgeous potatoes are still one of my favorite vegetables, especially the baby ones freshly harvested from my mom’s garden. Boiled whole until soft, gently mashed with a fork, and topped with a bit of butter and black pepper ... potato perfection! But I digress.

Let’s dig into the research now.

National dietary intake data shows potatoes are the most commonly consumed vegetable. They make up about one-quarter of adult vegetable intake and about one-third of the vegetables eaten by children ages 2 to 19. Boys tend to eat more potatoes than girls.

We consume potatoes in many forms with boiled being most common (31 percent), followed by chips (22 percent), French fries (19 percent), baked (17 percent), and home fries or hash browns (12 percent).

Many people believe that eating potatoes, especially chips or French fries, contributes to excessive sodium intake, but just 4 percent of average national sodium intake comes from all starchy vegetables, including all forms of potatoes, corn, and other starchy vegetables.

Potatoes are good sources of potassium and dietary fiber, two “nutrients of concern” that most Americans don’t consume enough of each day. In terms of potassium per serving, potatoes top the list. They are also one of the Top 6 best sources of dietary fiber. From this dietitian’s point of view, potatoes are a nutrient-rich vegetable that deserve more respect.

So why are potatoes so maligned by some public health and nutri-

tion professionals? There are many studies that provide associations between obesity and potato intake — especially French fry intake. But associations do not provide direct evidence. You’re more likely to see umbrellas on rainy days, but that doesn’t mean umbrellas create rain. (If that were true, everyone in California would be carrying an umbrella!)

There are also studies that show associations between colon cancer risk and potato intake, but these same studies show inverse relationships between high fruit and vegetable intake and risk of colon cancer. So perhaps the potato isn’t to blame, but rather a lack of adequate fruit and vegetable intake.

And then there are the proponents of eating low-glycemic foods who claim potatoes increase blood sugar levels too quickly. The trouble with this data is that it doesn’t reflect how people actually eat potatoes. The data for my beloved red-skinned potatoes is based on potatoes that are boiled with skin on in salted water for 12 minutes. The addition of butter, olive oil, sour cream, or whatever else you may put on your potatoes, will change the glycemic impact as will the composition of the entire meal in which you are eating potatoes.

We should also talk about all the people who get upset about the fat and calories in French fries. Sure, potatoes fried in oil contain more calories than a similar portion of baked or boiled potatoes. But the caloric content of a single food shouldn’t be your focus. The overall calories and quality of your diet is much more important.

So, let’s get back to the initial question my client had. Are potatoes a vegetable? Yes. Do they deserve more respect? Definitely! But so does the dietary recommendation to make half your plate fruits and vegetables.

We have to stop vilifying certain foods and start celebrating produce in all forms. We have to focus on flavor and enjoyment. And we have to focus on the science. Scare tactics won’t help Americans get healthier, but positive messages based on research will help more Americans find their way to more fruits and vegetables, maybe even more red-skinned potatoes. **pb**



We have to stop vilifying certain foods and start celebrating produce in all forms. We have to focus on flavor and enjoyment. And we have to focus on the science.

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.



Millennials: Show Them You Know Them

BY ANNE-MARIE ROERINK, PRINCIPAL, 210 ANALYTICS

Millennials are now the largest shopper group in the United States, and their behaviors, beliefs and preferences have been dissected endless different ways. The second installment of the FMI *Power of Produce* contrasts Millennial behavior against that of other generations and finds some big differences throughout the path to purchase that provide important clues on how to best appeal to this demographic.

Atmospheric Influences

Millennials show a strong like for many of the specialty attributes or transparency callouts that can be found in the produce department: non-GMO, locally grown, natural and organic. Millennials are putting money where their mouths are by driving double-digit sales gains in both dollars and units and bolstering business at stores known for these specialty offerings.

For locally grown, Millennials, like all other generations, strongly believe in supporting their community and more freshness. But there is an important difference, too — the environment. Millennials are almost twice as likely to cite lesser environmental impact as a reason to buy locally sourced items than the oldest shopper group. Regarding organic, they believe better taste is almost as important as the perceived longer-term health benefits — placing the importance of taste well ahead of the other generations.

Good Bargains Outside The Circular

While paper continues to be an important way to connect with shoppers in general, Millennials are just as likely to look for promotions in-store as they are to look at the paper circular at the kitchen table. Millennials' propensity for using digital, social and mobile is evidenced in produce, often showing double, if not quadruple, usage figures for emails, apps, social media or other digital vehicles versus the Boomers.

Connecting with Millennials pre-trip with targeted solutions, meal ideas, recipes and more is a great way to secure the produce purchase and use it as a way to build the basket.

Capturing The Visit

Produce has long been a supermarket stronghold, but increasingly, alternative channels are picking at the produce share. This is particularly true for Millennials, who like shopping at supercenters, specialty stores and farmers markets and have no problem with ordering produce online or through meal kit delivery services. The scattered produce purchases of Millennials should be a red flag for traditional retailers, but may also be a way to cement their loyalty by offering a convenient online shopping platform, supported by their trusted primary produce department.

Attention-Grabbing Education, and Fun Displays

While price and promotions influence the purchase during pre-trip

planning, Millennials are very susceptible to impulse and point to eye-catching displays, recipe/serving ideas, nutrition callouts and sampling as drivers of unplanned produce purchases. They are much more interested to learn about the product, its origin and ways to prepare it. As such, education and information are two very important platforms to connect with these younger shoppers by using in-store and on-pack signage. Retailers should take advantage of this knowledge and provide personnel and materials that can help inform the Millennial shopper while they are in the department.

Entice Via Convenience, Freshness And Affordability

Convenience is a trend that cuts across all steps of the path to purchase: whether online list building or shopping, fixed-weight packages, microwave-ready items, pre-cut or washed value-added produce or complete dinner kits, convenience strikes a chord with busy shoppers. While Millennials emphasize preparation speed and like the idea of more fixed-weight packages, they are not the top takers of value-added produce. Price points and lack of perceived freshness are two important barriers for stores to overcome to grow this category among Millennials.

Growing The Mature Category

Fresh produce is a mature category, and driving growth requires innovative strategies aimed at moving shoppers into new usage occasions, new categories and to higher consumption frequencies. Millennials lag on the home-cooked number of meals that include fresh produce — in part because of their higher propensity to eat out. But they are looking to increase their fresh produce intake. Beyond the main meal occasions, growth can be driven through both snacking and juicing. Millennials are all about on-the-go and nutritious solutions, but also show a higher-than-average interest in some of the latest merchandising trends.

Unconventional Shopping Occasions

Greater variety is the No. 1 area for improving the produce department, according to shoppers. This is underscored by the call for a better variety of specialty items, including non-GMO, natural, organic, and local. The second is lower prices, in particular, everyday prices. Millennials show greater price sensitivity than older shoppers. Operational areas, including better quality/freshness, improved in-stock conditions, better cleanliness and having clearly-marked pricing is a third area. Keep in mind, Millennials often shop later in the day and may not encounter the most optimal of store conditions. Lastly, Millennials recommend improved shopper outreach and customer service, including sampling, a variety of recipes, available and knowledgeable produce associates, and cooking demonstrations. **pb**

The Power of Produce 2016 — Shopper research by the Food Marketing Institute, made possible by FMI Fresh Foods Leadership Council, Yerecic Label, Hill Phoenix, and conducted by 210 Analytics.

OUR HURRICANE MATTHEW

The question was asked:
Do you fear Hurricane Matthew?
A wry sigh.
A quiet laugh.
Don't you know I've lived with my own
private Hurricane Matthew for 13 years?

Children are like hurricanes — fearsome in their glory.
Unpredictable.

Our little joke:
After he was born, I waited ... but the
Instruction manual never came.

The paths of hurricanes are not easily predicted.
We've evacuated for 12 hurricanes, but only 2 have hit our area.

One never knows.

And yet...
Unpredictable as outcomes may be ...
They are still amenable to management.
We run from the winds ...
Or board up the building ...
Or accumulate food and water and medicine and fuel.
The unpredictable becomes manageable.



So we teach children
Techniques and values and disciplines.

Sometimes they resist.
Sometimes they blossom.

This Matthew, OUR Matthew,
Like a hurricane, goes his own path.

What can we do but pray?

Most people don't understand *bar mitzvah*.
They think it is a party.

But it is about taking on responsibility.

We cannot control the winds that blow,
And we cannot live in the future with our children.
Yet here they diverge, for a hurricane cannot choose.

But children can.
And they will.

A *bar mitzvah* is not mostly party.
It is about assuming responsibility.

It is about decisions carrying moral weight.

And parents, watching with pride,
At how something so unpredictable
Could be loved so much.

OCTOBER 2016

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Contact the advertiser directly via the website, email, or phone listed in the ad.

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
Advance Customs			
Brokers & Consulting	96	786-476-0700	advancecustomsbrokers.com
Agexport	141	502-242-3559	www.export.com.gt
AgriTrade Farms LLC	76	954-324-8877	www.agri-trade.net
Alamo Produce LLC	176	951-961-1295	www.alamoproduce.com
AllFresh GPS	146	616-606-0200	www.allfreshgps.com
Alpine Fresh	96	800-292-8777	www.alpinefresh.com
Altar Produce LLC	96	760-357-6762	www.altarproduce.com
Apio, Inc.	41	800-454-1355	www.apioinc.com
Argentinean			
Blueberry Committee	53		www.argblueberry.com
Asesorias Yentzen			
Consulting SpA	208-209		www.portalfruitcola.com
Associated Potato			
Growers, Inc.	126	800-437-4685	www.apgpsud.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	173	201-807-9292	www.auerpak.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	83	201-807-9292	www.auerpak.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	97	201-807-9292	www.auerpak.com
Auvil Fruit Company	150-151	509-784-1033	www.geewhfruit.com
Awe Sum Organics, Inc.	46	831-462-2244	www.awesumorganics.com
Ayco Farms, Inc.	96	954-788-6800	www.aycofarms.com
Babe Farms, Inc.	166	800-648-6772	www.babefarms.com
Philip Balsamo Company	46	630-575-8000	www.phillipbalsamo.com
Basciani Foods, Inc.	206	610-268-3044	www.bascianifoods.com
BJ Brothers Produce LLC	76	520-281-0260	
Black Gold Farms Inc.	127	701-792-3414	www.blackgoldfarms.com
Bloom Fresh	37	718-991-4700	www.bloomfreshproduce.com
Blue Book Services	205	630-668-3500	www.producebluebook.com
Borton & Sons Inc.	152	509-966-3905	www.bortonfruit.com
Brooks Tropicals	102	800-327-4833	www.brookstropicals.com
Jack Brown Produce, Inc.	148	616-887-9568	www.jackbrownproduce.com
California Giant Berry Farms	115	831-728-1773	www.calgiant.com
Canadian Produce Marketing Assoc.	14	613-226-4187	www.cpma.ca
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	48	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com
CarbAmericas	97	954-786-0000	www.carbamericas.com
Castle Rock Vineyards	100	661-721-8717	www.castlerockvineyards.com
Cavalier Gulling-Wilson Co. Inc.	90	216-431-2117	
John Cerasuolo Co., Inc.	14	800-875-8286	
Christopher Ranch	173	408-847-1100	www.christopheranch.com
Classic Yams	133	209-394-8656	www.classicyams.com
Coast To Coast Produce Co.	82	877-836-6295	www.ctcproduce.com
Columbia Marketing Intl	147	509-663-1955	www.cmapples.com
Community Suffolk, Inc.	86	617-389-5200	www.community-suffolk.com
Concord Foods	18	508-580-1700	www.concordfoods.com
Copexeu	41	54-11-4866-1135	
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	206	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com
The Cranberry Network LLC	160	715-422-0410	www.thecranberrynetwork.com
Crystal Valley Foods	97	800-359-5631	www.crystalvalleyfoods.com
Customized Brokers	97	305-471-8989	www.customizedbrokers.net
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	79	800-223-8080	www.darrigo.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce	220	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com
Des Moines			
Truck Brokers, Inc.	142	515-981-2156	www.dmtb.com
Dietz & Kolodenco	84	312-666-6320	www.cipmarketing.com
Diversified Distributors, Inc.	178	323-588-2000	
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	800-333-5454	www.dole.com
dProduce Man Software	36	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduceman.com
Duda Family Farms	101	561-804-1477	www.dudafresh.com
Dulcinea Farms	77	559-255-5400	www.dulcinea.com
Edinburg Citrus Association	95	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Edinburg Citrus Association	122	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Ethylene Control, Inc.	58	800-200-1909	www.ethylenecontrol.com
Eureka Specialties, Inc.	167	213-488-6470	www.eurekapecialties.com
Farmer's Daughter			
Consulting LLC	142		farmersdaughterconsulting.com
Feeding America	219	800-671-0088	www.hungeractionmonth.org
Fierman Produce Exchange	81	718-893-1640	
Fillmore-Piru Citrus Assoc.	120	805-521-1781	www.fpcitrus.com
First Fruit Marketing	144	509-853-4710	www.firstfruits.com
Florida Department			
of Agriculture	99	850-488-4303	www.freshfromflorida.com
The Florida			
Tomato Committee	50	407-894-3071	www.floridatomatoes.org
Fowler Farms	155	800-836-9537	www.fowlerfarms.com
Fox Packaging	68	956-682-6176	www.foxbag.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	38	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com
Fresh Produce Association			
of The Americas	165	520-287-2707	www.freshfrommexico.com
Fruit Distributing Corp.			
of California	178	323-780-1000	
Garber Farms	133	337-824-6328	www.garberfarms.com
The Garlic Company	173	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com
GenPro Transportation			
Services, Inc.	92	800-243-6770	www.genproinc.com
Georgia-Pacific	62		www.gppackaging.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	48	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	207	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com
Gourmet Specialty			
Imports LLC	172	610-345-1113	
Gourmet Specialty			
Imports LLC	167	610-345-1113	
Gurda Gardens, Ltd.	42	800-475-4732	
A. Gurda Produce Farms	88	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com
J. G. Hall's	126	701-894-6112	
Harris Consulting Solutions	70	269-903-7481	
Herbs Unlimited			
Coosemans Retail Group	167	305-545-5516	
Highline Mushrooms	207	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com
Honey Bear Brands	148	952-746-1314	www.honeybearbrands.com
House Foods America Corp.	109	714-901-4350	www.house-foods.com
I Love Produce LLC	172	610-869-4664	www.iloveproduce.com
Idaho Potato Commission	43	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail
Idaho-Eastern Oregon			
Onion Promotion Committee	15	888-466-4667	www.usaonions.com
Inline Plastics Corp.	65	800-826-5567	www.inlineplastics.com
Interruption Fair Trade	55	718-417-4076	www.tastemedogood.com
J & D Produce, Inc.	31	956-380-0353	
JAB Produce	84	312-226-7805	www.jabproducecompany.com

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
JM International Produce, Inc.	179	213-394-9564	
Johnston Farms	122	661-366-3201	www.johnstonfarms.com
S. Katzman Produce	35	718-991-4700	www.katzmanproduce.com
J.R. Kelly Company	36	888-344-4392	www.jrkelly.com
Kerian Machines, Inc.	129	800-551-5188	www.kerian.com
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	169	661-854-3156	www.kernridge.com
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	97	717-597-2112	www.keystonefruit.com
La Hacienda Brands, Inc.	91	312-243-2755	www.lahaciendabrand.com
Lakeside Organic Gardens	170	831-761-8797	www.lakesideorganic.com
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	19	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	122	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
Litehouse Foods, Inc.	108	800-669-3169	www.litehousefoods.com
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com
Mau Fresh International, LLC	176	520-281-2644	www.mau-fresh.com
Maverick Potato Co	138	719-754-3161	
Melissa's			
World Variety Produce, Inc.	166	800-468-7111	www.melissas.com
Michigan Apple Committee	156	800-456-2753	www.michiganapples.com
MIXTEC Group	68	818-541-0124	www.mixtec.net
MJB Sales, Inc.	206	610-268-0444	www.mjbsales.com
Monte Package Company	63	800-653-2807	www.montepkg.com
Muller Trading Co., Inc.	90	847-549-9511	www.mullertrading.com
NatureSweet Ltd.	59	210-408-8557	www.naturesweet.com
New Jersey Department			
of Agriculture	21	609-292-8853	www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov
New York			
Apple Association, Inc.	149	585-924-2171	www.nyapple.com
New York Apple Sales, Inc.	157	518-477-7200	www.newyorkapplesales.com
Nickey Gregory Company, LLC	183	404-366-7610	www.nickeygregory.com
Nokota Packers, Inc.	130	701-847-2200	www.nokotapackers.com
Northern Plains			
Potato Growers Assn.	128	218-773-3633	www.redpotatoes.net
Nuchief Sales, Inc.	154	509-663-2625	www.smittenapple.com
NY State Urban Development Corp.	27	212-612-3100	www.empire.state.ny.us
Olympic Wholesale			
Produce and Foods, Inc.	88	312-421-2889	www.olympicwholesale.com
Pacific Sun	177	213-621-2991	www.pacificsun@aol.com
Pasco Foods	9	512-956-7516	www.pasco-foods.com
Peri & Sons Farms	54	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	96	305-477-9906	www.theperishablespecialist.com
PET Tiger Software	113	800-656-9365	www.tigerjill.com
Phillips Mushroom Farms	44	800-722-8818	www.phillipsmushrooms.com
Jerry Porricelli Produce	85	718-893-6000	www.porricelli.com
Prime Time	117	760-399-4166	www.primetimeproduce.com
Proccaci Bros. Sales Corp.	40	800-523-4616	www.proccacibros.com
Produce for			
Better Health Foundation	161	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Produce Marketing Association	129	302-738-7100	www.pma.com
Produce Pro Software	112	630-395-9600	www.producepro.com
Produce Pro Software	45	630-395-9600	www.producepro.com
Progressive Produce	97	323-890-8100	www.produceproduce.com
Pure Hothouse Foods, Inc.	61	519-326-8444	www.pure-flavor.com
Rainier Fruit Company	153	509-697-6131	www.rainierfruit.com
Red Blossom Farms	17	805-981-1839	www.redblossom.com
RockHedge Herb Farm	166	845-677-6726	www.rockhedgeherbs.com
Schur Packaging Systems Inc.	67	847-312-2946	www.schurstarusa.com
Scott Farms, Inc.	133	919-284-4030	www.scottfarms.com
Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc.	16	559-535-6050	www.settonfarms.com
Sev-Rend Corp.	69	800-550-2566	www.sev-rend.com
Silver Creek Software	53	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
Skyline Potatoes	137	719-754-3484	www.jvsmithcompanies.com
Smitten	154	509-663-2625	www.smittenapple.com
Southern Produce			
Distributors, Inc.	133	800-866-YAMS	www.southern-produce.com
Southern Specialties	96	954-784-6500	www.southernspecialties.com
Southwind Farms	56	208-436-8164	www.southwindpotatoes.com
Spice World, Inc.	171	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Spice World, Inc.	25	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
Strube Celery &			
Vegetable Company	80	312-226-7880	www.strube.com
Sun Orchard Fruit Company	156	716-778-8544	www.sunorchardapples.com
Sun Pacific	105	213-612-9957	www.cutiescitrus.com
Sunkist Growers, Inc.	121	818-986-4800	www.sunkist.com
Sunshine Bouquet Co.	198-199	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	100	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Symms Fruit Ranch, Inc.	156	208-459-8064	www.symmsfruit.com
Tambo Sur	97	954-943-1572	www.tambosur.com
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	47	800-772-4542	www.taproduce.com
Taylor Farms	163	866-675-6120	www.taylorfarms.com
TC Marketing, Inc.	104	800-533-2116	www.tcmkt.com
Texas Citrus	95	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	49	803-691-8000	www.gotarples.com
To-jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc.	207	610-268-8082	www.to-jo.com
Topashaw Farms	133	662-682-7733	www.topashaw.com
Tropical Foods	204	704-602-0631	www.trulygoodfoods.com
Twist Ease	70	888-623-8390	www.twistease.com
Uesugi Farms, Inc.	76	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
Umina Bros., Inc.	179	805-488-6658	www.umina.com
United Fresh Produce Association	189	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Fresh Produce Association	20	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	200-201	800-306-1071	www.usabouquet.com
V & L Produce Inc.	176	323-589-3125	www.vlproduce.com
John Vena, Inc.	89	215-336-0766	www.johnvena.com
Vick Family Farms	133	252-291-8880	www.vickfamilyfarms.com
Village Farms	39	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
Vlam Flandria	57	32 2 720.05.17	www.freshfrombelgium.eu
Volm Bag Company, Inc.	71	800-253-4737	www.volmcompanies.com
Wada Farms Marketing Group	75	208-542-2898	www.wadafarms.com
Western Fresh Marketing	100	559-662-0301	www.westernfreshmarketing.com
Wholesum Family Farms	213	520-281-9233	www.wholesumharvest.com
Wonderful Company	23	661-720-2500	www.wonderful.com
Wonderful Company	5	661-720-2500	www.wonderful.com
Wonderful Company	7	661-720-2500	www.wonderful.com
Wonderful Company	11	661-720-2500	www.wonderful.com
J. Roland Wood Produce	133	919-894-2318	www.jrwoodfarms.com
Yakima Fresh LLC	145	800-541-0394	www.yakimafresh.com
Zespri International	34	650-368-2870	www.zesparikiwi.com/retail
Kurt Zuhlke & Association	66	800-644-8729	www.producepackaging.com



BRAND BUILDER

It takes a team to capture and archive 90 years of business ventures and achievements — that’s just what A. Duda & Sons has in place to keep the company’s history safe and organized.

“We have a family council that archives information about founders and generations — or ‘Senior Dudas’ as we call them,” says Dan Duda, president of Oviedo, FL-based Duda Farm Fresh Foods and fourth generation Duda.

This picture, taken in the early 1940s of a celery harvest, showcases an important process that supports the backbone of the company’s success.

At the time, the celery was cut by hand and put into wooden crates labeled with A. Duda & Sons - Slavia stamped on the side. “Slavia was where the Senior Dudas settled for their homestead,” says Dan. “It was 40 acres of land, and Slavia is located just outside in Oviedo — about 5 miles from today’s corporate office.”

After loading celery from the field, product entered the packinghouse where workers would wash, grade and sort celery; and then pack it, pre-cool and ship.

The company is truly diverse and vertically integrated with a ranching, citrus processing, cattle, sugar cane, sod, and even real estate development. The company actually built the city of Viera, FL, which is currently home to more than 10,700 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

“We often say: ‘The family keeps growing, so we have to keep growing the business,’” jokes Dan. “In the 1940s, we were basically a regional Florida supplier of vegetables. If we were going to be competitive, then we needed product year-round. That [mission] brought us to [start an operation in] California.”

Dan says one of the keys to the company’s early success was diversifying its asset base. “We had all assets tied up in land. Now

we have income-producing properties, ag properties for farming, and income from lease payments.”

The company has a four-pillar structure for its business and subsidiaries: A. Duda & Sons is the parent company; Duda Farm Fresh Foods for fresh produce; Duda Ranches for citrus, sod, cattle, sugar cane; and The Viera Company for home building and commercial development in its privately developed city of Viera in Brevard County, which began about 25 years ago.

Another shifting point was development of unique and proprietary seed varieties. “More than 170 years of seed breeding research goes into our seed development,” says Dan. “About 15 years ago, we made a change; we wanted to approach seed development through the tactics of flavor, taste, and texture profile — the attributes favorable to consumers.”

Dan mentions a third element that contributed to the company’s achievements since the photo was taken. “Today we can utilize Nielsen and IRI retail scan data to understand consumer demand within the retail space. We mapped our customer base according to the eight geographic regions Nielsen maps in terms of retail scan data, so we can see how our product is selling. We never had the understanding in earlier years.”

Along with diversification of the company’s asset base and with the help of modern technologies, the Duda properties are poised for continued advancement.

“We feel privileged to have made it to a fourth generation [family business],” says Dan. “There are about 3 percent of family businesses in the produce industry that make it to fourth generation. We feel fortunate and blessed that the family is still committed to the produce industry by flourishing and growing as we celebrate 90 years in business.”

pb



1 in 5 children faces hunger.

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