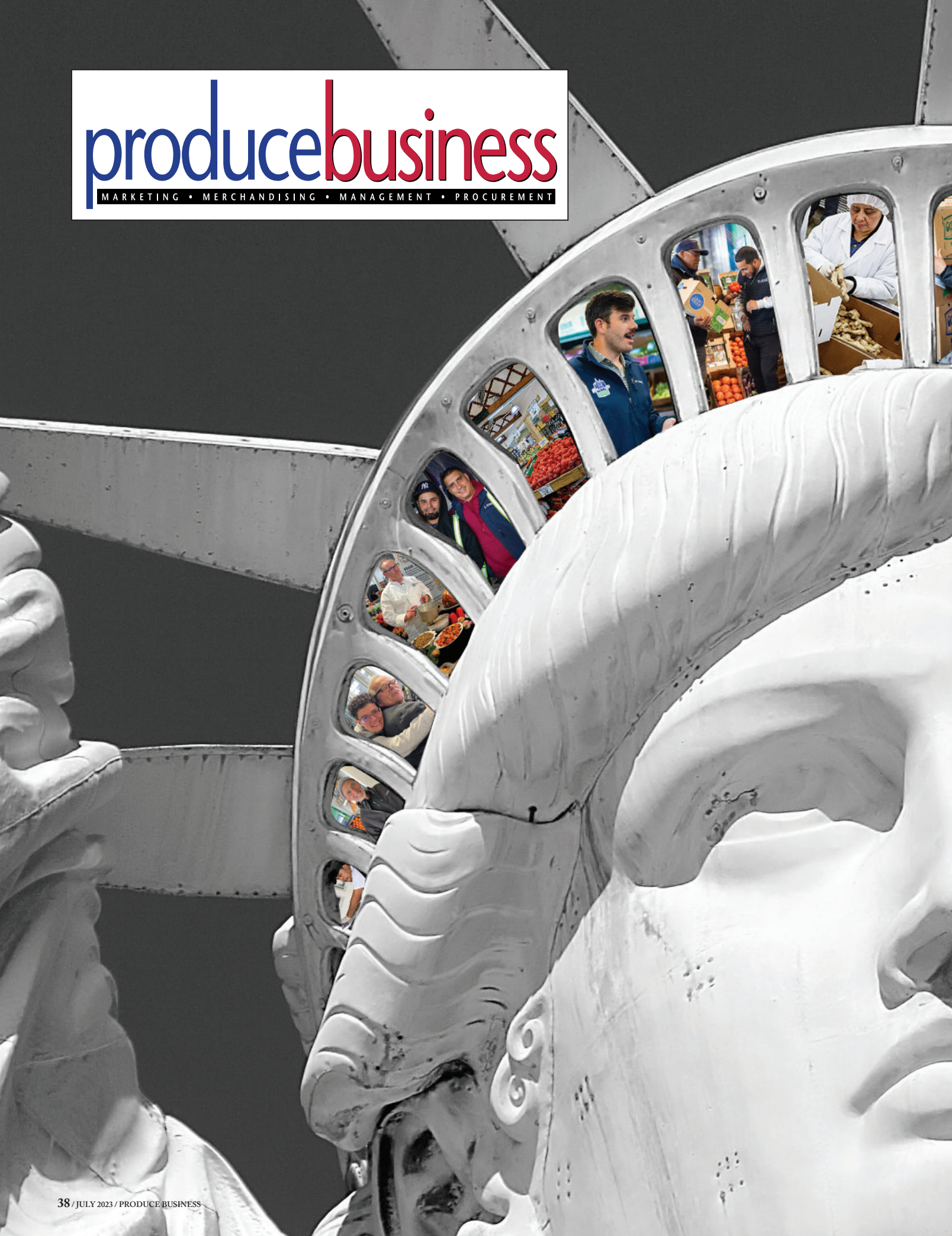


# producebusiness

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# **NEW YORK MARKET PROFILE**

## **LAND OF OPPORTUNITY**

To the relief of customers looking for the best quality and value of produce — whether it is local, regional, international, organic or processed — wholesalers and distributors on and off the Hunts Point Market provide opportunities to shop intelligently.

But when it comes down to providing real value, seasonal market information and long-standing relationships with both growers and customers are what makes this Land of Opportunity unique.



# Hunts Point Produce Market Shifts to Serve

WITH MAJOR RENOVATIONS PLANNED, THE MARKET'S WHOLESALERS CONCENTRATE ON INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDED SERVICES.

BY MIKE DUFF

**A**s the crises of the past few years reduce from boil to simmer, labor, transportation, weather and rising costs continue to weigh on operations at New York City's Hunts Point Produce Market, part of the city-owned Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. But the market is seeing a consistency of business.

Retail traffic is always a matter of concern, as wholesalers contend that larger operators fail to realize the potential of the market to help them deal with the ebb and flow of demand as it proceeds throughout the year with different buying opportunities. Whether it is holidays, growing seasons or even the shift of different cooking styles or reasons to cook outside or indoors, the Hunts Point market is the hub for those seeking opportunity buys and best fill-in options.

At the same time, infrastructure continues to be a consideration as the market gathers



The Hunts Point Produce Market plays a critical role in New York, supplying 25% of all the city's produce, or 900 million pounds annually.

support for major renovations. The Hunts Point Produce Market, in its longtime Bronx location, continues to pursue funds to renovate or even completely rebuild the facility.

"We have been very fortunate," says Phillip Grant, Hunts Point Market chief executive. "We now have city, federal, and, in the latest round of funding, about \$130 million from Gov. Hochul. It's a solid start."

The funding promises have come from a number of sources, including a pledge of \$100 million made by New York City Mayor Eric Adams more than a year ago, which now has been boosted by a \$130 million offer from New York Gov. Kathy Hochul.

"Now, we have to go back to the federal government and shake the tree," Grant says. "We have about \$370 million committed



Part of the E. Armato Produce team: Mike Marrello, Nick Armata, Chris Armata, Paul Armata, John "Ackie" Acompora, Michael Armata, Arthur DePinto and Steve Koster.



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right now. The goal is to outpace rising costs.”

To turn the pledges into funds and work on the market will require an environmental review, which is on tap for the fall of 2025. Although the situation remains fluid, the market is working to secure more funding pledges.

Grant says it is premature to speculate on just what projects the money will bring and how extensive work will be. It's better, he says, to get the money flowing and, when the market knows just what it has on hand, make the determinations about where to start and how extensive the project should be. However, he says the project will be apportioned so wholesalers can continue to operate while work is ongoing.

“It's definitely going to be phased from the east side, working our way west, and we will figure out the rest,” he says, based on what can be accomplished with the funding received. “We will try to keep everyone in business and feed the New York region without disruption.”

Market improvements continue, however. The city opened a highway ramp to the market and surrounding neighborhood that has gained general praise for making access faster. A cool roof is being installed in phases, lighting upgrades are underway, and rail improvements adjacent to Building D are being pursued.

A healthy Hunts Point Market serves the



Because Hunts Point Produce Market has constant availability from multiple growers at all times, retailers can use the market both as a full-time source or to supplement other sources.

region and the nation, but to do so, it requires 21st-century infrastructure to remain effective, says Gabriela D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo New York. She adds, however, it's not certain how much or when funding will finally arrive, which affects how the wholesalers on the market can plan for the future.

### CRITICAL ROLE IN NY ECONOMY

The Hunts Point Produce Market plays a critical role in New York, supplying 25% of all the city's produce, or 900 million pounds

annually. The independent, single-store and small chain supermarkets that use the market consistently understand the opportunities it represents.

“I have a buyer who goes from house to house every night to find me the best product at the best price,” says Zeke Kreitner, chief produce officer, at Seasons, Flushing, NY, an operation with five neighborhood supermarkets and an Express convenience store currently in operation. “I always get good product.”



Some of the Trucco team joined representatives from Camposol recently. From left to right: Bruno Giribaldi from Camposol; Nick Pacia from Trucco; Sergio Torres, Camposol; Tony Biondo, Trucco; Armando Rojas, Camposol; John Magna, Trucco.



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The way Seasons shops the market was once the standard operating procedure for retailers in the New York area, but contract buying and electronic links have made dock-walking retail produce buyers rare. Yet, the smaller independent solitary or multi-unit operators can use Hunts Point as a resource to compete with their bigger rivals by offering consistently higher quality fruits and vegetables.

Marc Goldman, produce director at Morton Williams, a family-owned and operated food retailer of 15 stores in New York metropolitan area, says the market is changing, with delivery becoming more common. Since the pandemic, wholesalers are making more deliveries and adding trucks, which establishes closer relationships.

However, Goldman continues to like the hands-on approach. “I have a buyer there I talk to every day,” he says. “Ultimately, it’s up to the buyer, buying quality first, then taking in the price.”

Market Basket, a two-store gourmet food market and catering company in Franklin Lake, NJ, regards the Hunts Point Market as an advantage for similar reasons, the ability to have a buyer on the docks multiple times per week to purchase quality first for its middle-class to affluent customer base.

Zachary Chernalis, chief operating officer and part of the family that founded and runs Market Basket, spent a year on the Hunts Point market as its produce buyer, which has given him an appreciation for the operations.

Market Basket has arrangements with different houses on the market, but the wholesalers it works with know Chernalis is looking for the best quality they offer, and they deliver for him.



Market wholesalers are in a position to help retailers try new products or work at the margins when seasonal items peak.

## Wholesalers on the Hunts Point Produce Market give retailers greater flexibility of product assortments.

### RETAILERS TAP INTO MARKET EXPERTISE

The market merchants endured recent turmoil during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 labor strike, supply chain challenges, and inflation. D’Arrigo is one who says current business trends are not so much a return to normalcy, as compared to pre-pandemic times, but a turn toward stability, with the typical ups and downs of the dynamic produce business.

“It’s trying to maintain consistency and being able to service the customers,” she says, “working through the challenges our suppliers have been going through. Most of it is weath-

er-related, frankly, and labor-related, which is the story of the produce industry’s life.”

“We have the ability to be flexible with all these things, which is the advantage of being a wholesaler,” she adds. “We don’t have contracts with customers some other people have, so we have the ability to be flexible and agile, which is a huge benefit.”

The market can function as a place where retailers can build out their selection of produce based on availability and occasion. Because it has constant availability from multiple growers at all times, retailers can use it both as a full-time source or to supplement other sources.

“It is incredibly important, and it’s always going to be important,” D’Arrigo says.

Larger retailers, which lean heavily on contracted product, don’t necessarily look at the wholesale market and its function as central to their way of doing business today, but D’Arrigo says that’s overlooking a prime



Charlie DiMaggio, FresCo



Michael Cochran, Robt. T. Cochran & Co



Stefanie Katzman and Robert Katzman, S. Katzman Produce





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Left to right: Brian, Gabriela and Peter D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo New York.

advantage: The ability to adapt and balance assortments based on holidays and broader promotional opportunities that occur through the year.

"We're here to help the retailer," says Michael Armata of E. Armata Inc. "We're here to make it easier for the retailer."

For example, market wholesalers are in a position to help retailers try new products or work at the margins when seasonal items peak. Armata says wholesalers can be providers and even advisers, given their broad perspective. "We can show them all the different options," he says. "We're very aware of what's going on."

Among its recent updates, E. Armata recently installed a more efficient warehousing system, using RF (radio frequency) scanner guns to better track inventory,

When things get complicated and retailers see an opportunity escaping, they may turn to the wholesale market for support. However, wholesalers consider relationships to be critical and can't readily prioritize occasional purchasers, D'Arrigo says. Rather, maintaining relationships with wholesalers puts both parties in a position to appropriately respond to changing conditions.



Left to right: Dillon, Gianna and Michael D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo New York.



The Armata Team



“What we’ve really focused on over the years is the relationship and the support we’re giving our customers and our farmers,” says Stefanie Katzman, executive vice president, S. Katzman Produce.

She likes to use an accordion analogy. “We can expand and take as much product as our farmers need us to take, and we can shrink down and piece out the product in small amounts for retailers, to keep everyone in the mix when there is not enough to go around.”

Katzman says a lot of retailers are used to purchasing produce based on data flowing through their computers, which sometimes works fine. Yet, people who follow the numbers aren’t necessarily produce experienced, which can present a problem when a bad year for a commodity is followed by a good year. So, price might have been up the year before because of weather, and now the

buyer is only purchasing what the company sold the year before — and is missing out on an opportunity.

At Rubin Bros. Produce Corp, Vice President Cary Rubin says beyond the difficulties of the past few years, the produce business is inherently challenging, with conditions always changing. However, he notes that wholesalers have a role — and can have a bigger role — helping retailers deal with a constantly shifting marketplace.

He says the main opportunity for the market is doing business with the smaller retailers. “The market is the place where

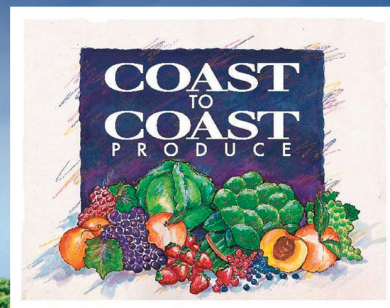
smaller independents have a chance to be competitive with the bigger stores,” Rubin says. “That’s especially because we’re in the tri-state area, the part of the country that has the most mid-range and small-range independents. This market provides opportunities for the smaller businesses to thrive, to do as well as, and even better, on price.”

And price matters these days, says Peter Faraci, buyer/sales manager at Coosemans New York.

“Customers are definitely becoming more price conscious,” he says, adding that quality and customer service are equally as important.



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"The pandemic showed us we needed to strive and pull ahead more than ever on customer service," Faraci notes, adding customer service is constantly "changing and reshaping Coosemans New York. Deliveries and set-ups are almost an industry standard, and every time we open new accounts, that is the first question they ask."

Nick Pacia, Trucco chief executive, says the year has presented various opportunities for growth. "The labor shortage has

eased somewhat, efforts are being made to manage transportation costs effectively, and the sector remains adaptable in mitigating the impact of extreme weather events," he explains. "Overall, these challenges are driving innovation and resilience within the industry."

Although prices have some pressure on demand, Pacia says the outlook remains fair.

Trucco has a foodservice team and has been making investments to make sure it can

satisfy customers, particularly as food safety guidance and regulations come into play. The company also is seeing a shift in customer requirements.

"Our customer interactions are changing a little bit," he says. "Phone and text messaging are playing a more significant role. Delivery requests are rising, and we're expanding our services to meet the demand. Adapting to changing needs is critical to serving our customers better."

## CONTRACT CONUNDRUM

Although major retailers will continue contracting large amounts of their produce, Katzman says disruption in certain markets can make set deals less effective.

"Just in time" is losing some attractiveness, and "just in case" has become a more attractive concept. The ability to tap terminal markets as a way to balance contract purchasing should be reconsidered by any retailer willing to concede that produce is not a wholly predictable business, Katzman says.

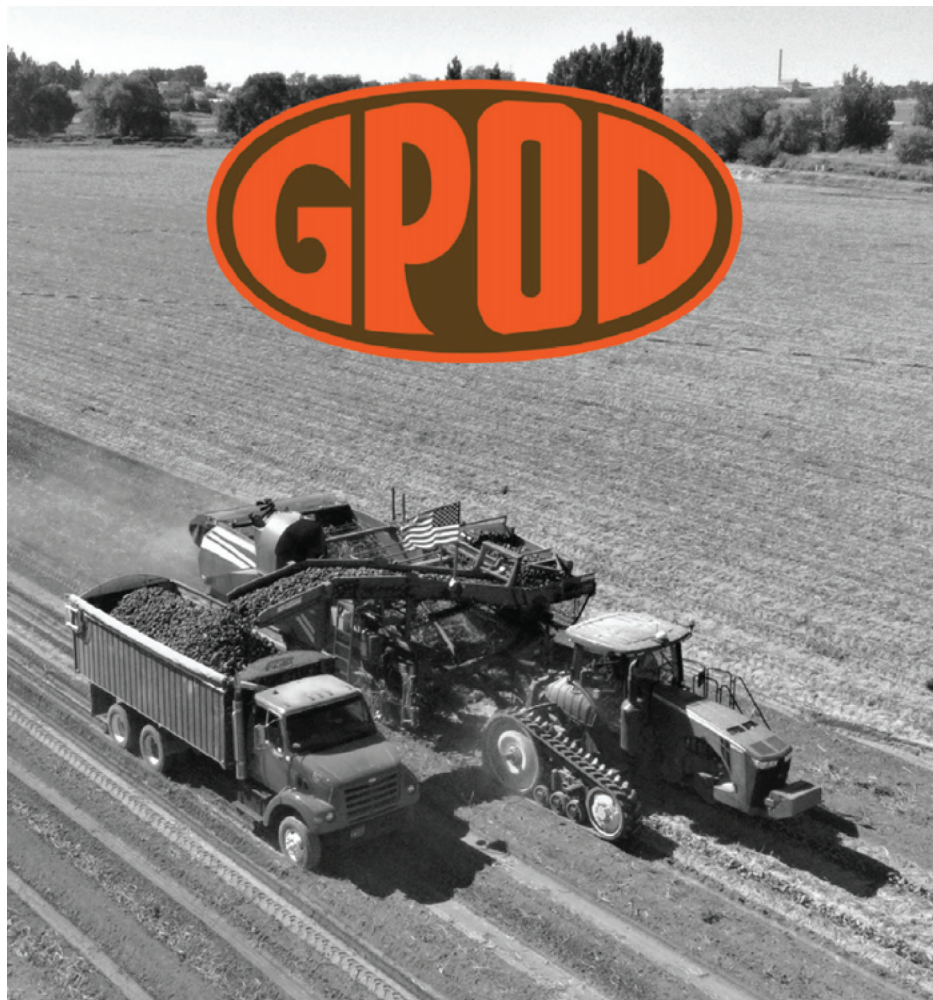
Yet, she points out, "just in case" is not the same as "just in an emergency."

"You might see less contracting with farmers because they don't want to fall down on a contract, and they don't know how much product they're going to get," Katzman says. "Because we've had such tight and high markets, you have some growers who aren't interested in contracting as much as they used to. Every farmer handles it a little bit differently, depending on their crop and the amount of risk they want to take. I don't think one way is right or wrong. I think you need a combination of the two when you're a big retailer."

The retailer may want to buy direct because it can make sense to a given operation. However, Katzman says, she can't turn her business upside down for a retailer who is facing short supply if it doesn't at least do some regular business with the company.

"What are they going to come in for? They're going to come in for the tight items," she explains. "That's no good because everyone wants the tight items, and we have to take care of our regular customers."

"Our customers understand this is a long-term relationship. I don't need all of their order, but they need to buy a little every day to keep us as strong, so I can carry that extra volume when they do need it, and so that it's fair, and they're not just picking me off on the tight, hot items, and I can give them product when they need it," she says.



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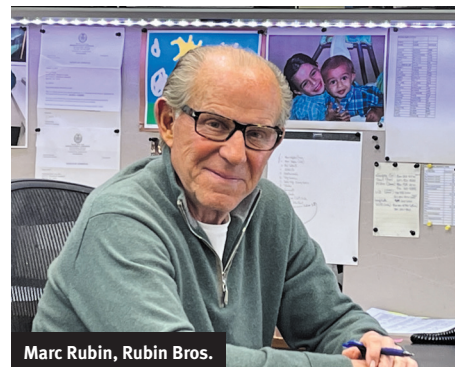




Matthew D'Arrigo, D'Arrigo New York



Joel Fierman, Fierman Produce Exchange



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## AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Charlie DiMaggio, president, FresCo, notes his company's main concerns are labor availability, customer preferences, and the evolving market.

"To tackle these concerns, we are actively searching for skilled workers to join our team. Additionally, we closely monitor customer demands to ensure we meet their expectations. We also adapt our strategies to stay competitive in the evolving market landscape. It's a continuous effort to address these concerns and remain successful."

Finding skilled workers who are willing to work in this industry "can be tough," DiMaggio admits.

The way of doing business at the market has changed significantly, and technology is playing a role, he adds. A consequence, however, is the need to accommodate customers more.

"A smaller proportion of customers still come to the market, but more are relying on phone calls and newer technologies like online ordering or even texting," says DiMaggio. "Delivery requests have also increased, and we are working to accommodate them by expanding our delivery services."

At A&J Produce, how business is conducted has evolved and, even if some older practices remain, the application of technology is more important than ever.

"Everything we have is scanned," says Stephanie Tramutola, A&J accounts payable and social media coordinator. "We're fully on Produce Pro [software]. We used to be everything pen to paper. Now, everything is at our fingertips."

The application of technology to food safety has also been part of A&J's refit of its warehouse space. About 70% of the warehouse is now refrigerated, which ensures the facility can maintain the cold chain as product moves through the operation. The upgrade anticipates the importance of certifications and, potentially, regulations as they become a bigger part of wholesale operations.



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Dennis Hong, Matthew Park and Stephen Botnick, of C&J Brothers Inc.

Tramutola says the company is hoping when its food safety review comes up in September, the upgrades to the facility will get due consideration. “Our grade was high before, but we’re hoping to score even higher than we did last year,” she says.

The addition of technology has been something C&J Brothers has been pursuing for some time, and it has added a new system that’s up to the latest standards in place. “Now we’re more precise with our numbers,” Matthew Park, the company’s chief executive says.

He describes current business as “steady,” with a consistency that allows wholesalers to move forward with initiatives and plans.

### SHIFTING GEARS

D’Arrigo notes market merchants need to be ready for increased food safety scrutiny “that’s going to be enforced on distributors and wholesalers as a whole.”

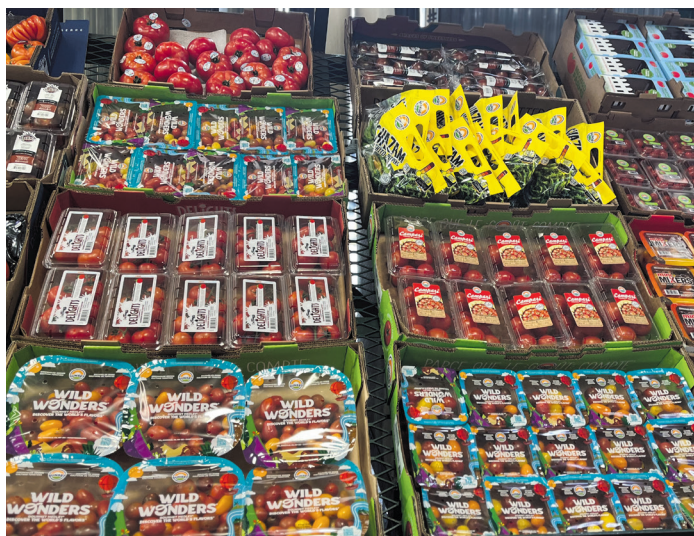
“The way that we’re structured here as wholesale food distributors, there’s no cookie-cutter plan of attack or strategy.”

Retailers and growers both have been navigating guidelines and regulations, and often times they have their own initiatives, which focus on factors such as food safety and sustainability.



Danny Imwalle, Top Banana





Hunts Point Produce Market wholesalers have a role — and can have a bigger role — helping retailers deal with a constantly shifting marketplace.



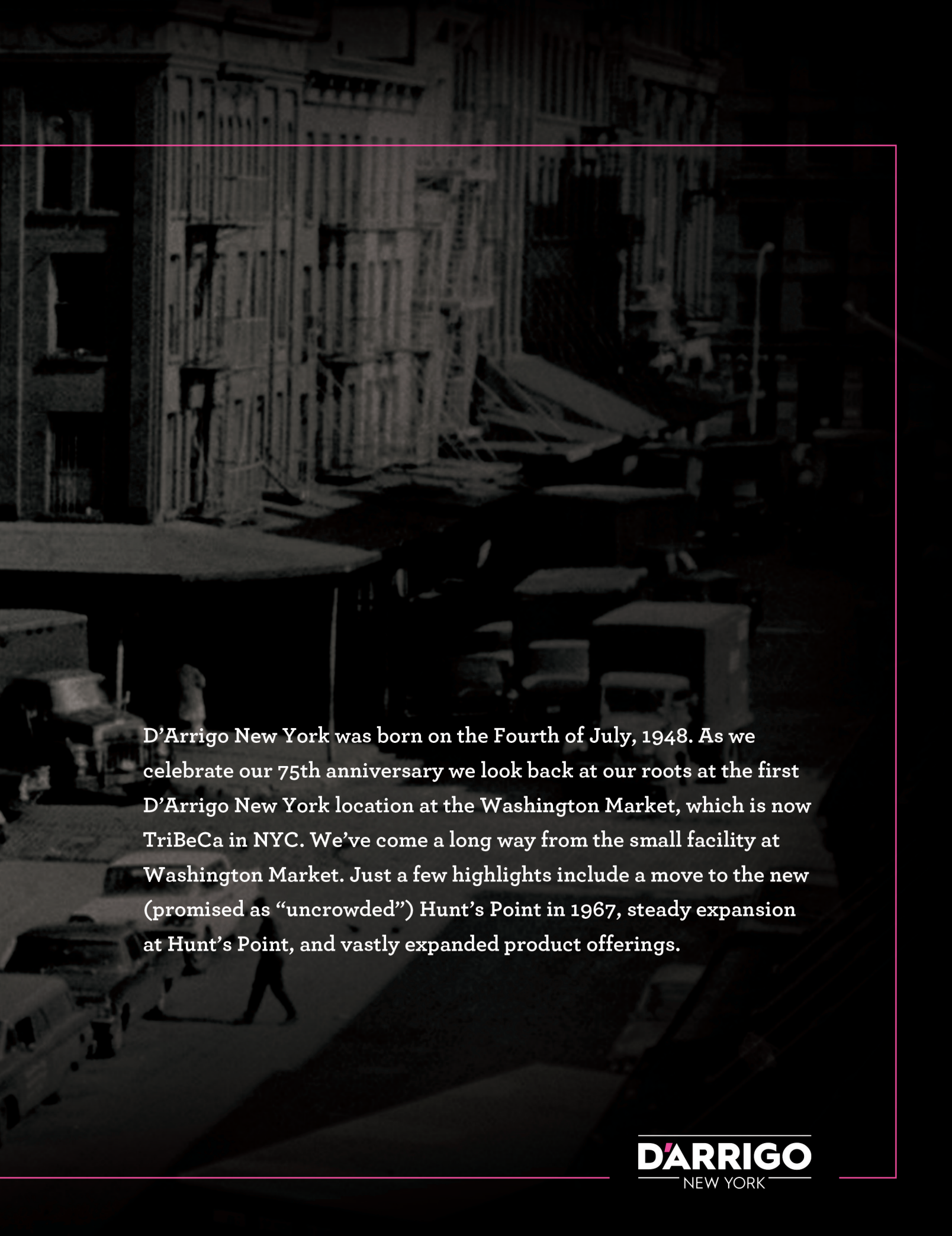


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D'Arrigo New York was born on the Fourth of July, 1948. As we celebrate our 75th anniversary we look back at our roots at the first D'Arrigo New York location at the Washington Market, which is now TriBeCa in NYC. We've come a long way from the small facility at Washington Market. Just a few highlights include a move to the new (promised as "uncrowded") Hunt's Point in 1967, steady expansion at Hunt's Point, and vastly expanded product offerings.





The goals aren't the problem for wholesalers, D'Arrigo says. What concerns her is that models developed for other sectors will be imposed on wholesalers, even if the fit isn't very good.

"I don't know how they will impose a lot of what they deem to be logical regulation, and still depend on us to be the solution for stability when the other markets are unstable," she says. "Our input is never asked for. This is what retail does; this is what foodservice does; this is what growers do; so you can do it. We're never asked."

D'Arrigo says industry organizations provide some support, but other sectors pull more weight than does the wholesale part of the food business. As such, wholesalers wind up having to deal with initiatives that don't really apply to how it does business, and that situation is looming.

At Coosemans New York Inc., food safety has always been important, emphasizes Charlie Badalamenti, operations manager. "We are proud to be one

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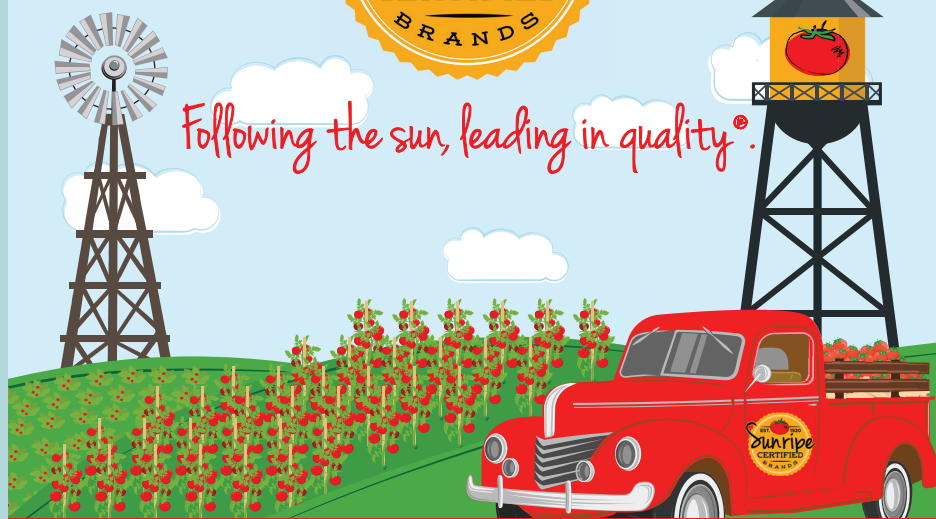
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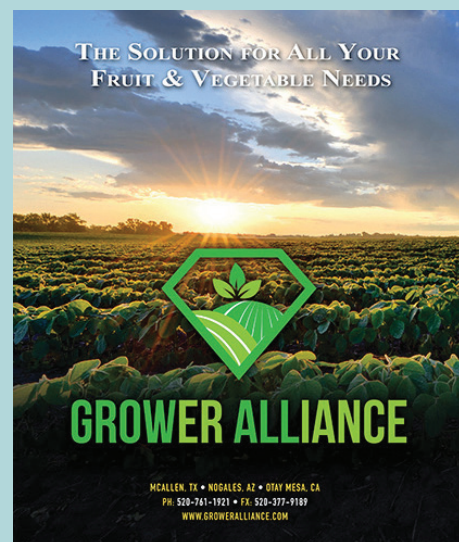


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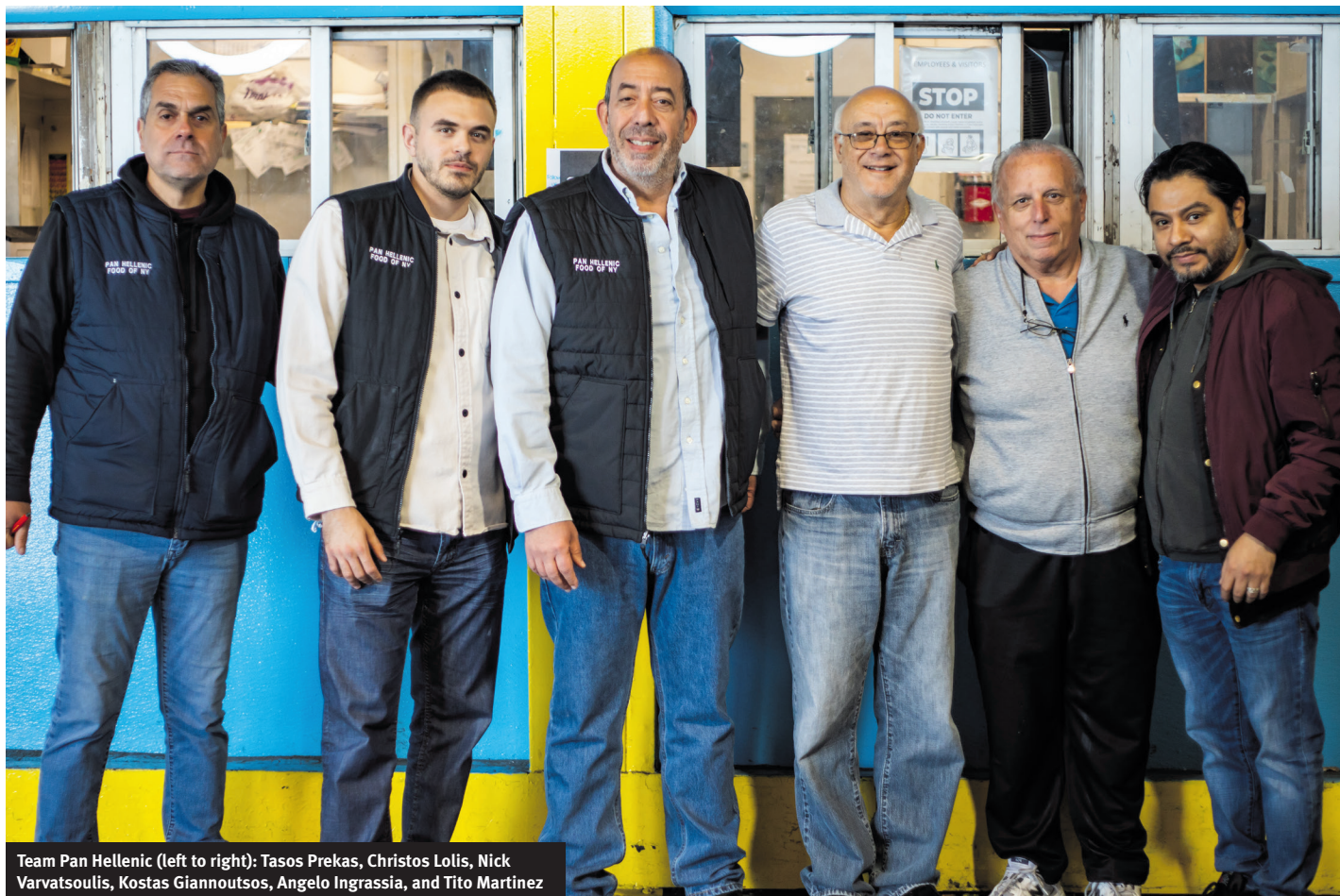
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Team Pan Hellenic (left to right): Tasos Prekas, Christos Lolis, Nick Varvatsoulis, Kostas Giannoutsos, Angelo Ingrassia, and Tito Martinez



Current business trends at the Hunts Point Produce Market aren't a return to normalcy, as compared to pre-pandemic times, but a turn toward stability, with the typical ups and downs of the dynamic produce business.





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Team Trucco



of the first to implement a certified food safety program well before it was required by customers or the industry.”

Badalamenti adds that food safety policies have been heightened across the board since the pandemic and also the implementation of the FDA's final rules regarding the Food Safety Modernization Act. “We continue to adapt and comply with new food safety standards year after year.”

Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce Exchange, says at a pivotal point in the operation of the market, it might be best to reconsider just how the business has changed, why it has changed and what could be a way to reposition the market both for the customers who still shop it regularly and those who are less inclined to do so. He also

suggests closer coordination and information-sharing among market merchants.

More retailers should be buying on the market, Fierman says, and consideration should be given to what they need to return on a regular basis.

“If I was a buyer, I would take advantage of this market like there was no tomorrow,” Fierman says, “because if you don't take advantage of it, you're foolish.”

Although the Hunts Point Produce Market isn't shopped the way it used to be, Stefanie Katzman says relationships have shifted, rather than lapsed. In the past, the big chain supermarkets would shop more in the market and do a little more opportunity buying. Today, she explains, the market continues to have an opportunity to build

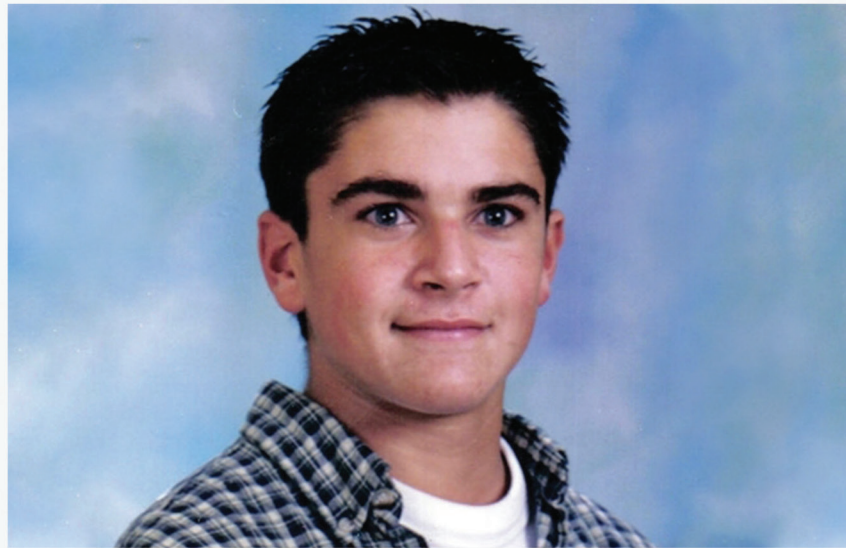
sales with the strong contingent of independent grocers operating across the New York metro area.

Independent supermarkets don't have their own distribution centers, Katzman explains. “The market acts as their distribution centers. We'll deliver to some of them four or five days a week, which allows them to have fresh product on their shelves each day. They don't have to worry about storing it. They don't have to build a cooler.”

Some smaller stores might have smaller staff, or might not have a produce manager, she adds, and buying on the market lets them rely on the expertise of a wholesaler who has different products and information.

“We're doing that all day long. We're talking to hundreds of farmers, not just in





*Louis J. Acompora died on March 25, 2000 from a condition known as commotio cordis, which resulted from a blow to his chest while playing lacrosse during his first high school game. He was only 14 years old.*

# BE AWARE. BE PREPARED.

## Undetected and Unexpected Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is Claiming our Youth

Cardiovascular disease is the second leading medical cause of death in children and adolescents in the United States. Data estimates that 1 in 300 youth have an underlying heart condition that could lead to sudden cardiac arrest. Affected youth usually appear healthy and normal...until they have an arrest. The good news is that early detection is possible. Heart conditions are treatable and young lives can be saved. Knowledge of the observations and actions that can make the difference between life and death is key to a successful outcome.

Early detection is crucial. The Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation promotes the early detection of heart conditions in youth through heart screenings. Frequently, the warning signs and symptoms of a heart condition in youth go undetected. Look for screenings in your area [www.parentheartwatch.org](http://www.parentheartwatch.org). The increased availability of publicly

### These steps will save a life. Please take the time to know them and learn CPR.

#### 1 Early Recognition

- Collapsed and unresponsive
- Seizure-like activity
- Gaspings, gurgling, snoring or labored breathing noises

#### 2 Early Access to 9-1-1

- Call 9-1-1 and follow emergency dispatcher's instructions

#### 3 Early CPR

- Begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately

#### 4 Early Defibrillation

- Immediately retrieve and use an automated external defibrillator (AED) as soon as possible to restore the heart to its normal rhythm

#### 5 Early Advanced Care

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responders begin advanced life support including additional resuscitative measures and transfer to a hospital

accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools and at school-sponsored athletic events will dramatically increase the probability that youth and adults alike will survive a sudden cardiac arrest. Knowing and properly executing the critically time-urgent links of the Cardiac Chain-of-Survival can help save a life.

Along with increased accessible AEDs and implementing Emergency Action planning protocols, preparedness will be greatly improved. In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all New York public schools. To date 114 lives have been saved as a direct result of this law. Each time a vibrant, seemingly healthy child suffers a SCA, the Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation mission of protecting youth from SCA and preventable Sudden Cardiac

Death (SCD) becomes even more critical. We know it happens and we need to collectively ensure others realize it by sharing our mission and vision.







How business is conducted on the Hunts Point Produce Market has evolved and, even if some older practices remain, the application of technology is more important than ever.

## Hunts Point Produce Market can help with a mix of product needed to satisfy demand that is becoming more fragmented.

the United States, but around the world. And we're collecting all this information on all the crops, all the weather conditions, all the production, and we're summarizing it and giving them little CliffNotes versions and helping them run their business. It's about the partnership with the retailers."

The arrangement is good for growers, too, because a direct shipment to 10 small stores is expensive, she adds. "In that way, the market can serve retailers who might otherwise generate too much shrink, while at the same time protecting the shippers' brands."

"We bring product from many different growers," Katzman says. "Why do we do this? Because where we're located with our dense population and our multicultural diverse population here in New York, we need to because customers want it."

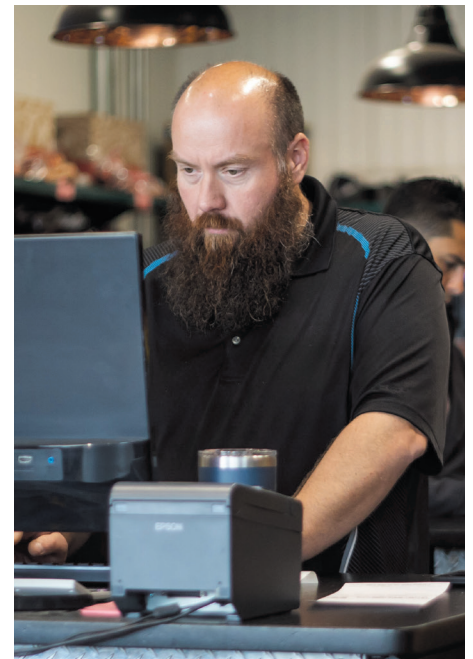
"The benefit of working with a wholesaler



is we deal with so many growers, but then we also deal with so many retailers, so we can keep that product coming in more frequently and keep it fresher."

The market also can help with the mix of product needed to satisfy demand that is becoming more fragmented, she adds.

"It's not just people who are vegans, vegetarians, organic purchasers, or who eat a



particular ethnic cuisine all or much of the time," Katzman says. "It's about wellness and, increasingly, the idea of food as medicine; it's people looking to support their local economies and growers; people who want a steady stream of just about every kind of produce year-round; and those who are deliberately following seasonal produce because they want to be more in tune with what is natural." **pb**



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# NYC Region's Food Security is Tied to the Future of Hunts Point Produce Market

Where do most New Yorkers get their fresh produce? Odds are it comes through the Hunts Point Produce Market, a wholesale produce market located in Bronx, NY. Fresh produce is delivered to the market each day via plane, train, boat, and tractor-trailer from 49 states and 55 countries.

The Hunts Point Produce Market plays an essential role in New York City and the region's food supply chain, and the city — as well as market administration and merchants — is working to ensure it remains a vital resource. The challenge is to chart a path toward critical modernization and redevelopment, while meeting ongoing food demands, increasing food security measures, and reducing the market's environmental impact.

To get an update on the market, **PRODUCE BUSINESS** recently spoke with Phillip Grant, chief executive of the Hunts Point Produce Market.

**Q. Can you please give us a bird's-eye view of what happens in a typical 24-hour period at Hunts Point? For example, how many truckloads, pallets, cases, etc. of produce come in and out of the market in a given day?**

**GRANT:** Every year, more than 210 million packages of produce pass through the market, thanks to some of the most streamlined logistics in the business. Our stock is handled with care to ensure the highest degree of food safety.

Soon after produce reaches our merchants,

**“As technologies to optimize food freshness and safety have advanced, so has the market.”**

it makes its way to wholesalers, retailers, independent grocers, restaurateurs, and more, across the five boroughs and beyond. As technologies to optimize food freshness and safety have advanced, so has the market. Hunts Point keeps up with innovations that allow us to operate at the speed and scale necessary to serve one of the largest cities in the world.





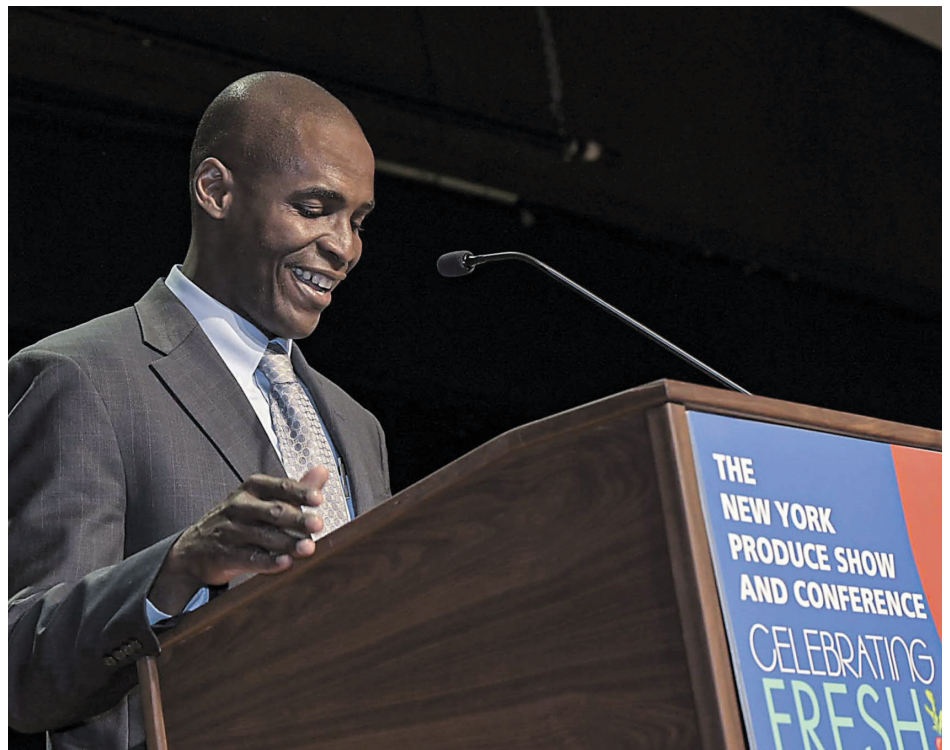
**Q. One of the overall themes of this year's Market Profile is the fact that Hunts Point offers many opportunities to shrewd buyers looking for the best prices and quality during holidays and seasonal changes. Can you speak to ways the Hunts Point market facilitates these opportunity buys?**

GRANT: From locally farmed fruits and vegetables to international specialties, Hunts Point offers a fresh array of competitively priced produce to meet all our customers' needs. Our expert merchants are here to serve the neighborhood shop owners stocking their shelves for the specialized cuisines of their community, the restaurateur looking for exciting seasonal options to delight diners, and the big-chain buyer sourcing kitchen staples that will reach thousands of homes.

**Q. We have witnessed the long-term relationships the wholesalers on the market have with local suppliers in New York and New Jersey, in particular. Do you have any involvement with the Departments of Agriculture for these states and their efforts to promote locally grown?**



Phillip Grant, chief executive of the Hunts Point Produce Market.



GRANT: We are actively engaged on the state level with the New York State Department of Agriculture via associations such as the farm bureau. We travelled to the farm bureau event last December and their event in Albany earlier this year.

**Q. Sustainability is a key topic that many wholesalers mention as a challenge and opportunity for future growth. How does the market overall address sustainability?**

GRANT: We are currently embarking on a future revitalization of the market that will allow us to reduce our carbon footprint. In the interim, we have started a phased project and installed NYC Cool Roof — energy-saving reflective rooftops — on a portion of roofs. According to NYC Cool Roofs, every 2,500 square feet of roof that is coated can reduce the city's carbon footprint by 1 ton of CO<sub>2</sub> and help fight climate change.

NYC CoolRoofs, which supports the city's goal to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, is a partnership between the NYC Department of Small Business Services, its Workforce1 Industrial & Transportation Career Center, the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, and The HOPE Program.

To date, the Hunts Point Produce Market has reduced up to 30 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> via the NYC CoolRoof.

**Q. A big part of your job is to reach out to government officials and NGOs in the**

**area. Please tell us about your relationship with the mayor of New York City and other politicians and city planners. How often do they visit the market and how invested do you think they are in realizing the economic impact of the Hunts Point Market overall?**

GRANT: We have a positive working relationship with our government stakeholders, and actively engage with our elected officials in Albany and Washington D.C. Revitalization of the market is a matter of national security, and Mayor Eric Adams has contributed \$130M to this effort. The federal government has issued \$110M, and Gov. Kathy Hochul's office has committed \$130M.

**Q. Finally, we see the area surrounding the Hunts Point Market is also evolving, and more housing is planned for the area. How do you see the market's role in the broader community?**

GRANT: We continue to support nearly 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. With the redevelopment of the market, we anticipate fueling economic development by generating 1,000 new jobs for New Yorkers. We are also proud that a majority of our work force is local Bronxites.

The future of food security is tied to the future of Hunts Point Produce Market and regional hubs like ours that keep New York and the world fed.



# New York 'Off-Market' Companies Serve Up Multitude Of Opportunities



PHOTO COURTESY BALDOR SPECIALTY FOODS

Foodservice and retail customers alike can find opportunity through more unique items that only a distributor can find and source.

**WHOLESALE AND DISTRIBUTORS AROUND THE NEW YORK CITY REGION PROVIDE CRUCIAL ADVANTAGES.**

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**T**he role of a wholesaler/distributor in the supply chain allows for an abundance of opportunity-creation for customers.

“Opportunity — in a produce sense of the word — is any situation that can help evolve or achieve a desired outcome, scenario, knowledge, thought process, perspective or idea,” says Angela Aronica, vice president of sales for Vision Global Group in Wyckoff, NJ.

And most view ‘opportunities’ as yielding financial outcomes. However, Aronica continues, “if you think of the definition in broader terms, customers can use information provided per commodity, not only to better

understand how to make themselves most profitable, but also to educate consumers in a way that will support the overall growth of the industry.”

The service aspect of the business offers particular benefits. “Our main opportunity is that we’re in the service business,” says Anthony Serafino, executive vice president of EXP Group in North Bergen, NJ. “In everything we do, we work to serve our customers. All aspects of our business combine to support the service objective: availability, sourcing, consistency, and logistics.

“More than ever, we are seeing customers looking to their wholesaler to be a comprehensive source and solution.”

Bruce Klein, director of marketing for Maurice A. Auerbach in Secaucus, NJ, believes recent challenges have increased the value and benefit to customers. “We partner with our customers to explore and provide opportunities for a win for all sides of the business,” he says. “Our main goal is to satisfy our customer needs, and I think we’re more

crucial than ever in the supply chain. Our job is harder, but we try to make it easier for the customer.”

## GETTING MORE WITH FEWER STOPS

Customers increasingly rely on New York wholesalers to provide a wide variety of consistent supply.

“We’re seeing customers looking for their wholesaler to be a one-stop-shop with constant availability,” says Serafino. “They want a fuller line. It’s been the theme of centralizing buying power and vendors — to simplify things and meet the needs of providing excellent merchandise as well as cost considerations. We’re continuing to respond and expand what we offer.”

Floyd Aillo, president of FreshPro Food Distributors in West Caldwell, NJ, agrees one-stop shopping is the name of the game. “Customers are looking for this,” he says. “We offer a full line of conventional and organic produce, as well as provide fresh-cut and repacking — all done in our facility.”





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**“We partner with our customers to explore and provide opportunities for a win for all sides of the business.”**

— Bruce Klein,  
Maurice A. Auerbach

Riviera Produce of Englewood, NJ, found opportunity by widening its ample variety of products. “It’s imperative for us to have more than just produce for our customers,” says Ben Friedman, president. “You can no longer just be one thing. With restaurants facing greater constraints, they need more support. They can no longer take multiple deliveries, so the more they can consolidate what’s coming in the door, the less labor and the more profit they will have.”

Customers may find opportunity in working with more unique items. “As opposed to doing a romaine baby Caesar salad, customers might find a baby kale Caesar salad interesting,” says Friedman. “We’re helping them find ingredients and opportunities on their menu they may not have thought of before. We enjoy expanding the breadth of products we’re offering and helping expose products to customers that can push their creativity.”



Wholesalers provide greater opportunity for foodservice and retailers through one-stop shopping, including fresh-cut and repacking.

Baldor brings forth a highly curated, hard-to-find product mix, says Scott Crawford, vice president of merchandising for Baldor Specialty Foods in Bronx, NY. “The reason we’re able to do so much specialty business is that we have the demand for it,” he says. “As a result of our customer-cen-

tric sales team and our years of resourcing the finest restaurants, we are asked by our chefs to find specialty and unique products. Our secret sauce is the customer demand that pushes us to exceed run-of-the-mill sourcing.”

BDA/Dorot Farms headquartered in Melville, NY, offers increased options by adding rainbow carrots for customers. “Rainbow carrots are very trendy in restaurants right now,” says Ami Ben-Dror, chief executive. “Another opportunity we’re expanding is organic carrots. We started that this year to retail and for foodservice.”

### DIRECT FOOD CHAIN LINK

Wholesalers and distributors offer opportunity to customers by providing a fuller link to the supply chain. “Since EXP is a grower, packer, shipper, importer and wholesaler, we provide a direct line of product to our customers, which gives them the best opportunity for the best product direct from the source,” says Serafino.

“Clients are looking for the most direct line of sourcing. Whether coming from Central or South America or the U.S., it’s about providing the most direct and consistent service and merchandise.”

BDA/Dorot Farms carrots are vertically integrated as a grower-importer-distributor. “Our philosophy is to be involved in every aspect of our product,” says Ben-Dror. “If a customer has feedback or questions, we know

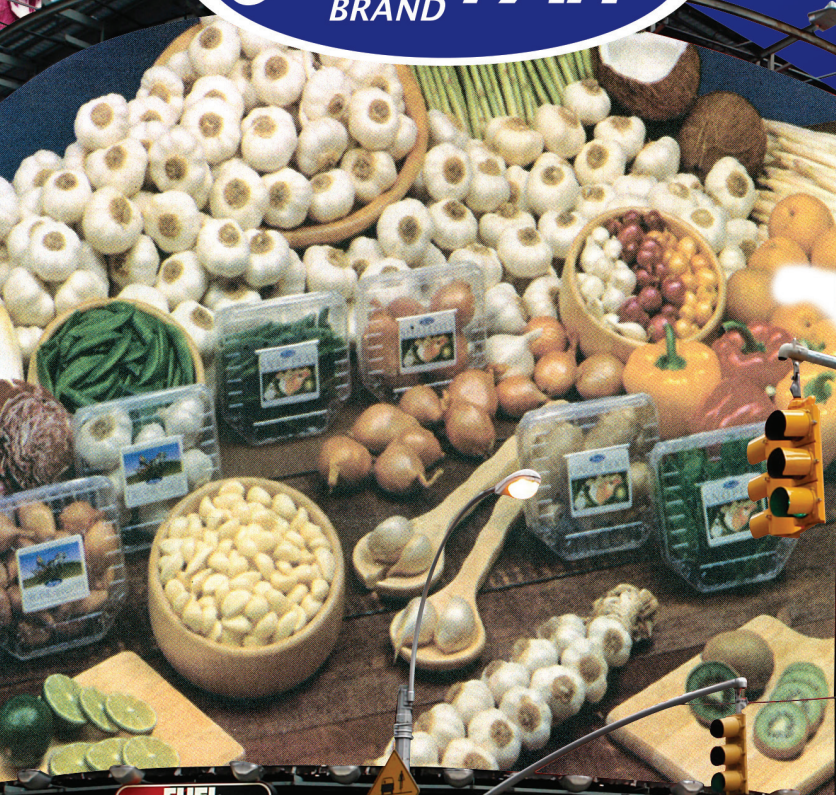


Through distributors such as FreshPro, customers can make their own deals with growers/shippers, but have it fulfilled through the distributor, including warehouse and delivery.





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it all the way back along the supply chain. Our philosophy is to be involved from the seed to consumer.”

FreshPro works with customers to give them the opportunity to identify specific sources directly, but have product procured and serviced via FreshPro. “Our customers can make their own deals with grower/shippers, but have it fulfilled through us,” says Joe Granata, director of produce sales. “We warehouse it and deliver it to their stores. This allows them a more ‘direct’ buy, but without the headache of the logistics of direct buying.”

At Baldor Specialty Foods, customers have provision of the highest quality, short-shelf-life products, many of which aren’t easily found elsewhere, according to Crawford. “No one else is giving you the chance to get those super sweet Harry’s Berries on the East Coast, or going to Florida on Chef Dan Barber’s recommendation to discover King Grove, an organic blueberry farm growing in soil,” he says. “Because of our agility, we can also work with small boutique farms that sell these unique items and help them grow. Our customers are thoughtful about wanting unique products, and we provide them with access to the very best and most interesting produce that’s out there.”

## INTERNATIONAL PROCUREMENT

Serafino sees increased opportunity in internationally sourced products for several reasons. “One, we have increased demographics in ethnic groups who want products from their countries of origin,” he says. “And, we’re seeing an increase of foodies interested in different and unique products. Customers are increasingly recognizing the full potential of international trade and maximizing the potential. We’re also seeing a fuller understanding of how merchandise should be handled and even priced from an international sourcing perspective.”

Given customer desire and demand to have seasonal produce all year long, Riviera’s Friedman describes going around the world to find growing regions to support that demand.

“Products don’t grow domestically during certain times of the year, so if we don’t import from Peru, Colombia or Chile, we won’t have the product at all,” he says. “Also, we see increasing demand for new and unique products, which must be sourced internationally — for example, baby mangos from Colombia this season became admissible.”

Importing has been a part of Baldor Specialty Foods’ DNA for many years. “In



According to Anthony Serafino at EXP Group, there is a lot more complexity in the business, such as dealing with USDA, maritime issues, and even geopolitical issues, but the opportunity is in supplying products with appropriate quality controls and standards.

PHOTO COURTESY VISION IMPORTS/FRUTAS DE EXPORTACIÓN BIMA S.A. DE C.V.

fact, we’re known for being one of the first to bring shallots, Belgian endive and Cavaillon melons to the U.S.,” says Crawford. “Our customers demand to see innovation in products, which requires us to have an eye to the global markets. But we’re very conscious to engage only with farmers in other countries that meet our social responsibility criteria — we’re also conscious of the environmental impact global sourcing has.”

Serafino notes EXP Group sources internationally because much of what they handle isn’t grown in the U.S. “Importing is more work on the ground level and requires more attentiveness and control because you’re dealing with a longer line of communication and supply chain,” he says. “There is a lot more complexity in the business — dealing with USDA, maritime issues, even geopolitical issues — but it’s imperative, because our buyers want these products and we want to offer them consistently and with the appropriate quality controls and standards.”

The biggest opportunity Auerbach’s international sourcing gives customers is the ability to source products year-round, according to Klein. “Our garlic is grown in Spain, Argentina and California,” he says. “We follow the cycle so we can offer fresh product to customers all year. The same is true for asparagus, which moves from Peru to Mexico to Washington State, and then cycles back to Peru. When ginger isn’t available from Brazil, we bring it from Honduras or Thailand. International sourcing gives us the chance to provide a wider supply.”

Importers play a crucial role in mitigating

**“With restaurants facing greater constraints, they need more support. They can no longer take multiple deliveries, so the more they can consolidate what’s coming in the door, the less labor and the more profit they will have.”**

— Ben Friedman,  
Riviera Produce

supply chain issues for customers. “We bridge the gap for customers,” says Klein. “For example, we try to anticipate issues in the supply chain and adjust product orders so it doesn’t affect our customers.”

BDA/Dorot Farm’s Fresh & Sweet brand carrot, exported from Israel to Europe, Asia, North America and Africa, showcases the opportunity provided by a focused product. “We look at our business as a partnership with our customers,” says Ben-Dror. “We are dedicated to providing the best product and service to our customers to ensure their supply.”

## BOOSTING SMART, STRATEGIC BUYS

Wholesalers help customers find specific opportunities in the market through a variety of buying strategies. EXP Group serves many clients who reach out at the last minute





The biggest opportunity Auerbach's international sourcing gives customers is the ability to source products year-round.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AUERBACH



**“Our customers demand to see innovation in products, which requires us to have an eye to the global markets. But we’re very conscious to engage only with farmers in other countries that meet our social responsibility criteria...”**

— Scott Crawford,  
Baldor Specialty Foods







PHOTO COURTESY BDA/DOROT FARMS

BDA/Dorot Farm's Fresh & Sweet brand carrots, exported from Israel to Europe, Asia, North America and Africa, showcase the opportunity provided by a focused product.

for merchandise, according to Serafino. "Our customers can find opportunity with our inventory. If they're short on a certain commodity, they know EXP can help them get the product they need."

Given the recent economic situation, thinking strategically about how to access the power of the wholesaler can yield return.

"Every expense that can't be controlled is going up at a higher percentage than it ever went up before," says Riviera's Friedman. "So, looking at any type of 'smart buying' is crucial. If we're not working on those smart opportunities, we're leaving dollars on the table that will eventually turn into red ink."

Customers of local and regional wholesalers can find opportunity in smart buying by taking advantage of seasonality trends per country of origin, says Vision Global's Aronica. "First and foremost, this requires participation, as well as understanding when and why to transition to the next growing region," she says.

Wholesalers can also help customers find volume or contract buying advantages. "The more a customer buying a high quantity of volume partners with their distributor to talk about how we can together lower their cost, the more they can substantially increase profit," says Friedman.

"Everyone in the last three years has faced challenges they've never had to face before. It's important to address the cost and supply issues so we can keep driving healthy, tasty foods to consumers."

Riviera services multiple HMR companies where the volume is tremendous, according to Friedman. "When they have a certain recipe or menu item, then we reach out to our suppliers for deals or contract pricing. We get a better ROI for the company as a whole and we benefit our customers through it. It allows us to keep our customer's food costs at a more reasonable level."

FreshPro offers customers the ability to pre-book certain items and commodities. "This is important around holiday times for key items that tighten up," says Avillo. "We also have the history for what they purchased prior years."

### ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Direct links to information is another area of opportunity for customers. "Wholesalers stay smart by watching and seeing trends begin and happen and then reaching out to their suppliers," says Friedman. "I'm constantly reading and searching out items people talk about. By finding the right growers of the product and forming relationships, then we get preference for a new product item."

The produce industry is changing swiftly, asserts Aronica. "The old way of the produce industry does not yield the same opportunities as today," she says. "Inflation, mergers and acquisitions, climate change, remote work culture, technological advancements, etc. — there are variable factors that impact how success is now cultivated. Excel and prosper or float and sink."

According to Aronica, Vision Global Group offers consistent access to accurate information to properly market/promote the company's products. "We have cultivated strong and unique relationships with our grower partners," she says. "We provide thorough and accurate communication regarding market updates, seasonality trends, and crop forecasts on a routine basis to better equip customers with the necessary information needed to make the best purchasing decisions for their operation."

Customers can access store-level assistance as well. "We provide anything a retailer needs to run a successful produce department," says FreshPro's Avillo. "In addition to our line of products, we provide merchandising support and use of our retail information system for managing margins and

**"We provide thorough and accurate communication regarding market updates, seasonality trends, and crop forecasts on a routine basis to better equip customers with the necessary information needed to make the best purchasing decisions for their operation."**

— Angela Aronica, Vision Global Group

measuring tonnage and movement."

FreshPro's merchandising specialists visit stores and assist with resets and merchandising ideas to help drive sales, explains Granata. "Our inside sales representatives speak with and provide product updates on a daily basis, as well as take orders over the phone instead of just on a computer — it gives the customer a chance to ask questions about products."

### CUSTOMIZATION AND COMMITMENT

Flexible wholesalers react to customer needs, resulting in customized opportunity. "We pride ourselves on meeting customers' needs," says Auerbach's Klein. "If it can be done, we'll do it. For example, we have a bagging machine that can pretty much make any size bag the customer wants, and we can react quickly to customer requests."

Vision has developed mutually beneficial relationships, including a joint venture with William H. Kopke Jr., headquartered in Great Neck, NY. With this new partnership, says Aronica, "VGG and Kopke will continue to evolve our commodity portfolio, resources and network that will greatly expand our opportunities, as well as the opportunities of our customers."

In the end, opportunity comes down to relationships, explains Ben-Dror of Dorot/BDA. "We are committed to our customers. For example, even though the European market was higher this year, we kept our commitments to our customers in North America. We don't ship based on price, we ship based on commitment."

"The opportunity of having relationships such as ours for a buyer is that their shelf will always have the product and quality." **pb**





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# Fresh Produce Fills the Market Basket

GOURMET MARKET IN NEW JERSEY HAS FULL-TIME BUYER WHO WALKS HUNTS POINT MARKET FOR FRESH BUYS.

BY MIKE DUFF

**M**arket Basket, of Franklin Lakes, NJ, is a gourmet market that makes a statement about its high-quality produce at old-fashioned, fair prices to consumers before they even reach the doors.

That's because to enter the store, shoppers walk by a produce-laden Model T Ford wagon, one that actually runs, although its days are now spent stationary as part of an outdoor fruit and vegetable display.

The Franklin Lakes store is the company's 28,000-square-foot flagship location and a little larger than the original location in nearby Wyckoff, NJ. However, half the Franklin Lakes store is dedicated to back-room, prepared food operations, part of a major catering business.

The business is reflected in the extensive prepared food presentation in the store, which runs from sandwiches and soup to roasted asparagus and cauliflower puree to General Tso's cauliflower to a Harvest Chicken dinner with rice and vegetables. And that's in addition to the fresh-cut produce. The stores



Market Basket, in Franklin Lakes, NJ, uses the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx, NY, as its main source of produce year-round.

employ chefs from the Culinary Institute of America and the French Culinary Institute, who are involved both in catering and putting together meals behind the stores' service counters.

The company also operates a 60,000-square-foot warehouse and commissary, which suggests how important prepared food and catering is to the Market Basket business.

Fresh produce, however, is critical and is a differentiating factor for the store. Market

Basket uses the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx, NY, as its main source of produce year-round, and employs a full-time buyer who walks the market at least three times a week. Then, in season, the company heavily promotes local produce. In both cases, the company operates its own trucking fleet to source from the market and growers.

Zachary Chernalis, Market Basket chief operating officer, says the Franklin Lake area is affluent and the store has a gourmet orientation, emphasizing the peripheral departments. However, Chernalis makes the point that he will squeeze margins somewhat on certain produce products to keep what he's charging in line with more mass-market competitors, counting on making it up on other gourmet items. He does so because a lot of his customers are middle-class people who are drawn to superior food products, but who also are a bit more price-conscious. Chernalis wants to convey the quality he offers is so high that the price/value equation favors Market Basket over food retailers that might charge less for items that don't deliver as much in the way of freshness and flavor.

To put it another way, his customers, whether middle class or affluent, tend to be foodies.

## TERMINAL MARKET ESSENTIAL

"One of the reasons we started going to the [Hunts Point] market years ago — and I'm a third generation owner of the store, my grand-



Quality fresh produce is a differentiating factor for Market Basket, and employees — from the buyer to the warehouse to the store produce manager to the floor employees — are trained to put only the best out for customers.



father started it in 1960 and expanded from the Wyckoff stores to this location — was an emphasis on things being fresh,” Cernalis says.

Mike Rubinsky, Market Basket’s produce buyer, has spent lots of time on the Hunts Point docks, selecting the fruits and vegetables that are right for the store.

“He’s had years of experience working in the market,” Cernalis says. “We’ve had a lot of really long-standing relationships with a lot of the businesses there. We like to go in there. It gives us the availability. We have contracts with some vendors there, making sure we’re getting the best lots that come in. Really, just having such a long relations with these guys, they treat us very well.”

Cernalis spent a year as a buyer on the market, so he’s familiar with how it operates and understands the advantages a terminal market offers to a grocery store operation.

“Having my buyer going into the market and visually inspecting the produce, it really helps,” he says, noting the company’s trucking fleet hauls what’s chosen. “The produce goes directly to our warehouse. We have three different produce refrigerators for different climate zones.”

Buying is done to satisfy the company’s in-store customers, but also to use in processing back of store, and one of the factors that makes produce buying so critical for Market Basket is the various uses the operation has, from store floor to catering.

“Produce affects everything down the line,” he says. “If we have tomatoes that are overripe or underripe, that’s going to go through our entire food process, from our bruschetta to our salsa, or our tomato and mozzarella platters. Everything starts with our produce for the most part, so, really, it has to be fresh.”

“If we’re doing a 400-person product launch or a \$300 a person wedding at a venue, we have to make sure we have top-notch produce.”

Catering began about five years after the business began in 1960, Cernalis says, and was a major reason why Market Basket added the second location in Franklin Lakes.

“My grandfather saw the need for prepared food before most companies did,” he says.

## JERSEY TIME

Garden State produce is a favorite with Market Basket customers, and the stores feature it prominently in season. At the Franklin Lakes location, the storefront Model T is a touchpoint where New Jersey produce gets staged.

Customers entering the store don’t immediately arrive at the main fruit and vegetable space, but at prepared food. Shoppers can pick up meal and meal items, including fresh-cut



produce, and proceed directly to the checkouts just a few feet away.

Produce takes up a position further into the store and adjacent to the bakery as a dual draw through the store. Near the top, the company offers more cut fruit, cider and the company’s own line of organic juices. Fresh-squeezed orange juice is nearby, a product line that uses 750,000 pieces of fruit a year, Cernalis says. Also prominent are Market Basket clamshell salads, cut vegetables and the company’s own salad dressings.

Market Basket offers a lot in a small space, but doesn’t vary deeply into exotic or tropical produce, although it carries a bit of each, such as pineapples and mangos. Cernalis says he’s not looking to go big with such items, but will feature top-quality specialty product in bulk, as fresh-cuts and in prepared food to give shoppers the choice, while ensuring what comes into the store isn’t wasted.

Avocados get big play, as do tomatoes and apples, which the store merchandises even more conspicuously in fall, when the local apple harvest is in full swing. As the fixtures are modular, Market Basket can do a lot in a little space by expanding and building the profile of items.

Organic produce has a strong presence, too, although not growing as fast as once was the case. Cernalis says he maintains an abundant presentation in proportion to the department size for customers who are steady organic consumers and those who like an organic option even if they may buy conventional, too.

Cernalis isn’t chasing every trend, but

focuses on having a solid assortment, meeting shoppers’ needs in terms of variety, but exceeding their expectations as to quality.

“I try to make it so that my customer can look the other way, pick, and it’s going to be good,” Cernalis says. “I have the confidence. We look at the market and check, then it comes into the warehouse, and I have a warehouse foreman who will check all the main products, break open a box and make sure everything looks good. Then, we have a third check here where my produce manager looks at everything. We have three steps, fail-safes, to really check our products to make sure they’re top-notch.”

Employees are trained to check every single item as it comes off the flat, “rotate it and make sure everything looks good.”

Rubinsky, produce buyer, reiterates a Cernalis expression when he says, “We specialize in quality.” Shoppers are smart today, he adds, and know quality produce when they see it. So, when confronted with anything other than product that suits Market Basket standards, “we’d rather walk away.”

Innovation is also important to Market Basket’s proposition to the consumer. The company’s emphasis on fresh and healthy, for instance, has generated a line of items called Clean Eating, with input from a nutritionist.

Cernalis says he wants Market Basket to be an experience, a place where shoppers can discuss the food they’re buying with trained employees and experienced chefs. Still, the key is superior product at a fair price.

“We specialize in quality,” Cernalis says. **pb**



# A Cut Above

CINGARI FAMILY MARKETS:  
RESTAURANT-QUALITY,  
TO-GO MEALS BUILD  
THE SUPERMARKET

BY MIKE DUFF

**C**ingari Family Markets, Norwalk, CT, is making prepared meals, entrees and side dishes a critical part of its ShopRite-affiliated store operations.

Executive Chef David Cingari trained at the Culinary Institute of America and had a long career as a chef in New York, then became founder of a restaurant and catering business in Stamford, CT, with the catering business ongoing for 35 years. Now, he heads up a growing prepared food program at the supermarket, offered under the Cut Above Cingari Family Brand label.

Cingari Family Markets dates back to the late 1920s, when founder Salvatore Cingari, David's grandfather, began delivering fresh fruits and vegetables, first from an old school bus, door-to-door in Stamford. Today, the company operates 12 Cingari Family ShopRite locations throughout Connecticut. Nearly 100 years later, the company's commitment to fresh, local products, strong customer service, and affordable prices is still fundamental.

David Cingari's shift to the executive chef role at the family business officially occurred in January 2021, but the job is an extension of his earlier career. Effectively, the role "is based on trying to bring restaurant-quality, to-go meals to our 12 supermarkets," he says.



Executive Chef David Cingari trained at the Culinary Institute of America and had a long career as a chef, restaurateur and caterer. Now, he heads up a growing prepared food program at Cingari Family Markets, offered under the Cut Above Cingari Family Brand label.

## WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

The meals are developed and put together at a commissary in Stamford, which delivers the meals daily to half the Cingari ShopRites, so each is serviced every other day.

"It all gets planned, tested and judged here before we decide to bring it to all 12 stores," Cingari says. "My role — from an executive chef standpoint, as there are chefs in all the stores, or the majority of them — is coming

up with new recipes and ideas to bring to market."

He's also taken some of the 20- or 30-year-old recipes, such as the chicken salads and the Waldorf, and modernized them.

Convenience take-out meals items were once prepared in the stores, but now the commissary is the singular source, which ensures high-standard fare is always available.

"From the consistency standpoint, it makes a lot of sense," Cingari says. "The idea was to have an elevated product — newer, more modern — and have it consistent across all 12 stores, instead of just coming up with a recipe, teaching, training and hoping that it happens every day. The commissary just makes perfect sense."

The commissary begins business each day at about 4:30 in the morning, then 29 employees arrive between 5 and 7:30 to begin production that occurs in different rooms, including those for salads, meals and hot food, among others. Right now, the commissary operates in about 6,000 square feet, but Cingari is looking for 30,000 to 60,000 square feet where he can expand the prepared food operation.

"From a production standpoint, I have an executive chef of just the commissary who



Cingari Family Markets, Norwalk, CT, operates 12 ShopRite-affiliated stores across Connecticut.





runs all the operations there, and I oversee him and that team. The majority of my time now is spent on developing new recipes.”

In creating new dishes, Cingari and commissary executive chef Matt Alexander, “will talk and bounce things off each other.” Research also includes visiting other grocery stores in the tri-state area to see what is generating demand, as well as checking out restaurants, and media to see what’s happening in prepared food.

All the research goes into developing recipes that can be produced consistently in large batches. Then, the formulation has to be modified so it can stand up over a five- to seven-day period.

“That changes the recipes a lot,” Cingari says. “We won’t even bring something to market unless it’s 100% going to work.”

## CONVENIENCE AND CHOICE

Cingari monitors food developments, but not everything that’s trendy lends itself to his operation. Some trends, popular in specialty markets, might not translate into the super-market setting, and some trendy items that have come out of the commissary haven’t turned out to be big sellers.

In terms of acceptance, the familiar with a twist tends to generate the most interest. However, items consumers believe are healthy are the more attractive, Cingari says, whether that quality is fact or perception.

Cingari Family Markets now offers a range of products under its prepared food programs across meal occasions and positions in the store.

“We put granola out about six months ago, marketing it in the produce department,” Cingari says. “It’s flying.”



Connecticut-based Cingari Family Markets now offers a range of products under its prepared food programs. A company commissary prepares the items, which are delivered to the chain’s 12 stores.

Among the products that have proven attractive to shoppers include pesto pasta salad with artichoke hearts and roasted red peppers in a homemade mustard balsamic vinaigrette, and roasted bacon scallion potato salad, “which is ridiculously good, it flies off the shelf.”

Twists on more common dishes have a good track record at Cingari Family Markets, and, as they get accepted by customers, the chef’s food operation can get a little more exotic.

“We do a soy ginger lo mein noodle salad with snow peas and mushrooms,” he says. “That’s a little bit trendy.”

They also offer a chipotle chicken and black bean quesadilla, as well as a chicken and cheese quesadilla, but the chipotle chicken and black bean sells more. “That one’s kind of an offshoot I didn’t think was going to be a bigger seller, but it is.”

He said combination entrees, such as chicken and potatoes, are on the menu, but Cingari says the combinations don’t sell as well as the individually chosen entrees and

side dishes, which shoppers can use to put their own meals together. “They definitely want convenience, and they definitely want choice,” he says.

The third component is freshness, and shoppers really examine everything for freshness. Cingari points to the honey roasted carrots he developed, which are simply carrots, orange juice and honey with lemon zest, salt and pepper.

“We get the trendy part in some of the dressings and marinade. We just do them with a little bit of a twist. The sides are really popular,” Cingari says.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

To sell the chef program to consumers, Cingari Family Markets is promoting Cingari’s background as a family member, executive chef, Culinary Institute of America grad and well-known caterer.

At the same time, the company did a private brand for what’s coming out of the commissary.

“It’s beautiful,” Cingari says. “The labeling is different, the signage, all the marketing in the store is different. It’s just working. We can’t keep up. Every single month, it’s up and up and up.”

As he looks at the opportunity the chef’s program affords, Cingari says, “From here on out, it’s new and interesting,” he says.

“I think that we’ve got 65 products to market. We covered the basics. Now, we’re constantly putting things out. If it doesn’t work after three months, we put something else in that slot. We’re not afraid to do that because we’ve got our standards. Now, it’s the fun time.”

**pb**





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149	INC.
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COOSEMANS	249
FIERMAN PRODUCE	248 247

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