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RECALL MADNESS!

How The Industry Is
Catching Up To Science



Tommy Wilkins, produce procurement director for United Supermarkets, visits growers to ensure they comply with the retailer's food safety standards, minimizing the number of recalls affecting his produce departments.

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INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT REFINERIES VS. FOOD PRODUCTION
WAL-MART PRICING REPORT • WEST MEXICO
FOODSERVICE TRENDS: WHAT'S HOT? • VEGETABLE TIE-INS • ECO-CRATES
WINTER MERCHANDISING • IMPORTED SWEET ONIONS • LEAFY GREENS
MEXICAN AVOCADOS • CENTRAL AMERICAN IMPORTS
CITRUS • BANANAS • PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS • HOLIDAY BAKING
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REGIONAL MARKET PROFILES: TWIN CITIES AND LOS ANGELES



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p.64

COVER STORY

36 RECALL MADNESS: HOW THE INDUSTRY IS CATCHING UP TO SCIENCE

The ramifications of improved science and more testing are leading to an overwhelming amount of recalls on a wide range of perishable goods. PRODUCE BUSINESS explores the consequences of pulling product from shelves and what it means for the industry as a whole.

COMMENTARY

22 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT Pick Your Retail Turf

167 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE Accountants Versus Merchants

168 EUROPEAN MARKET Macfrut 2012: International Participation On The Rise

170 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY Do They Watch The Food Channel In The Trailer Park (And Other Questions)?

p.114



FEATURES

64 NEW LEAF COMMUNITY MARKETS CARVES ITS OWN NICHE Independent California retailer applies local strategy to maximize buying power and steadily flourish in today's competitive market.

67 SPOTLIGHT ON MEXICAN IMPORTS — PART III: WEST MEXICAN GROWERS AND IMPORTERS LOBBY FOR PROTECTED AG In this third part of an ongoing series, PRODUCE BUSINESS outlines another contested issue facing the West Mexico import industry: What can be called greenhouse produce?

79 USE HOLIDAYS TO WARM UP WINTER PRODUCE SALES By marketing and merchandising specific products built around the numerous winter holidays, every month is sure to have positive produce rings.

94 VEGETABLE SALES-BOOSTERS Tie-in products sold in produce increase fresh item sales.

102 IMPORTED SWEET ONIONS: SPANNING THE GLOBAL CALENDAR Once domestic product finishes up, it's time to take advantage of high quality onions arriving from offshore countries like Peru, Mexico and Chile.

106 LEAFY GREENS CATEGORY GROWTH DEMANDS RETAIL ATTENTION Leafy green sales are growing, but retailers must continue to work against storage and marketing challenges.

110 A UNIQUE IDENTITY FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN IMPORTS With a distinctive year-round niche, Central America is proving itself to be a reliable source for a variety of high quality produce.

114 WELL SUPPORTED MARKETING SPARKS RETAIL PROMOTIONS OF MEXICAN AVOCADOS Growers and marketers of avocados from Mexico offer retailers fun and informative ways to stimulate sales all year long.

p.102





p.118



p.150

IN THIS ISSUE

- 6 THE QUIZ**
- 8 TRADE SHOW CALENDAR**
- 10 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE**
- 12 SPECIAL NOTE**
- 14 PRODUCE WATCH**
- 28 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**
- 29 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**
- 171 POEM**
- 172 INFORMATION SHOWCASE**
- 174 BLAST FROM THE PAST**

DEPARTMENTS

FOODSERVICE MARKETING

118 *Produce In Foodservice: What's Hot? What's Not?*
 From finger limes to microgreens and everything in between, PRODUCE BUSINESS talks to the top flavor-makers in the industry to bring you a cheat sheet of the up-and-coming produce items making their way into the foodservice field.

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

124 *10 Ways To Merchandise Citrus*
 Whether it has arrived from California, Texas, Europe, South America, South Africa or South Florida, citrus from around the world is a popular category for produce departments across the country, and can add plenty of ring when merchandised creatively.

132 *Seven Ways To Sell More Bananas*
 As one of the most popular selections in the produce department, bananas deserve extra marketing attention.

138 *Key Factors To Consider For Building Winter Asparagus Sales*
 Promoting asparagus during the winter months gives retailers an opportunity to increase sales.

DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS

159 *Beyond Fruitcakes And Cookies: New Usages Inspire Holiday Sales Of Dried Fruit And Nuts*
 Marketing support from suppliers, well executed retail merchandising and promotional programs can strengthen sales of dried fruit and nut items throughout this year's holiday season.

SPECIAL FEATURES

24 **FROM THE PAGES OF THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT**
 State Financing Of Refinery Versus Food Production Is No Simple Decision

32 **NEW CRATE SEEKS TO REVOLUTIONIZE CORN SHIPPING**
 After 150 or more years of packaging in wood, it's time for fresh corn crates to join the 21st century.

58 **WAL-MART PRICING REPORT ROUND XXIV**
 In Lake Worth, FL, Two Hispanic Stores Beat Wal-Mart In Produce Pricing



141 **REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: LOS ANGELES EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION: L.A. STYLE**
 Produce wholesalers in Los Angeles successfully deal with a stretched economy by offering flexibility and added services to their clientele.

148 **FOODSERVICE PROFILE: Fresh Produce Drives Salsa Grill's Menu**
 Chef Marco Zapien of Salsa Grill brings produce-heavy Latin specialties to the masses.

150 **RETAIL PROFILE: Northgate Gonzalez: A Growing Ethnic Chain Enjoys Mainstream Success**
 A family business finds great success by focusing on local consumers' needs and desires.

152 **REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: TWIN CITIES PRODUCE IN THE TWIN CITIES**
 Minneapolis/St.Paul has long-standing history of great produce offerings, with an emphasis on optimum food safety adherences.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Catherine King
General Manager
California Watercress Inc.
Fillmore, CA

As the general manager of California Watercress Inc., a grower/distributor of watercress and specialty crops, primarily herbs.

Catherine oversees the entire operation, doing "a little bit of this and a little bit of that," and spends a portion of her time in the greenhouses caring firsthand for the plants. The company sells to both foodservice and retailers throughout the United States and Canada.

While Catherine was born into her family business, and currently works hand-in-hand

with her two sisters, she spent about 12 years "on the outside," as she says, before being hired full-time. "I've now been with the company for 31 years."

"I've been reading PRODUCE BUSINESS since the beginning, since the first issue," she says. "We have been a subscriber all these years. I really appreciate the good articles," says King. "Plus, we're such a small farming operation that reading the magazine keeps us in the loop of what's going on around us."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS quiz, Catherine receives an indoor, counter-top grill.

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

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QUESTIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

- 1) Name the two new flavors of Wonderful Pistachios. _____
- 2) How many calories are in a Braeburn apple? _____
- 3) Ocean Mist has a new 1-lb. microwavable package of vegetables. What are they? _____
- 4) Name three of the five certifications held by Banacol bananas. _____
- 5) What is the website of Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee? _____
- 6) What is the PMA Booth number for Marzetti? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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Conference Venue: Rio Rico Resort & Tubac Golf Resort, Rio Rico, AZ

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

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

Email: freshfrommexico.com

Website: www.freshfrommexico.com

November 10 -13, 2012**INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, MOTEL AND RESTAURANT SHOW**

Conference Venue: Javits Center, New York, NY

Conference Management: GLM, White Plains, NY

Phone: 914-421-3346 • Fax: 914-948-6197

Email: customerrelations@glmshows.com

Website: www.ihmrs.com

November 11 -14, 2012**WESTERN GROWERS ANNUAL MEETING**

Conference Venue: Fairmont Resort, Scottsdale, AZ

Conference Management: Western Growers Association, Newport Beach, CA

Phone: 949-863-1000 • Fax: 949-863-9028

Email: info@wga.com

Website: www.wga.com

DECEMBER 4-6, 2012**NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE**

The 3rd Annual iteration of *Celebrating Fresh!* in the magical city of Manhattan.

Conference Venue: Pier 94, New York, NY

Conference Management: PRODUCE BUSINESS, Boca Raton, FL

Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610

Email: info@nyproduceshow.com

Website: www.nyproduceshow.com

JANUARY 16 - 18, 2013**PMA FIT LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM**

This program is designed for decision-makers who currently drive strategy and growth in an organization.

Conference Venue: Omni San Diego, San Diego, CA

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: 302-738-7100 • Fax: 302-731-2409

Email: solutionctr@pma.com

Website: www.pma.com

January 20 - 22, 2013**SWEET POTATO CONVENTION**

California Sweet Potato Council hosts the 50th Annual United States Potato Convention.

Conference Venue: Westin, Charlotte, NC

Conference Management: United States Sweet Potato Council, Columbia, SC

Phone: 803-788-7101 • Fax: 803-788-7101

Email: cwalker12@bellsouth.net

Website: www.sweetpotatousa.org

January 20 - 22, 2013**NASFT WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW**

The West Coast's largest specialty food and beverage event.

Conference Venue: Moscone Center, San Francisco, CA

Conference Management: NASFT, New York, NY

Phone: (212) 482-6440 • Fax: (212) 482-6555

Website: www.fancyfoodshows.com

January 23 - 25, 2013**TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXPOSITION**

TPIE is the trade event showcasing the latest trends in foliage, floral and tropicals in warm and inviting S. Florida.

Conference Venue: Broward Convention Center,

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Conference Management: Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, Orlando, FL

Phone: (407) 295-7994 • Fax:

Email: info@fngla.org

Website: www.fngla.org

FEBRUARY 6 - 8, 2013**FRUIT LOGISTICA**

The world's leading trade fair for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry.

Conference Venue: Berlin Exhibition Fairgrounds

Hall 1 - 25, Berlin, Germany

Conference Management: Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany

Phone: 493-030-382048 • Fax: 493-030-382020

Email: berlin@exhibitpro.com

Website: www.fruitlogistica.com

February 10-13, 2013**N.G.A. SUPERMARKET SYNERGY SHOWCASE**

The National Grocers Association is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry.

Conference Venue: Mirage Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV

Conference Management: National Grocers Association, Arlington, VA

Phone: 703-516-0700 • Fax: 703-516-0115

Email: info@nationalgrocers.org

Website: www.nationalgrocers.org

February 13 - 16, 2013**BIOFACH 2013**

The World Organic Trade Fair: where organic people meet

Conference Venue: Exhibition Centre Nuremberg, Nuremberg, Germany

Conference Management: NurnbergMesse GmbH, Nuremberg, Germany

Phone: 490-911-86060 • Fax: 490-911-86068228

Website: www.biofach.com

February 20 - 24, 2013**NATIONAL WATERMELON CONVENTION 2013**

The Centennial Celebration

Conference Venue: The Westin La Cantera Resort, San Antonio, TX

Conference Management: National Watermelon Association, Inc., Lakeland, FL

Phone: 863-619-7575 • Fax: 863-619-7577

Email: nwa@tampabay.rr.com

Website: www.nationalwatermelonassociation.com

February 28 - March 2, 2013**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 2013**

To promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia through good fellowship, cooperation and mutual interest among its members.

Conference Venue: Caribe Royal Resort & Conference Center, Orlando, FL

Conference Management: Southeast Produce Council, Inc., East Ellijay, GA

Phone: 813-633-5556 • Fax: 813-653-4479

Email: info@seproducecouncil.com

Website: www.seproducecouncil.com

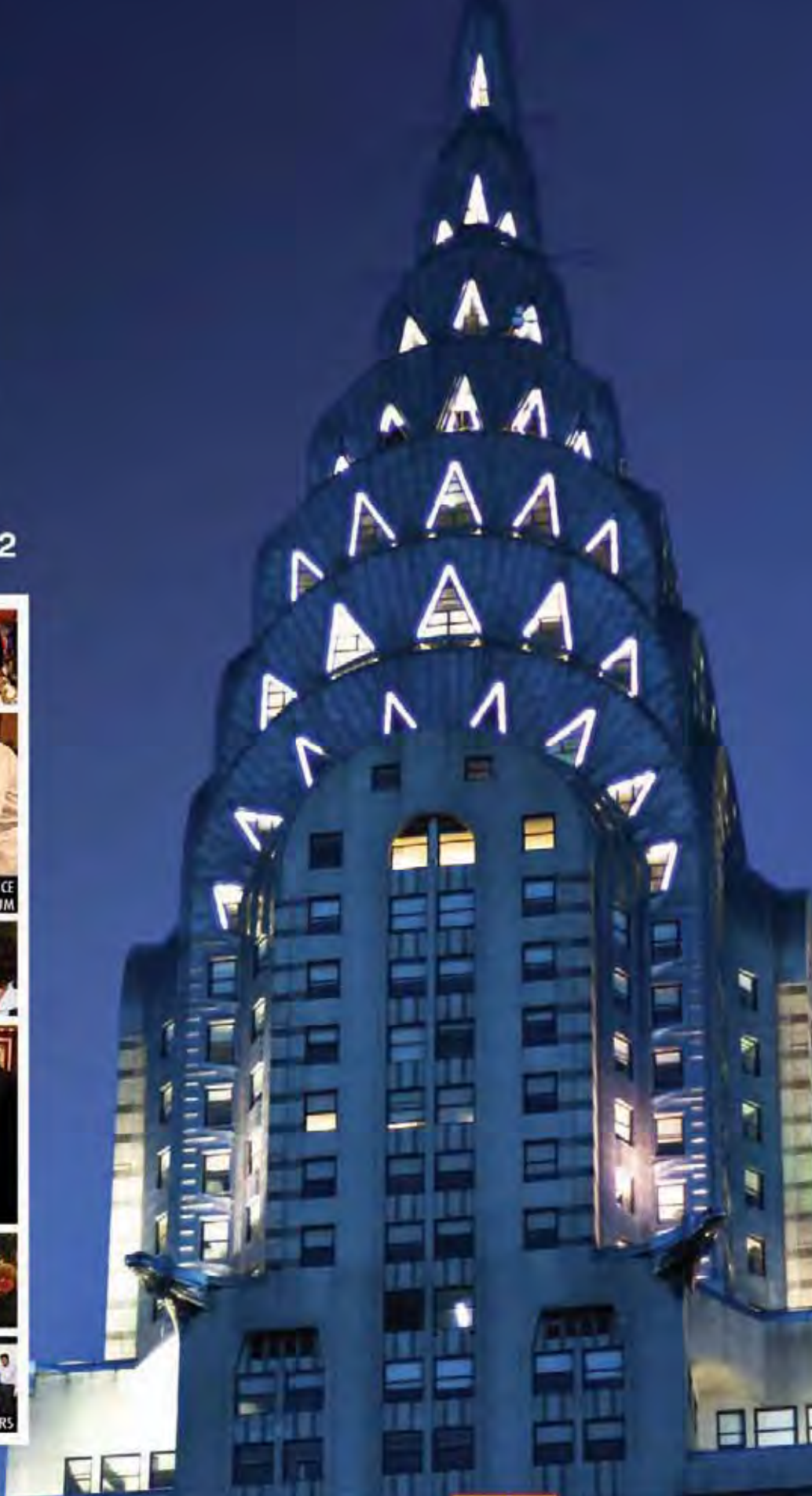
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THREE POSSIBLE POST-ELECTION SCENARIOS

By Robert Guenther, Senior Vice President of Public Policy,
United Fresh Produce Association



With seats up for grabs in the House and Senate and the Presidential Election difficult to predict, what difference will it make to the produce industry if President Obama or Governor Romney wins the election? How could a shift in power on Capitol Hill affect opportunities for Congress to take action on the Farm Bill? Several different post-election scenarios could play out, each with different implications for the industry that will tint how constituents can most effectively communicate priorities to lawmakers.

Produce industry engagement can help drive the election outcome. The United Fresh Washington Public Policy Conference brought together more than 500 industry leaders to activate an effective grassroots advocacy effort and send a clear, unified message that Congress must take action on the policies that impact the industry. Attendees split into 38 teams for valuable face-time with the congressional offices of 30 states in meetings that addressed the Farm Bill, agriculture labor, nutrition, and economic and regulatory challenges.

Though things may be rocky between now and January, it is critical that the fresh fruit and vegetable industry continue to stress our priorities. Here are three brief scenarios that the industry could face on November 7:

Scenario 1: President Obama Is Re-Elected

If President Obama is re-elected and the current majority party in the House and Senate remains in power, the post-election session may offer a thin window of opportunity to cut deals. If Congress considers the elimination of sequestration, Medicare reimbursement for doctors, and the extension of unemployment benefits tied to a payroll tax cut, the situation may favorably color the potential 10-year savings of a Farm Bill reauthorization.

The allure of Farm Bill savings, however, could be offset by the fact that it would require nearly 800 pages of bill text to obtain those savings, which may draw fire from conservatives

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MESSAGE THAT
CONGRESS MUST TAKE
ACTION ON THE
POLICIES THAT IMPACT
THE INDUSTRY.**

and some liberals scoffing at the procedural shortcuts used to pass a Farm Bill. The key decision makers in this situation would be Senators Reid, McConnell, Stabenow and Roberts, along with Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Cantor, Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson. In this case, the negotiations would be limited to staff from the House and Senate Leadership and the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, which would make constituent input from those states much more pertinent.

Scenario 2: President Obama Is Re-Elected, But Party Leadership Races Come To The Forefront

Similar to the first scenario, if the President is re-elected but parties suffer disappointing election results in the House and Senate, the current leadership may be tested by challenges from rank-and-file members. This could mean that leaders on both sides of the Capitol will be reluctant to cut any deals with the President until they are firmly ensconced as leaders in the 113th Congress. In this situation, the lack of

political capital held by outgoing congressmen means that the chances of action on the Farm Bill are very slim.

Scenario 3: Governor Romney Is Elected

Under this scenario, observers predict the lame duck session will be extremely short, perhaps spanning only a few days to allow for caucus organization and elections. It's unlikely that President Obama or Republicans in Congress will be in any mood to act on pending legislation, irrespective of the potential economic fallout from significant provisions of the Internal Revenue Code expiring. Those provisions include the expiration of current individual rates, corporate rates, child tax credit, marriage penalty relief, the 10 percent lowest tax bracket, estate tax and payroll tax. We do expect that a Romney Administration and Republicans would seek to assure markets that they will deal promptly with those matters in January 2013.

The persistence that Congress has shown in delaying action on the Farm Bill is frustrating and disheartening, but should not deter the produce industry from keeping steady pressure on legislators. The specialty crop industry could face devastating consequences if a new bill is not passed and sequestration cuts go into effect. The fresh produce industry could lose funding for several critical programs, including pest management, marketing, trade, nutrition and research programs.

United Fresh urges those leaders who attended WPPC to follow up with their congressional visits to help drive a successful grassroots advocacy campaign that preserves the gains the specialty crop industry has made. The broader industry should also not hesitate to call their senators and representatives to send a clear message that we need a Farm Bill now. No matter the outcome of the presidential election, United Fresh will continue to advocate for the produce industry and communicate with Congress and the administration to preserve our gains and advance priorities.



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It was 27 years ago, at the PMA convention in San Francisco, that we launched the inaugural edition of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. In that issue, we presented a special note in which we exercised a decent respect for those who make *PRODUCE BUSINESS* possible — specifically, our readers, our advertisers, our employees and vendors — by expressing our thanks. With this page, we wish to reiterate that gratitude: Nothing we do would be possible without those reading this very issue.

The year just passed marked, in a business sense, a remarkable achievement. In a tough economy, *PRODUCE BUSINESS* has managed to grow. So, with both pride and humility, we thank the industry for supporting us as we conclude the 27th consecutive year of growth.

In a world where *Newsweek* has just ceased printing copies, that what began with an idea and a blank sheet of paper 27 years ago has grown to encompass a roster of outreaches in print, online and in-person, now stands as evidence to the power of an idea well executed. It also stands as testimony to the power exerted by a community that supports the entrepreneurial spirit.

As we have grown, we have increasingly come to possess a position in the industry unique to ourselves and thus to provide a unique industry service.

As the industry sought to understand and analyze the collapse of talks between PMA and United, our assessment, written both in the pages of this magazine and at our sister online publication at *PerishablePundit.com*, was not so much better than anything else previously written as it was on a completely different plane. The influence of this series of articles continues, and the industry will be surprised to see, as the future rolls out, the influence that series will be seen as having.

Our big business initiative this year was serendipitous, following the death of Chandler Coppins, scion of the Midwestern supermarketing family and one-time chairman of the Produce Packaging and Marketing Association (now the PMA). Chandler won his fame by establishing industry share groups in which non-competitive retailers, wholesalers, distributors and processors would meet to exchange information, benchmark best practices, assess the future and find paths to greater success for themselves and their organizations.

When Chandler passed, a committee was put together to seek his successor. When the smoke cleared, I was given the extraordinary honor of being selected by my peers to carry on Chandler's work. I accepted the challenge, and in the past year had the privilege of making new friends and gaining deeper relationships with industry leaders from many sectors. They have entrusted me with privileged information and have allowed me to help their businesses grow and help them, as individuals, flourish professionally and personally.

The data and relationships have, in turn, helped us to be more relevant and more insightful in the pages of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* and online at *PerishablePundit.com*. The direct link to vital happenings in the trade has made *PerishableNews.com*, another sister publication, consistently first with important industry news.

Along with the Eastern Produce Council, we launched The New York Produce Show and Conference in 2010. Its growth has been phenomenal as the trade responded to a world-class event in the capital of the world. This year's event is scheduled for December 4-6, 2012, and will be in a new larger facility to accommodate all the exhibitors on one level and to showcase an expanded media, foodservice and university interchange program.

We must count our blessings...Yet this has been a hard year. Surely the hardest we have ever endured, for my father, Michael Prevora, a longtime wholesaler, importer and exporter based on the Hunts Point Market, died after an extended battle with pancreatic cancer.

That battle was public, and among the many things I am thankful for was the enormous love the industry shared with me as I faced that battle. Some

of it came in the form of heartfelt letters and phone calls, some as people went out of their way to attend my father's funeral or visit our home for the *shiva*, a Jewish tradition of mourning. And now I still struggle to process what I might have done to inspire so many industry members to donate hundreds of thousands of dollars in honor of my father to the special fund we set up to support immunotherapy cancer research. I look at the list of donors, a not insignificant number of whom contributed five-figure amounts in his honor, and I find I begin to weep. I am not one for being short of words, but I know not how to say thank you to such love and generosity. If there is another scribbler in another industry who brought forth such love, I do not know who this might be.

I continue, of course, fighting the good fight to eliminate cancer. I know my father would want to see such a thing banished from the earth. As a result of my efforts, I was invited to join a special board at the Abramson Family Cancer Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, and in that capacity I continue this work, as I believe the immunotherapy we discovered in the course of seeking to save my father will, one day, save millions. If you wish to support this work, simply go to *PrevorFamilyFund.org* and you can make a tax-deductible donation to further this effort.

I have experienced the loss of my father in an unusual way. I am, of course, sad that he is not here to talk to and to hug. I miss his humor and intelligence and love. Yet he must have done a good job of imparting his wisdom, because whenever I am faced with a dilemma — business or personal — the kind of dilemma in which I would have turned to my father for advice, I find that I can still ask my father and, somehow, I seem to always know what his answer would be.

It is as if the values and lessons of a life well-lived carry on. They form some sort of inexhaustible well of wisdom that I can draw on during the course of my life. I can only hope to leave my children an inheritance half as rich as the learning and temperament my father bequeathed to me. Now we struggle to help my mother, a woman wise and vivacious, courageous yet frightened as she lives now in a world torn asunder. There is no cure for her condition, just the hope that in time she will see that her children and grandchildren, her friends and extended family, all love and need her. She will be at The New York Produce Show, so please come and say hello.

In the inaugural issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, I wrote this about my father:

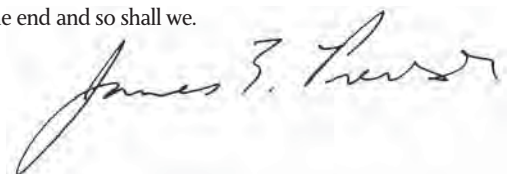
The real genesis of this paper goes back to when I was a boy reading the trade papers which my father, Michael Prevora, brought home. It was through discussing the contents of these papers with my father that I came to know and love this industry. If this paper, or if I, should ever amount to anything, it is surely due to my father's wisdom, guidance, and encouragement. It is to him that this enterprise is dedicated.

And so, 27 years later, it remains. If I have seen far, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of a giant.

One of the great strengths of this magazine and of this company is that its owners have lived through it all. The same people — my college fraternity brother, Ken Whitacre, and I — who launched this magazine 27 years ago are still here. Present at the creation, we have nurtured it through business wins and losses and through weddings, children, births and funerals. But that is how it must be, for in a business such as produce, the lines between living and working often blur, and the dreams for the future encompass both.

In the year to come and the years beyond that, we rededicate this enterprise to my father and to the idea that achievement is possible, that love and work can mix, and that we should never, ever, give up.

Dad fought to the end and so shall we.



Toss the Black Tray

Consumers Don't Use it Anyway!



That Was Then.

- Limited graphic impact.
- Flimsy plastic tray consumers do not use—plastic they are willing to do without:



This Is Now!

- + Next generation—farm fresh graphics.
- + Easy peel tab.
- + 38% less packaging by weight!
- + 50% **LESS** packaging by weight than other trays.

Get your party platter sales out of the dark ages and move them to this new, sleeker design with fresher graphic impact and less packaging. It's party platter 2.0!

92 percent* of consumers tested do not use the black tray for serving as intended (even when instructions prompt them to do so). When told about the positive impact removing the tray would

have on the environment, the same 92 percent said they would be happy without it.

By removing the black plastic lid on vegetable trays, our industry would reduce landfill disposal by over 2 million pounds annually.

What are we waiting for?

*Consumer Focus Group n=149-210



TRANSITIONS

MANN PACKING CO., INC. SALINAS, CA

Mann Packing is pleased to announce that **Denise Takakjian** has joined the sales staff to replace Bixby Ramsey who is moving to field operations. Takakjian previously worked for Growers Express, Ready Pac Produce, Inc., The Sholl Group/Green Giant Fresh and Tanimura & Antle. She will report to Scott Wise, director of sales and customer solutions.



Brian Bengard has been hired as the regional sales manager for the company's foodservice division in the western United States. He has held previous positions at Tanimura & Antle, Madison Cellars/Parkfield Vineyards and was the owner/operator of Solid Gold Produce, a wholesale produce company with distribution in three central California coastal counties. Bengard will report to Rick Russo, director of sales for foodservice and commodity.



KINGSTON & ASSOCIATES MARKETING IDAHO FALLS, ID

Toye Cawley has been promoted to the company's growing sales team. Cawley joined Kingston in May of this year as a customer service representative. In her new role as key accounts manager, Cawley will be responsible for servicing key customers and relationships at Kingston and contribute to the continued growth of the business.



CHIQUITA BRANDS INTERNATIONAL, INC. CHARLOTTE, NC

Chiquita Brands International, Inc., has appointed **Edward F. Lonergan** as President and CEO. He has also been appointed to the company's board of directors. Lonergan most recently served as President and CEO of Diversey, Inc., a leading global provider of sustainable cleaning, sanitation and hygiene solutions.



THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA

Oppenheimer Group's East Coast senior sales representative, **Brett Libke**, has been promoted to the role of East Coast director of sales. Libke will be responsible for providing effective leadership and support for the eastern U.S. sales team and will focus on expanding distribution and supporting category directors in key areas, while providing quality service to retail customers, growers and suppliers.



SUNSWEEP GROWERS, INC. YUBA CITY, CA

Sunsweet Growers, Inc., recently promoted **Brad Schuler** to the expanded role of vice president of global sales and marketing, adding to his previous global sales responsibilities. Schuler will oversee Sunsweet's marketing and sales efforts in all channels globally, including branded retail, private label, bulk, foodservice and industrial ingredients.

AYCO FARMS POMPANO BEACH, FL

Ayco Farms has hired **Lou Kertesz** to lead its melon program. A 20-year industry veteran, Kertesz joins Ayco as melon category manager to champion a diverse program of supply from Central America, Mexico, Arizona and California. Formerly a founding member and vice president of Fresh Quest, Inc., Kertesz comes to Ayco with great enthusiasm for building a year-round melon program.



Mike Dickman has been hired as category manager for greenhouse peppers. Dickman brings 25-plus years of experience in value-added and branding to his role. His goal is to expand the Ayco greenhouse pepper business as well as develop value-added items. Before joining Ayco, Dickman was western division sales manager for NatureSweet Tomatoes.

Jason Miller has been hired as key accounts manager for all vegetable sales. Miller will concentrate on avocados and broccoli, two new items for the company, as well as expand growth in traditional vegetable products. With 13 years in the produce industry, he was previously a broker/importer at All American Farms Inc.



ANNOUNCEMENTS



ATLAS PRODUCE'S DATE HARVEST LOOKS PROMISING

Atlas Produce and Distribution, Inc., a Bakersfield, CA-based grower, packer, and shipper of premium California dates, anticipates exceptional quality for its Medjool date crop this year. Caramel Naturel will be offering pitted Medjool and Deglet Noor dates as additions to its product line. Pitted Deglet Noors have been a category leader for 30 years in stores nationwide. Caramel Naturel will offer a pitted option of both popular varieties for increased customer convenience.

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 - 12 oz Washed and Trimmed Bag
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 - 1 lb Vexar
 - 25 lb Bulk



¹ 52 weeks ending 1/1/12 vs. YA, Total US sales; Source: FreshLook Marketing

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



GALAXY NUTRITIONAL FOODS REBRANDS AS GO VEGGIE!

Galaxy Nutritional Foods, North Kingstown, RI, is rebranding its traditional grocery store products as GO Veggie!™ while also introducing a new dairy-free line. This unique and innovative product line has been developed for individuals with food allergies, specifically milk, and for those who want to live a vegan lifestyle.



DOLE FOOD AND HY-VEE FOOD STORES DONATE FIVE SALAD BARS

Dole Food Co. and Hy-Vee Food Stores celebrated the donation of five salad bars to schools in the central Iowa area at the United Community School in Boone, IA. The salad bars were donated as a part of the *First Lady's Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools* initiative, which has donated more than 1,440 salad bars, serving more than 720,000 children across the country.

INCREASED CONSUMER AWARENESS WITH NEW BARD VALLEY PACKAGING

The Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association has announced the addition of the Natural Delights Snack Pack to the growing line of Natural Delights products. The new 4-oz. snack packs have been specifically designed to induce consumer trial at a competitive price, and will hit store shelves this fall. Natural Delights Snack Packs are made from the best-quality Medjool dates and contain no added sugar or preservatives.



U.S. POTATO BOARD HOSTS EIGHTH ANNUAL CULINARY EXPLORATION SEMINAR

The USPB is sponsoring its eighth annual culinary seminar at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Greystone, CA, one of the leading continuing education schools for professional chefs. Designed to inspire executive chefs at leading restaurant chains to create dishes with U.S. potatoes, the two-day, accredited seminar is themed *The New American Menu: Global Flavors, Healthy Appeal*.



MANGO MANIA DISPLAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The winners of more than \$10,000 in cash prizes have been announced for the Mango Mania Display Contest for Small Retailers, sponsored by the National Mango Board, Orlando, FL. Twenty-seven produce departments across the country will receive prizes based on their outstanding mango displays. Results show a 104 percent increase in mango volume for participants, an increase compared to same time last year.

HEEREN BROTHERS PLANS EXPANSION WITH NEW FACILITY

Heeren Bros., Inc., Grand Rapids, MI, has announced plans to modernize its operations by building a new \$22 million state-of-the-art facility in Alpine Township. The company plans to break ground this month on the 170,000-square-foot, LEED-anticipated facility. The new facility will be home to the corporate headquarters, warehouse and distribution center, and apple storage and packing facility with new apple grading and packing lines. The plans are pictured below.



SOBEYS COMPLETES WORLD'S LARGEST POTATO DISPLAY

Sobeys, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada, has completed construction of its world-record-setting display, featuring a final total of 92,500 pounds of potatoes. This sets a new, unofficial world record for the size of a potato display, eclipsing a previous record of 80,000 pounds, previously set in the United States. The display consisted of 10-lb. paper bags of PEI potatoes supplied by PEI potato growers.



MANN PACKING RECEIVES CERTIFICATION AS A WOMEN BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, has received certification as a Women Business Enterprise through the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), the nation's largest third-party certifier of businesses owned and operated by women in the United States. The certification will generate awareness for Mann with companies and government agencies that are actively seeking to conduct business with a women-owned organization.

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We Just Cracked Flavors!



Available October 1

The number one selling snack nut SKU is now available in two category-crackin' flavors: Salt & Pepper, a flavor favorite guaranteed to shake things up and Sweet Chili, the hottest new flavor to hit pistachios. Backed by our \$30 million Get Crackin'™ campaign, including our first-ever Super Bowl spot, the two new offerings are a flavorful addition to your current assortment. Order a cart stopping display today!

Call your Paramount Farms Representative or 1-800-528-NUTS (6887).



ANNOUNCEMENTS



NEW STUDY CONFIRMS TOMATOES COULD CUT RISK OF STROKE

Deardorff Family Farms, Oxnard, CA, has been promoting the health benefits of its Tasti-Lee brand of tomatoes. Tasti-Lee tomatoes contain very high levels of lycopene, which is present in all tomatoes, but studies have shown that the Tasti-Lee variety contains much higher levels than traditional varieties. According to the Mayo Clinic, lycopene is a carotenoid that has been identified as an antioxidant with the potential for several health benefits.

ARIZONA LEAFY GREENS RECEIVES USDA GRANT TO EXPAND PROGRAM

The Arizona Leafy Greens Food Safety Committee was recently awarded a \$125,000 federal grant to expand and enhance distribution of its acclaimed Food Safety Training Program. The Food Safety Program provides uniform multicultural food safety training guidelines. It drives home the importance of field safety training, while recognizing the very different cultural attributes of Hispanic workers, which comprise the majority of those in the field.



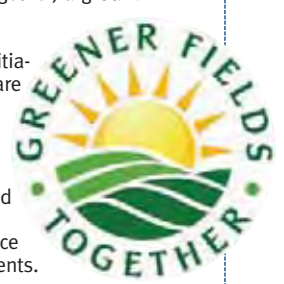
CHARLES M. "BUDDY" LEGER INDUCTED INTO GEORGIA AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

The Georgia Pecan Commission is proud to congratulate Charles M. "Buddy" Leger, who was recently inducted into the Georgia Agricultural Hall of Fame. Leger was honored at the University of Georgia's 58th Annual Alumni Awards Banquet in Athens, GA, on September 14th. He received the award for his lifetime support of Georgia agriculture and creating several Georgia commodity boards, including the Georgia Pecan Commission, and expanding its markets.



TESTA PRODUCE INTRODUCES NEW SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

Testa Produce, Chicago, IL, is a founding participant in Greener Fields Together, a groundbreaking, industry-wide sustainability and local produce initiative. The initiative's two primary goals are to create and commit to continuous sustainability improvements at each touch point in the produce supply chain, and to ensure the availability and safety of local produce for operators in all segments.



MANN PACKING ENCOURAGES INDUSTRY TO "TOSS THE BLACK TRAY"

Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, is tossing the black tray with a newly designed vegetable platter that removes the familiar black plastic portion of the package. Mann found that 92 percent of consumers asked said they did not use the black trays for serving as intended, even when instructions prompt them to do so.



MONTEREY MUSHROOMS AWARDS ANNUAL CARL FIELDS SCHOLARSHIP

Watsonville, CA-based Monterey Mushrooms' annual scholarships have awarded 135 students (some of which are pictured above) a total of \$175,000 for the 2012/2013 school year. This means that Monterey's scholarship program, which was initiated in 1992, now has awarded over \$1,842,000 to over 1,250 dependent children of Monterey employees. Named for the late Carl Fields, the program remains a testament to his passion and equally strong dedication to the education of our youth.



"TASTE OF SOUTH AFRICA" PROMOTION KICKS OFF IN PENNSYLVANIA

Representatives of South African Summer Citrus growers, Wal-Mart, and importer AMC Direct kicked off a week-long "Taste of South Africa" promotion at a Pennsylvania Wal-Mart Supercenter. Wal-Mart customers enjoyed samplings of citrus, traditional South African music and a variety of giveaways at the "Taste of South Africa" event. The celebration marks the long-term partnership between Wal-Mart and the South Africa Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF) to bring South African Summer Citrus to U.S. consumers.



EARTHCYCLE LAUNCHES COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

Canada's largest sustainable packaging company, Earthcycle, Vancouver, BC, is unveiling its improved water-resistant packaging as part of its long line of certified home-compostable, recyclable and renewable products. The new highly refined palm pulp formula means retailers, growers and re-packers across North America can now take advantage of Earthcycle's new packaging for high-moisture produce.

GRIMMWAY FARMS NAMED EXCLUSIVE SUPPLIER OF BIGGEST LOSER FRESH CARROTS

Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, recently announced its partnership with Giraffe Interactive as the exclusive carrot supplier of *The Biggest Loser* consumer brand. The company plans to launch an extensive line of baby carrots catering to both retail and foodservice venues alike that are co-branded with *The Biggest Loser* in early November.



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Born to Boost Business With Proven Quality and Taste

Consumers demand fresh, safe produce. In fact, they're willing to pay more for produce that comes fresh from a local farm. Jersey Fresh looks and tastes just picked because it is just picked.

Consumer confidence is important. Our Jersey Fresh farmers must meet the high-quality standards of the Jersey Fresh grading program. It's more than an advertising logo. It's a comprehensive program of assuring the highest quality product is coming from our local growers.

Jersey Fresh appeals to consumers because of its guaranteed quality, flavor and freshness. And that's important to today's health-conscious consumer, resulting in easier, quicker repeat sales and a healthier bottom line for you.

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NEW PRODUCTS

BUDDY FRUITS UNVEILS JIGGLE GEL

Buddy Fruits, Coral Gables, FL, introduces its revolutionary Jiggle Gel pouch, the first 100-percent fruit gel pouch to hit the market. Buddy Fruits' Jiggle Gel pouch contains only fruit and nothing else, with no high fructose corn syrup, fillers, added water or gelatin. The functional and attractive pouch requires no spoon and ensures a healthful and convenient snack for on-the-go consumers.



NEW APPLE VARIETY FROM FIRSTFRUITS OF WASHINGTON

Sweetie™, an intensely sweet and crunchy new apple variety from FirstFruits of Washington, Yakima, WA, was introduced to retailers this past September. Sweetie™ combines the best attributes of two parents — Gala's excellent sugars alongside the firm-crisp texture of Braeburn, but with a unique flavor of its own. Characteristic with its name, Sweetie™ leads the pack of varieties when it comes to sweetness.

DOLE INTRODUCES FRUIT DISHES FOR FALL AND WINTER MENUS

Offering dishes with Asian spice and bright, tangy flavors is one way to keep customers happy during the long winter months. Using Dole Chef-Ready Cuts and Dole Fresh Frozen Fruits, operators can open the flavor horizons with zesty Beef Noodle Salad with Orange-Anise Dressing (pictured below), Thai Shrimp with Lemongrass and Pineapple, or *Bibimbap*, a Korean rice bowl with fruit and vegetables that's topped with a fried egg.



CRUNCH PAK INTRODUCES FLAVORZ AND SALAD KITS

Crunch Pak®, Cashmere, WA, is premiering a duo of new products including FlavorZ™, apples infused with a natural flavoring that result in another fruit flavor and Salad Kitz™ which come in two versions: Sweet and Creamy Tropical Salad and Crunchy Creamy Waldorf Salad.



GOURMET MUSHROOMS EXPANDS RETAIL LINE

Gourmet Mushrooms, Inc., Sonoma County, CA, is adding a new retail pack to its MYCOPIA™ line of organic mushrooms. The 8-oz. Specialty Trio contains Forest Nameko, Velvet Pioppini and Nebrodini Bianco varieties. The organic Specialty Trio variety pack is visually appealing with contrasting colors that stand out on the retail shelf.



CORRECTIONS

In the Pete Penza Memorial in the September issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, the details of Pete's family were unclear. Mark is the son of Linda, Pete Penza's wife, and is not employed at Pinto Brothers. He is not involved in the produce industry. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* regrets the error.

In October's Red River Valley article, the name of Steve Tweten and Mike Rerick of Nokota Packers, Inc., were misspelled. The first name of Keith Groven of Black Gold Potato Sales Inc., was also incorrect. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* regrets the errors.

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PICK YOUR RETAIL TURF

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



There are many strategies stores have adopted to fight off new competition. Consultants, for example, have commonly suggested that the proper response to the opening of a Wal-Mart Supercenter is to become the “anti-Wal-Mart” — that is, to emphasize high service, organics, perishables, etc. This approach can enable supermarkets to cultivate and retain customers who are not going to be so drawn by Wal-Mart’s siren song of low prices.

Such a strategy has its imperfections: It may help — and has helped — individual operators to survive, but on an industry-wide basis, it is not so much a strategy to compete with Wal-Mart as it is to get out of its way, to cede the paycheck-to-paycheck crowd to Wal-Mart.

In many places, the “anti-Wal-Mart” strategy is becoming problematic in a multi-format world. Consumers are intelligent, and many are perfectly capable of buying fine prepared foods and perishable items at the local upscale supermarket while also running in occasionally to a warehouse club or supercenter to stock up on core grocery items. This means, of course, that the high-end foodservice and broader perishable offerings can’t just differentiate the store; they have to pay the bills.

Most competitive strategies are reactive, and thus likely to fail. Reactive strategies are, by definition, built around some other organization’s strengths. We see this all the time when retailers deal with the entrance of discounters in the marketplace by being more price-competitive. To make these reduced prices feasible, the chains look for cost reductions. Next thing you know, the chains have secured “better” union contracts that, for example, might significantly lower wages for newly hired meat cutters.

The consequences: Soon the chain is short on great meat cutters, and the service meat counter can’t handle all the special holiday orders that differentiated the store. So it soon converts most of its meat program to case-ready and is now left without a differentiated offer and is still more expensive than the discounters on meat.

Another common mistake is to rely on pricing to achieve a positioning that is more economically achieved in another fashion. For example, profits have needlessly been drained from the banana category as supermarket CEOs have demanded that produce departments “give” the fruit away as a kind of flag advertising that the store is price-competitive.

This is a large and continuous expense, yet it may not be the key to low price perception at all. Walk through the Demoulas Market Basket stores in the Boston region with experts in advertising and marketing, and they will tell you the stores look frozen in time. They will critique the flooring, the color scheme, even the tinsel cheapness of the holiday decorations. Yet this chain is a powerhouse! It has a reputation for low prices, is opening stores left and right and gaining market share every day.

Possibly, it is successful despite dated décor. But it is even more likely that it is successful *because* of the dated décor. In other words, the message consumers get when they walk into the store is that this oper-

ator doesn’t overprice to buy wooden floors and track lighting. The holiday decorations can be bought for a few bucks and consumers know that — plus the decorations look like they have been saved and reused from previous years.

In other words, many chains are asking the produce department, through cheap banana prices, to obtain a value image at great cost — when that image could probably be obtained far less expensively by focusing on overall presentation.

In essence, marketing and positioning of the store need to be consistent. All of Whole Foods’ efforts to moderate price perception are probably counter-productive. Customers want Whole Foods to be different. They want the store to pay extra to protect the environment, and keep the employees well paid and the food wholesome. To the extent that Whole Foods convinces customers it is priced normally, Whole Foods also persuades customers it buys, pays and builds normally.

A proper competitive strategy has to begin with a self-assessment. What is your chain good at? What does your chain want to be? Once that is understood, one can build on those strengths to get where one wants to go.

Aside from lack of strategic focus, the big obstacle is often ego. Proud families who have operated supermarket chains multi-generationally have a perception of themselves and their role in the community that

includes thinking of their stores as the place for everyone to shop. So if told they should cut their square footage in half, expand perishables and rationalize grocery SKUs, these proud and successful families recoil. They

don’t view themselves as grocers to the elite — they view themselves as everyone’s grocer.

This can be done, but we live in an increasingly fragmented world. Those in their fifties today grew up with five or six TV channels; today there are hundreds. In today’s retail world, you need deep discount formats *à la* Aldi and Save-a-Lot; you need upscale stores such as HEB’s Central Market; you need a health and environment concept such as Whole Foods or Publix’s Greenwise; you need a Warehouse Club; you need a Supercenter... on and on.

Too many retailers have 10 percent of their stores in marginal neighborhoods and not performing well because the owners are unwilling to re-banner the underperforming stores, give them their own ad, maybe negotiate a special deal with a distributor to keep costs low. Too many retailers know full well that their market will support a Whole Foods but are unwilling to pre-empt Whole Foods with a specialized store concept.

It barely matters what owners want. What matters is that reality is upon us. If you are not a mass market giant, either specialize or develop multiple specialized approaches or watch your concept strain as more concepts — from internet shopping to ethnic stores to drug stores and more — chew off a little piece of business. Small bites or large, in the end, one gets consumed. So pick your turf, make sure it is a defensible position, then play to win.

pb

A proper competitive strategy has to begin with a self-assessment.



European flavors

For your healthy lifestyle!



A message from Europe

Since 2008, the European Flavors program has been present at the top trade shows in the produce industry, organized in-store promotions and developed an entire campaign highlighting and promoting the qualities found in fruits and vegetables from Europe in the U.S. The program's success has exceeded our expectations.

We are happy to announce the renewal of the program with commitment from the European Union, the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Affairs and support from the Centro Servizi Ortofrutticoli.

The program will continue to promote the extraordinary quality of both fresh and processed produce grown in compliance with strict European directives -safeguarding the environment, health and safety of the consumers.

Together with you, we can look forward to continued growth and success in North America.

Please visit our booth #3350 at PMA Fresh Summit in Anaheim, California

www.europeanflavors.eu



State Financing Of Refinery Versus Food Production Is No Simple Decision

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 10.15.2012

Alan Siger at Consumers Produce Co. in Pittsburgh, PA, sent over an opinion piece in a local newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, titled, "Food for all our neighbors: We should invest as much in Western Pennsylvania agriculture as we do in a 'cracker' plant.*"

"We take care of our own" goes the popular Bruce Springsteen song that gets played at political rallies everywhere, regardless of political party. But here in Western Pennsylvania, this is simply not true — at least when it comes to making sure that our neighbors don't go hungry during these hard economic times.

A front-page headline in the Post-Gazette Sept. 15 read, "Rural Food Banks Struggle to Meet Need." The article reported that food pantries all over Western Pennsylvania — but particularly in our rural communities — cannot provide enough nutritional food for struggling families. Does anyone find this more than ironic?

Our region is a cornucopia of agriculture. We have well over 14,000 operating farms and more than 1.2 million acres under cultivation. We produce a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, poultry, beef and pork. We have a rich history in food production and processing. Yet we seem incapable of addressing the most fundamental need of our community — indeed, of any community — and this is to see that everyone is well fed.

However, as recently as 2010, the USDA estimated that Western Pennsylvania farmers and producers devoted nearly 99 percent of their capacity to commodities like corn and soybeans — the overwhelming share of which are exported from our region and into the agri-industrial system for conversion to ethanol, processed food and non-food additives.

Urban sprawl has overtaken many farms, to be sure, but even more have been lost because it is so difficult for farm families to run financially sustainable operations — especially if they produce goods for local markets. Also at risk is our community's ability to directly meet the nutritional needs of our neighbors — even though we know from recent university studies and research that our region has plenty of capacity to produce food for all of our residents. If we provide the financial and market infrastructure, there might never be another story about an empty food pantry in Western Pennsylvania.

This is a problem with a solution. All it requires is the shared commitment of the public and private sectors and a bipartisan effort to do what is in the best interests of the citizens of our commonwealth.

I would modestly propose that the state invest as much in food-system development in Western Pennsylvania as it is offering in subsidies to Shell Oil for the gas cracking plant in Aliquippa. No more, no less: some \$1.7 billion over the next five years.

In exchange, the region would start a local-food initiative to direct subsidies and tax benefits to farmers and producers who agree to shift at least 10 percent of their capacity away from commodity agriculture for industrial reprocessing and into the

production of vegetables, fruits, beef, poultry, pork and dairy. This five-year, 10-percent commitment would fill a regional anti-hunger and nutrition resource pool managed by the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank and our regional pantry network.

Beyond providing fresh, in-season produce and protein, this state investment also would be used to create regional food aggregation and processing centers so that we could capture more locally grown food and make shelf-stable, value-added food products.

Much of what is needed is already under development here and around the nation in the creation of food hubs. Hubs are, by the USDA's definition, centers for value-added processing, which are intended to leverage the economic benefits of local farming. In much the way that Shell wants to leverage the presence of natural gas and byproducts in Western Pennsylvania, we should leverage the presence of fertile land and a farming culture through our commitment to grow and buy local.

Our leading food-based corporations also should increase the share of locally produced food products they buy by a minimum of 10 percent. This purchasing commitment would help drive the development of more and higher-volume processing centers in the region. Local growers and producers would have the value chain they need to move fresh products into our marketplace on a year-round basis. Our end markets would create demand and the market would become efficient and robust over time.

The author of the piece is Joseph Bute, the president of Hollymead Capital, a Gibsonia, PA-based company that supports the creation of sustainable enterprises in low- and moderate-income communities. He makes an interesting argument, but we don't think the solution is as obvious to us as it is to him.

First, he explains that the government is giving subsidies of \$1.7 billion over the next five years to Shell to have a "cracker" refinery built and suggests that the same amount be spent on developing and diversifying the local agricultural and food production community.

It is a little unclear as to whether he is saying that there would be a better return on investment for the community in investing in local food than investing in bringing the refinery there, so the government should not do the refinery and, instead, do the food or if he is just arguing the government should spend twice as much money and do both.

In either case, the argument is weak. These are major financial investments, and to suggest them one really has to show a return. He never quantifies the return on an investment in the food and ag industry — how many jobs created, how much tax revenue paid, etc. — in any way that could justify an expenditure. He certainly doesn't take on the burden of demonstrating that this investment in food would pay off more than an investment in a refinery.

He also has some of his facts wrong. He talks about the state making a \$1.7 billion dollar subsidy over five years. In reality, the proposal — and it is just that, a proposal that has not been passed — is to provide an incentive of \$67 million each year, or \$1.7 billion

*A cracker plant converts ethylene into chemicals to make a broad range of plastic products.

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over 25 years, not five years. That reduces the present value calculation very substantially.

Besides, the word he uses — “subsidies” in referring to the Shell Oil project — is somewhat questionable. Although the details of the proposal haven't been published, typically these incentives offered by states and localities involve tax credits. So if a new refinery is not built, then, obviously, the tax that will be paid on the profits of the non-existent refinery is zero.

Now we don't think states and localities should even be permitted to give out these types of incentives — to oil plants or food companies. It encourages politicians to allow the business climate to deteriorate in general — high taxes, regulatory obstinacy, etc. — then to play the hero by offering incentives to individual companies.

Besides, the whole process is unfair to competitors who don't get deals, and it is corrupting as it gives politicians too much leverage against particular industries and individual companies.

Still, if we are going to allow states to incentivize certain industries, certainly Mr. Bute doesn't provide any particularly compelling analysis as to why the local food industry would be a profitable place to invest state funds.

Second, Mr. Bute seems to conflate local food production with alleviating local poverty. These are really issues that are not particularly related. If a local population needs help, increasing local wealth is what increases the ability of the community to help them out. Mr. Bute doesn't explain how taxing the local community \$1.7 billion and then putting the \$1.7 billion back into the community through this program would actually increase wealth. If it does not — and it seems unlikely to do so — the program might well make poverty worse.

Third, diversifying agriculture away from corn and soybeans sounds pretty good, but then again, neither Mr. Bute nor the Pundit has to do the work. We've mentioned other efforts to consciously move farmers to different crops — as in the piece we wrote when Dole was opening a new fresh-cut facility in Bessemer City, NC, and was collaborating with the state department of agriculture to persuade local farmers to switch from tobacco to vegetables.

Turns out these efforts are most difficult. Different products present different degrees of difficulty, and different farmers have different levels of expertise.

In the end, Mr. Bute's approach is

Sustaining America depends not only on making sure people are fed, but also on making sure people are free. Focusing on changing policy to ensure more food for food banks detracts from the important work of making sure there are fewer people needing food banks.

questionable. First, what makes him think that politicians will be good at selecting certain industries — picking winners and losers — to invest in? Politicians have no special expertise in this area and, if anything, they are likely to make decisions on a political basis. Second, a focus on feeding the poor may distract from the key question: Why are all these people poor to begin with, and what can we do about that? Third, it is important to keep a focus that expenditures have costs as well as benefits, and those who propose expenditures thus have to argue not only that their proposals will do good, but whether they will do more good than the money would do elsewhere or if left with the people who made the money to begin with.

In fact, there is substantial evidence that Pennsylvania ought to look to improve general economic conditions by adopting pro-growth policies. Economist Stephen Moore recently collaborated on a piece for *The Wall Street Journal*: “Laffer and Moore: A 50-State Tax Lesson for the President.”

In our new report, “Rich States, Poor States,” prepared for the American Legislative Exchange Council, we compare the economic performance of states with no income tax to that of states with high rates.

Every year for the past 40, the states without income taxes had faster output growth (measured on a decadal basis) than the states with the highest income taxes. In 1980, for example, there were 10 zero-income-tax states. Over the decade leading up to 1980, those states grew 32.3 percentage points faster than the 10 states with the highest tax rates. Job growth was also much higher in the zero-tax states. The states with the nine highest income tax rates had no net job growth at all, and seven of those nine managed to lose jobs.

Then there's the question of immigration from state to state — or how people vote with their feet. As common sense would dictate, people try to move

from anti-growth states and cities to more welcoming climates. There are relevant factors other than tax policy, of course, but in general the most popular destination states don't have income taxes. That's as true recently as it was 40 years ago.

Over the past decade, states without an income tax have seen 58 percent higher population growth than the national average, and more than double the growth of states with the highest income tax rates. Such interstate migration left Texas with four new congressional seats this year and spanked New York and Ohio with a loss of two seats each.

The transfer of economic power and political influence from high-tax states toward low-tax, right-to-work ones is one of America's most momentous demographic changes in decades. Liberal utopias are losing the race for capital. The rich, the middle-class, the ambitious and others are leaving workers' paradises such as Hartford, Buffalo and Providence for Jacksonville, San Antonio and Knoxville.

Sustaining America depends not only on making sure people are fed, but also on making sure people are free. Focusing on changing policy to ensure more food for food banks detracts from the important work of making sure there are fewer people needing food banks.

Instead of finding new ways to spend money, maybe Pennsylvania should become a Right to Work state and eliminate its state income tax. Then come the 2020 Census, we might be reading about some additional congressional districts being allocated for the Keystone state.

We would love to have an expansion of diversified food production in western Pennsylvania and other areas — but it shouldn't come by taxing the people of the region to the tune of \$1.7 billion.

Many thanks to Alan Siger and Consumers Produce Co. for leading us to think over such issues.

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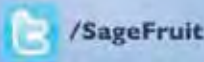
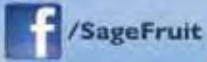
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Fresh Fruit Is The Apple Of The Snack Consumer's Eye

BY KATHY ROSS, CATEGORY SPECIALIST, NPD GROUP

Fresh fruit is not only the top snack food consumed in America, it is also one of the fastest growing, according to new snacking research from The NPD Group. NPD's recently released *Snacking in America*, which examines long-term attitudes and behaviors about snacking as well as snack selection drivers, reports that annual eatings per capita of fresh fruit as a snack have increased by six percentage points since 2003. Growing concerns about health and eating right are certainly contributors to the increasing popularity of fruit as a snack, but NPD's research shows that fruit has been the top snack choice in this country for the past decade.

One of the reasons that fruit holds the top snack position is that it's eaten throughout the day, resulting in its inclusion in more snack occasions than other snack foods. Over a two-year period ending March, 2012, fruit was consumed as a snack in nine more snack occasions than chocolate, the next top snack food, and 25 more occasions than potato chips, the third most popular snack food.

Availability is certainly another reason why fruit leads the pack in snacks. Snack foods are never too far away from us, and this is especially true for fresh fruit. Eighty-five percent of households currently have fresh fruit on hand, which compares to 51 percent of households that have cookies available, according to NPD's most recent *Kitchen Audit*, a survey conducted to determine what food ingredients, appliances and utensils U.S. households have on hand. Fruit is, however, outranked by salty snacks, which are currently on hand in 91 percent of U.S. households. Over half of American pantries currently have on hand just about every top snack food eaten in-home today. This is especially true in households with children.

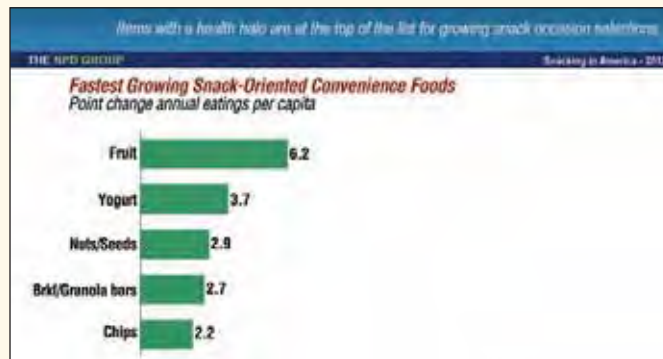
Having fruit on hand makes sense, as it appears to be a favorite snack among all ages. Consumers 65 and older eat the most fruit, followed by children under 12. Teens, ages 13 to 17, eat the least amount of fruit, but their consumption increases as they get

older. Females eat more fresh fruit than males, but not that much more. Another aspect of the fruit consumer, other than their age, is the type of snackers they are. Healthier snack consumers snack more often between meals and eat a wider variety of healthy snacks, and fruit is the top go-to snack for these consumers.

Its broad appeal among consumers of every age and gender would account for fruit as a planned, rather than impulse, snack purchase. Impulse purchasing, those snacks purchased within 30 minutes of consumption, is strongest among ready-to-eat sweet baked goods, candy, and traditional salty snacks, whereas the majority of fruit purchases are planned more than one day in advance of eating.

Although fruit is the top snack overall, its popularity wanes a bit as the day progresses. Fresh fruit holds a strong lead as a morning snack, ties as the top afternoon snack, and drops to fifth place as a late night snack when indulgent, sweet-and-salty snacks grab more attention from snackers. Consumers are motivated by different needs for snacks as the day progresses. Portability, availability, and health seem to drive morning snack selections; afternoon choices look to be more satiating, while snack-oriented foods consumed in the evening are more about flavor and taste sensations.

In addition to time-of-day, snack food selections are often based on the type of activity the consumer is engaged in at the time of the snack occasion. The portability of candy, baked goods, and bars drive consumption of these items when consumers are on the go, and may contribute to their likelihood of being consumed in a car. Fresh



Annual Eatings Per Capita	
Fresh Fruit (Total)	143.2
Bananas	41.4
Apples	26.0
Berries	16.2
Oranges	11.6
Melons	11.3
Grapes	11.2

CHARTS COURTESY OF THE NPD GROUP/SNACKING IN AMERICA REPORT

fruit is a more popular snack choice for leisure and meal-related activities than work/school, social, or on-the-go activities.

Taking the who, what, when, and where of fresh fruit consumption into account, the point to be made is that fresh fruit is a top-of-mind snack with most consumers. Since 2002, the average American is consuming an additional 15 snack meals per year, with most of the snacking growth occurring in the morning, when fruit is the No. 1 snack choice.

Among the opportunities this trend presents to producers and produce retailers are to market and merchandise around the morning snack occasions, promote fruit for the activities during which it is most likely to be eaten, and package and promote it for on-the-go activities when it's least likely to be consumed.

Bottom line: fresh fruit is a growing snack food that is ripe for the picking.



The NPD Group is the leading provider of reliable and comprehensive consumer and retail information for a wide range of industries. Today, more than 2,000 manufacturers, retailers, and service companies rely on NPD to help them drive critical business decisions at the global, national, and local market levels. NPD helps our clients to identify new business opportunities and guide product development, marketing, sales, merchandising, and other functions.

Time For Rest Of The Industry To Catch Convenience-Fruit Craze

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

It is odd. We have no evidence that overall produce consumption is expanding, yet the reputable folks over at the NPD group show that fruit is a fast growing snack. Why might this be so?

One possibility is that this is a testament to the fresh-cut fruit industry. From apple slices to fruit cups that fit in car cup-holders, there has been an explosion in convenient ways to eat fresh fruit. Some items, such as fresh pineapple or fresh watermelon, which once were very difficult for consumers to cut, are now available most conveniently.

Another driver may be expanded distribution. Today, from the drive-through at McDonald's to many drug stores, vending machines and convenience stores, fresh fruit, whether a simple display of apples, bananas, oranges and pears or a full fresh-cut offering, are quite common. In fact, we covered this topic in our October cover story, *Produce Finds A Home In Non-Traditional Outlets*.

In addition, varieties have changed. More fruit is seedless and some, such as easy-peeling citrus, is easier to eat in the car or at one's desk. New varieties have made a selection of tastier items available. This is clearly true in apples and melons. Grape varieties have also expanded enormously.

What's more, counter-seasonal and tropical growing opportunities have made most fruits available year-round.

There are also lots more programs at schools and offices to give out free fresh fruit. In the office of PRODUCE BUSINESS, we receive two fresh fruit deliveries each week, which we share with all associates at no cost.

Whatever the cause, the fruit industry is intersecting profitably with a growing trend toward snacking and that is for the good.

Of course, since overall consumption of produce is flat, the rise in fruit and vegetable consumption for snacks may mean a decline in fruit consumption at other times or a decline in vegetable consumption.

This may point to an enormous difficulty in increasing overall produce consumption — for every action there is a reaction. If we give away fruit at the office, it seems as if this would increase produce consumption. It well may, but quite possibly by less than hoped. After all, someone who always has a banana after work might have a cookie if he already had two bananas in the office that day.

Where to go from here? Well, one lesson is that snack-eating occasions are rising; this might link in to a grazing trend and imply less consumption at the tradition breakfast, lunch and dinner. This poses particular challenges to vegetables as they are so often consumed as side dishes.

One wonders if producers of microwave-steamer type packs shouldn't focus on producing single-serve snack packs perfect to microwave at the office or home for quick snack. If a desire to eat healthy and to fight obesity is part of what is driving the increased consumption of fruit at snack occasions, an increased availability of tasty vegetable snack items might be well received.

Merchandising may have to change — and substantially. Right now, drugstores sell fresh-cut fruit, maybe some celery and carrot sticks, sandwiches, pudding, etc., all things ready to eat. Maybe someone could design a merchandising display with an integrated steamer or microwave appliance so that vegetable snack packs could be heated in-store ready to slip in a cup-holder and snack on the way to work or school. Maybe we can get cars to come with little microwave ovens?

Distribution would be another challenge. Most gas station convenience stores have fresh-cut fruit of various sorts, and many have whole fruits in at least a limited assortment. There may be some salads. But salad greens aside, there isn't a fresh vegetable to be seen.

Another issue for both fruits and vegetables is how to capture more late-night snacking. Here, the answer to a consumer

To sell more produce, we need to meet consumer needs at different day-parts and with different accompaniments.

yearning for "flavor and taste sensations" may be more tie-ins with other popular snack items. Chocolate, caramel, cheese, whipped cream, olive oil, bacon... all these and more can take fresh produce and ramp it up a notch. At Kings Super Markets, headquartered in Parsippany, NJ, you never see a produce department without at least three different specialty cheeses being cross-merchandised amidst the produce.

To sell more produce, we need to meet consumer needs at different day-parts and with different accompaniments. Sometimes you feel like having some berries and sometimes you want them with a great cheese, and sometimes with whipped cream and sometimes dipped in chocolate. Maybe the key to increasing consumption is offering items in variations — so they are perfect for every eating occasion.



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Our logistics certifications



Our market



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Rosemont's Daniel Whittles designed 15 prototype versions over 18 months before final production of the Eco-Crate.

New Crate Seeks To Revolutionize Corn Shipping

After 150 or more years of packaging in wood, it's time for fresh corn crates to join the 21st century. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Despite many unique packaging developments in the produce industry, there has been little to no innovation in fresh corn packaging for decades. The currently used wooden crates can be traced as far back as the 1800s. However, a new dawn is on the horizon as a unique recyclable crate prepares to move the corn industry into the next century.

"The Eco-Crate is a proprietary, patent-pending product made from 100 percent polypropylene and ideal for packing fresh bulk produce," explains Daniel Whittles, director of grower programs and business development for Rosemont Farms, a CH Robinson Company, in Boca Raton, FL. "It has been developed as a joint effort between Rosemont and Coroplast [a Vanceburg, KY-based manufacturer of corrugated plastic]."

The product is said to be revolutionary in a number of ways. "Some of the primary benefits are related to performance," states Whittles. "The Eco-Crate performs well in the extensive post-harvest treatment of fresh sweet corn, as well as the general design and material performance. It is completely recyclable."

"This is a revolutionary product for all growers because it is designed for the environment," says Joey Mickler, president of J&J Ag Products, Inc., a family-owned grower/shipper based in Clewiston, FL. "Farming conservation is a large part of our growing, and renewable products like the Eco-Crate will make farming sustainable for the future."

Such an innovation for the corn category is of no small implication. "The category significance is roughly \$.75 billion dollars in retail, wholesale and foodservice channels," reports Whittles. "It is a significant presence for consumers in the marketplace as well as the footprint in landfills."

Development And Testing

The Eco-Crate was essentially birthed in April of 2011 in response to a number of issues and opportunities in the sweet corn category including food safety and handling. "Given the current 150-year old technology with wooden crates, I knew there had to be a next level for those seeking to be a leader in the category," says Whittles.

The crate has undergone extensive testing

and validating as 15 prototype versions were given to various growers over the past 18 months. "These growers have all been instrumental in both validation and encouragement of this product," says Whittles. "Additionally, we have had the pleasure of aligning with at least half-a-dozen world-class retail trade partners who confidentially provided invaluable feedback along the way."

The prototypes and support of the many stakeholders resulted in the exact combination of features and performance necessary. "This has allowed us to test commercial shipments in volume," says Whittle. "These shipments have been ongoing since May of 2012, when we started shipping truckload volumes of Eco-Crate brand sweet corn. The collaborative work of our manufacturing partner, Coroplast, in taking my design ideas and guidance and putting them into the actual production of the crate was invaluable."

Trademark and Provisional Patent applications were filed this past year. "Having the trademark and patent will allow us to provide a unique solution to those we serve in the supply chain from the field to the receiver,"

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Eco-Crates are hand-packed before being loaded into the hydro-cooler.

states Whittles.

The entrepreneurial orientation of Rosemont/CH Robinson is credited as a crucial component of the product's development. "Having a company that supports a culture of innovation was critical," explains Whittles. "This would have been easy to drop after the first few rounds of unsuccessful testing or the various other obstacles that came up as we tackled this on top of our regular responsibilities managing a very dynamic business."

Making An Impact

The most highly touted benefit of the Eco-Crate is its recyclable aspect. "The Eco-Crate is #5 plastic, and in most cases, recyclable, thus eliminating the cost of disposal of wax impregnated corrugate or wire-bound wooden crates," states Rosemont's Whittles. "Both of these other packing options have sustainability issues, and frequently have substantial costs in relation to disposal."

The Eco-Crate has quite a potential for positive environmental impact. "Since the fresh sweet corn category represents tens of millions of crates per year, use of the Eco-Crate means hundreds of thousands of tons of waste that won't end up in landfills," says Whittles. "My own personal mission statement is founded on a service mentality and being a good steward of the earth. The sustainability implications of this product for farm and the category are all motivations for me."

The crate should be recyclable as part of standard recycling programs. "The current #5 plastic is a fit for the trend to single-source recycling where the waste management people sort the materials themselves," explains Whit-

les. "The Eco-Crate can be bundled or bailed with existing plastic."

However, other models of recovery could actually provide a small per-pound or per-container recovery fee for this material. "As a grower/shipper/marketer, we have been very interested in this deeper dive into understanding the full implications of the materials we choose to use," says Whittles.

"Since the fresh sweet corn category represents tens of millions of crates per year, use of the Eco-Crate means hundreds of thousands of tons of waste that won't end up in landfills."

— Daniel Whittles, Rosemont Farms

Cost And Efficiency

Cost benefits are another significant element of the Eco-Crate stemming from saved waste disposal costs as well as efficiency in freight. "A big problem with the wooden crate is the cost of disposal," states Buddy McKinstry, co-owner of Ray's Heritage, a vegetable grower/shipper in Belle Glade, FL. "The Eco-Crate is easier and boasts a cheaper disposal."

"While we do expect

to see a small premium in the marketplace for this proprietary solution, the cost benefits will far outstrip any upcharge," contends Whittles. "Right now, we're seeing about a 10- to 20-cent savings per empty crate for disposal costs. We also see 10 to 20 percent more product on the truck for freight savings."

The Eco-Crate is lighter than other containers while still providing the necessary high performance standards. "This year, in our beta stage, we found that shipping truckloads of Eco-Crate Fresh Sweet Corn resulted in at least 10 percent more corn on the truck and we regularly cube 20 percent more sellable product on a truckload," states Whittles. "This has been calculated as a per-case savings over a wood crate of \$.43 and a savings per truck over wood of \$475."

Shrink through the supply chain is estimated to decrease. "Broken crates will essentially be eliminated and less product damaged," says Rosemont's Whittles.

"Producers also will see an increase in packing efficiency," adds J&J's Mickler.

Improved Safety

Safety in handling is another advantage. "In a number of surveys, wood crates were identified as the single most difficult container and most injury-causing container at DC and store level, both domestically and in Europe," reports Whittles. "We expect those handling the Eco-Crate at various points of contact from packing through merchandising to be thrilled at the reduced hazard of metal wire and splintered wood."

The Eco-Crate is easier and safer for ship-



pers, as well. "It's easier for our box makers to put together and they can fold it with their hands," reports Jaime Patrick, manager/partner of grower/shipper Patrick Farms, headquartered in Omega, GA. "Also, you don't have to worry about anybody cutting their hand. The wood sometimes splinters or breaks, especially on bottom crates."

The crate also provides food safety benefits and superior ease of labeling through a very wet and demanding post-harvest and logistics process. "Food safety managers love how the most basic adhesive and labels are virtually permanent once affixed, even through the hydro-cooling process and icing," adds Whittles. "We find the crate slides through the hydro-cooler more easily. The containers don't break down and the packing and stacking patterns look to meet or exceed any existing container systems on the whole."

Better adhering labels ensure traceability to store level. "With the implementation of PTI, this is a crucial element," says Whittles.

The plastic also serves as a sanitary environment to pack premium sweet corn. "From a food safety perspective, you don't have to worry about wood harboring any bacteria or pathogen," says Patrick.

Into The Future

Currently, Rosemont/CHR and its sweet corn grower partners located in the primary growing areas are the only authorized entities permitted to pack and ship commercially in the Eco-Crate. "At this time, we have five primary growing operations already staged to use the Eco-Crate, but that will likely expand to all of our growing operations by spring 2013," reports Whittles.

A longer-term vision is to expand the Eco-

Crate to a greater clientele. "At the point we can manufacture sufficient amounts to meet our own multi-million crate program needs, we may offer it to the broader producers in the category," says Whittles. "But it will be at least a year or two before we can consider offering it beyond our own in-house programs."

Additionally, expansion into other products would be beneficial as well. "We do see future potential to expand the Eco-Crate to other items," says Patrick.

"I see potential as time goes on for the Eco-

Crate in other products," agrees McKinstry of Ray's Heritage. "It will be good for many products in the produce industry."

In the end, Eco-Crate is positioned to help bring value to the category and the customer. "The branding of the Eco-Crate with our premium sweet corn varieties is a natural fit with the price points and value points we want to provide and bring to the whole category," states Whittles.

"The renewability of the box will make it commonplace in the future," adds Mickler. **pb**

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How The Industry Is Catching Up To Science



The ramifications of improved science and more testing are leading to an overwhelming amount of recalls on a wide range of perishable goods. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* explores the consequences of pulling product from shelves and what it means for the industry as a whole. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Recalls of fresh produce products are becoming a common phenomenon in the produce business equation. “According to FDA’s Recall website, there were 109 food recalls between August 6 and October 2, 2012, with 33 of those being fresh produce,” reports Dr. David E. Gombas, senior vice president of food safety and technology at United Fresh in Washington, D.C. “Of these, 18 were linked to the original recall of Daniella-brand mangos, five were because of *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination in bagged leafy greens and the other 10 were apparently unrelated, involving pathogen detections in leafy greens, mushrooms, apples, cilantro, cantaloupe and tomatoes.”

“The Coordinated Outbreak Response & Evaluation (CORE) Network has responded to more than 40 outbreaks of varied scope and severity over the past year,” says Carla Daniels, spokesperson for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in Silver Spring, MD. “The Reportable Food Registry has increased the speed with which FDA and its state partners investigate reports and take appropriate follow-up action.”

Though a necessary evil, recalls do cause havoc. “Recalls over the past year have been damaging to the industry from the producer right down the line to the end user and everyone in between,” states Dave Corsi, vice president of produce and floral for Wegmans Food Markets

in Rochester, NY, with 81 stores.

“Recalls have cost us sales,” acknowledges Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Food Markets in Parsippany, NJ, with 25 Kings and 6 Balducci’s stores. “Cantaloupe recalls have affected the entire category. As a result, customers don’t trust fresh produce immediately after a recall, and it can linger on if the recall has extended products.”

While many of the recalls this year did not involve consumer illness, the notoriety of a few has been sufficient to keep produce recalls in the public eye. “The recent recalls generating the most interest are the ones having to do with cantaloupes because of what happened in 2011 with Jensen Farms,” explains Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for the Produce Marketing Association, headquartered in Newark, DE. “On its heels came the issues out of North Carolina, then Central Indiana, then Central California — keeping cantaloupe in the limelight.”

“In the July/August period there were at least 16 recalls linked to the Gills Onions’ recall for *Listeria* and one for Chamberlain cantaloupes,” reports Gombas. “Among the July to October recalls, only Daniella mangos and Chamberlain cantaloupes were linked to illness outbreaks.”

Though costly, recalls do serve a role. “In the realm of the whole produce world, four incidents may be statistically insignificant, but the impact of just one person being sick is significant,” states Tommy Wilkins,

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Tanimura & Antle's new campaign is based on the fact that, according to the FDA, there have been no deaths linked to field-packed lettuce, despite the high number of recalls in the category.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANIMURA & ANTLE

produce procurement director for United Supermarkets, in Lubbock, TX, currently operating 51 stores. "Just one sick person is unacceptable."

"If we're putting public health first, then the consequences of not recalling the product are potentially much worse than the fallout of these recalls," agrees Will Daniels, senior vice president of operations and organic integrity for San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm.

Reasonable Questions

The reasons behind the seeming increase in recalls remain simple, yet complex. According to Craig Hedberg, professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health in Minneapolis, MN, "Recalls occur for two major reasons. Either a product has been identified as the cause of a foodborne outbreak, or a pathogen has been isolated from the product."

"An increase in recalls is attributable to

more in-depth signaling, trending and surveillance," says FDA's Daniels. "Streamlined decision-making and quicker response time if an outbreak occurs, seamless coordination and enhanced communication, and ultimately, increased public health protection leading to effective preventive food safety practices and policies are also factors."

Multiple factors play into illness-generated recalls. "First, there are companies that have not developed the kind of food safety programs they need to have," states Whitaker. "They don't have good risk assessments and they don't have a crisis management program. Then you get these perfect storm events and they end up with a problem. What results is high-profile crisis event that can actually crash an industry segment — responsible and irresponsible alike."

"The illness-causing incidents we've seen to a large degree were because the growers weren't following good practices," says Tim York, president of Salinas, CA-based Markon Cooperative Inc. "We need to be honest about this as an industry and call out the bad actors when things happen. Issuing statements about how the industry, in general, takes food safety seriously is counterproductive. We need to pronounce those irresponsible parties as not representative of our



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industry. If we don't call out the bad actor, then we all become accountable."

Recalls are also originating farther back along the supply chain. "We are seeing numerous subsequent piggyback recalls occurring because items are used in other products, thus requiring those products to be recalled as well," explains United's Gombas. "The 18 recalls linked to Daniella mangos and the 16 recalls linked to Gills onions occurred only because those products contained the recalled ingredient; the pathogen was never shown to

be in the subsequently recalled products."

Testing is another instigator. "In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of outbreaks associated with fresh produce vehicles," says Professor Hedberg. "This, in turn, has led to increased testing of fresh produce items by government agencies and industry. When more products are tested, more positive samples will inevitably be found."

"We see more companies doing voluntarily testing and recalls," explains PMA's Whitaker. "Even though there are real questions as to

Eighteen recalls were linked to Daniella-brand mangos, even though the pathogen was never found in the recalled product.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPLENDID PRODUCTS LLC

what the testing really means, companies choose not to harvest, to hold back production or to recall product based on positive testing."

"As an all-organic operation, Earthbound has adopted comprehensive multi-hurdle food safety programs, which include raw product and finished goods pathogen testing," reports the company's Daniels.

Costco requires a test-and-hold program from suppliers. "We have test-and-hold programs on all ready-to-eat produce and cantaloupes," says Craig Wilson, vice president of quality assurance and food safety for Costco in Issaquah, WA. "One reason you see more product withdrawn from the market is because companies are shipping before they get test results back. We place emphasis on test-and-hold. If we have to give up 24 hours shelf-life to have food safety assurance, we're happy to do it."

Testing comes with pros and cons. York explains, "While testing is a good method to validate that appropriate food safety programs are in place, it doesn't really increase safety within the system. You need such an extensive testing program to make it statistically valid, it isn't practical."

"We can never ensure the safety of any food item through testing," adds the University of Minnesota's Hedberg. "We also cannot avoid the appearance of problems by avoiding testing. Outbreaks due to contamination of fresh produce are a reality and will become more common as the effectiveness of public health surveillance increases."

"From a legal perspective, more testing is a good thing both to keep product off the market as well as help the industry learn where mistakes are made," says Bill Marler, food safety lawyer at Marler Clark, in Seattle, WA. "You can't test your way to food safety, but learning if the product was contaminated can

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INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

Industry initiatives play an important role in facilitating and preventing recalls. Industry leaders weigh in with some examples:

Traceability: "The more advances we can make in traceability the better," says Tommy Wilkins, produce procurement director for United Supermarkets LLC, in Lubbock, TX. "It's the key to be able to identify certain lot numbers instead of just saying 'don't eat tomatoes.' All the work being done in growing areas to identify lot numbers, pick dates, crew numbers, and other data will help move the issue from an industry-wide problem to a specified growing issue."

Research: "The Center for Produce Safety is a great example of government and

industry working together to develop better science and information around food safety," says Tim York, president of Markon Cooperative, Inc., in Salinas, CA. "More research will help bridge the gap between detection and practical implementation of regulations."

Commodity-Specific Programs: "Industry-initiated food safety programs like the LGMA and California Cantaloupe Advisory Board have created guidelines and standards that minimize the food safety risk associated with California- and Arizona-grown leafy greens and cantaloupes when these items are properly handled," says Rick Antle, CEO of Tanimura & Antle in Salinas, CA. "A National Leafy Greens Standard has yet to progress beyond hearings because of regional opposition. This opposition must be quelled. The past two years demonstrate that regional programs are likely to have

higher health risks. Historically, this has meant smaller and more contained outbreaks. However, as regional growers outgrow their small local market area and begin shipping nationally, these health risks also grow, as we saw with the 2012 Indiana Cantaloupe outbreak."

Industry Guidance: "The United Fresh Food Safety & Technology Council is developing guidance on Environmental Monitoring and Control for *Listeria* in Produce Operations," says David E. Gombas, senior vice president, food safety and technology at United Fresh in Washington, D.C. "We're building on more than 20 years of experience in other raw and ready-to-eat foods to help the industry understand when a facility or equipment is vulnerable to *Listeria* entrenchment and how to find and control it." **pb**

help you understand what was going on that day, that hour or in that plant."

Outpaced By Science

Advances in detection are another factor. "As science becomes more accurate, they're finding smaller and smaller traces that would not have

been actionable years ago," points out Dave Westendorf, a sales associate with San Clemente, CA-based Bay Area Produce. "Now it triggers a recall. Obviously, nobody wants to sell contaminated product, and recalls are going to be a way of life, but science is outpacing the practical implication and response."

Larry Nienkerk, owner and general manager of Splendid Products LLC, in Burlingame, CA, agrees, adding, "The technology of detection of pathogens seems to be outstripping the ability to come into compliance. Until you get a situation where all the technologies are at the same level, you're going

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“Issuing statements about how the industry, in general, takes food safety seriously is counterproductive. We need to pronounce those irresponsible parties as not representative of our industry. If we don’t call out the bad actor, then we all become accountable.”

— TIM YORK, MARKON COOPERATIVE INC.

to continue to see a proliferation of recalls well into the future.”

The debate if detection may actually result in illness adds difficulty. “The testing methods we have are often based on enrichment techniques, which put the sample in an ideal environment so that if the organism is there it will indeed grow,” explains PMA’s Whitaker. “But, the real question is if the organism left in its natural state on the sample would cause disease if it goes through the normal environment and then is consumed.”

“Our detection techniques are incredibly better today than in the past,” acknowledges Stephen Patricio, president of Westside Produce

Co., in Firebaugh, CA, and chairman of the Center for Produce Safety Advisory Board. “Bacteria are present all around us. Sample enough and you will find something. But, not all bacteria at minimum levels result in illness.”

“For the past 15 years of FDA/CDC data, there have not been any deaths associated with field-packed produce,” states Dr. Gurmail Mudahar, vice president food safety and quality control for Tanimura & Antle, based in Salinas, CA. “However, there has been a high number of testing and recalls of field-packed lettuce. Thus, one can only conclude that there is absolutely no relationship between these recalls of field-packed produce and outbreaks.”


One example of this conundrum is the newly instituted *Listeria* testing. “Unlike *Salmonella* and *E. coli*, *Listeria* is a soil microorganism and is expected to be found in the field and periodically on produce,” says United’s Gombas. “Fortunately, and inexplicably, *Listeria* from field sources has not been implicated in any U.S. outbreaks in over 30 years. The two *Listeriosis* outbreaks linked to produce [2010 on fresh-cut celery and 2011 on whole cantaloupes] were both blamed on contamination most likely occurring in the packinghouse or processing facility, not in the field.”

Gombas continues, “However, product testing is unable to differentiate between *Listeria* coming from the field and contamination occurring in a facility, so FDA still considers any level of *Listeria monocytogenes* on a ready-to-eat food as an adulterant, regardless of its source. We are likely to see increased testing of fresh produce for *Listeria* and increased numbers of recalls.”

“In the case of *Listeria*, FDA is making some general assumptions about the detection of a pathogen that may not present a real threat,” adds Markon’s York. “The United States is one of the few countries without a standard for how much *Listeria* is generally

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Nevertheless, regulatory agencies must move to protect public health. “You have a constant tug-of-war going on in that if you increase the surveillance, you find evidence of positives,” explains PMA’s Whitaker. “Even though they’re at very low frequency and very low levels, our techniques are good enough to find them. When you find them, the regulatory agencies are left with no choice but to recall these items.”

Tough Consequences

Despite the recognized need, recalls are burdensome. “It would be impossible for anybody who hasn’t been through a recall to appreciate just what a horrible experience it is,” says Splendid’s Nienkerk, who recently underwent a recall of Daniella brand mangos. “The depth the issue reaches is just unfathomable.”

A recall adds cost in a number of ways. “From those in the corporate offices who share the information with distribution centers and stores, to the loss prevention people who follow up with stores to make sure product was removed from sale, to those who actually remove the products involved, it all adds up,” says Wegman’s Corsi. “Combine that with business interruption, and a recall can be extremely expensive.”

The foodservice industry is also no stranger to the devastating effects of an illness-related recall. “A big difference in consequence between retail and foodservice is how consumers tend to hold foodservice establishments more accountable,” says Markon’s York. “For example if consumers buy contaminated melons at Safeway and take them home and get sick, they don’t usually equate the risk with Safeway and refuse to shop Safeway again. However, if the consumer eats a contaminated melon in a restaurant, that restaurant name is integrally linked with a food safety problem.”

The ramifications of a recall can be far reaching. “Recalls have a negative impact on brand integrity,” states Corsi. “They can cause insurance costs to increase and eventually get absorbed into future product costs.”

Resulting Injustice

Despite all best intentions, tragic incidents occur and are made more difficult when seemingly right-acting businesses are threatened. When faced with the mango recall, Splendid reportedly responded quickly. “I couldn’t stand the thought of being responsible for anyone becoming ill, so within minutes of finding out there was an issue we stopped sales and issued a recall,” reports

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Nienkerk. "We've been told by everyone that we handled it in a very appropriate manner."

However, regardless of their right response, the company experienced retribution. "It's unfortunate for our industry when a sales agent through no fault of his own stands to lose millions of dollars and the business is at risk as a result of a recall," says Westendorf of Bay Area Produce. "If a packer or grower is doing things in an unsanitary manner, then they should go out of business. But if an agent has done the due diligence of assuring the supplier's food safety

programs, then it's counterproductive to the industry to put these good companies at risk."


In addition to the sheer volume of product recalled, Splendid alleges ignoble practices by some of its customers. "Many of our customers are realistic, and we worked with them to ensure they were covered on their losses," says Splendid's Nienkerk. "However, some were charging unsubstantiated extra fees or claiming a retail price for compensation of lost sales. We're all in this together and no one should be trying to make profit off a recall."

Injustice also comes in the form of speculation about possible contamination without conclusive proof. Tanimura and Antle's recent field-wrapped whole head romaine recall made the public eye because of a random sample by Canadian authorities that tested presumptive positive and then negative. "Canadian wholesalers who had received the product voluntarily recalled without our input," explains Rick Antle, CEO of T&A. "Based upon the actions taken in Canada the U.S.'s FDA demanded we recall product distributed in the United States. To date, we still do not





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THE VALUE OF A TEST

Multiple government programs, headed mostly by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), have long been in place to test products for pathogens. "FDA checks product when it crosses the borders," reports Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for the Produce Marketing Association, in Newark, DE. "FDA also does testing when they do a domestic inspection, and samples of specific crops on a regional basis. In the past couple of years, they have had surveillance-type tests, like on bagged salads, where samples are taken from the marketplace and tested. Of course, FDA also does extensive testing associated with any outbreaks."

Most recently however, USDA's Microbiological Data Program (MDP) has raised controversy. "This program has been in existence for several years," explains Whitaker. "The original goal was to determine the prevalence of domestic contamination. USDA contracts retail level sampling and testing to different participatory states. However, it's been plagued with being slow. It's not uncommon for 12 days to have passed before testing results are completed. The tests often result in recalls not associated with an illness-outbreak and where the product is already out of the marketplace."

"The USDA MDP testing program, initially designed to collect data, has been used as a regulatory enforcement program to initiate recalls based on test results with no association to illness," adds Wesley Van Kamp, vice president legal and general counsel for Tanimura & Antle, in Salinas, CA. "The lack of association to illness with these recalls indicates the level of pathogen detected does not pose a health risk, since by the time the produce has been recalled most, if not all of it, has already been consumed."

Continued on page 50



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have data confirming that a health risk existed.”

The challenge boils down to protecting public health, while not doing a disservice to the industry. “It’s a difficult situation because government has a responsibility to the public,” says Westendorf. “But, in cases where they can’t tie a specific product to a specific illness-causing bug, there should not be a recall. A few years ago, the tomato industry was decimated and it turned out it wasn’t tomatoes at all. In fact, chilies were the culprit. That is an injustice and we need to figure out how to prevent it.”

Some industry members recommend forming an insurance pool or another program with limitations of liability. “Regular recall insurance rates are astronomical,” relates Splendid’s Nienkerk. “Failure to find some recourse for these situations could potentially put smaller companies out of business — a real injury for the industry in general. We need some kind of government awareness of this disparity between detection and prevention and some help from government or an NGO in managing the costs associated with recalls.”

“We’re at a turning point where we need to protect the industry or it will become prohibitive for good players to stay in business,” adds Westendorf.

Broadening Responsibility

Buyers are in a position to mitigate severe recalls through their food safety diligence. “We must live up to what we say,” counsels Markon’s York. “This rests heavily on the buyer’s shoulders. We have a moral, if not legal, responsibility to understand where product is coming from and live out what we say with respect to food safety.”

“Buyers must be confident that suppliers have performed a risk assessment and have adequately addressed any identified risks,” says Earthbound’s Daniels. “Additionally, they need to be sure buying practices are food-safe as well. For example, a truck cannot be overloaded to maximize freight at the risk of overheating product and leading to quality and potentially food safety issues.”

United Supermarket’s Wilkins travels to ensure all growers comply with the store’s food safety standards equally. “I get out there to see what our suppliers are doing,” says Wilkins. “As a result of me getting down in the dirt, the number of recalls affecting our produce department is minimal.”

“Retailers and other end users such as food-service operators can exert influence on suppliers to change practices,” advises Wegman’s Corsi.

“These random retail checks were not meant to be a policeman, but rather to provide a base line of the level of pathogens at retail and what, if any, health risk existed,” says Rick Antle, T&A’s CEO. “It was intended to be used to create cultural and production protocols. Instead, we now trace recalls to overzealous regulators in specific states who do not follow CDC protocols regarding how to identify health risks and trace to source.”

The program’s ultimate usefulness given the cost remains under question. “If you’ve been doing the same testing for decades with the same results then why continue to do it?” queries Whitaker. “Those same funds could be better used to try to understand what the testing means. There are questions the food industry as a whole must understand, and some of those funds might be used in a more constructive manner. At the end of the day, they’re looking at an exceedingly small percentage of what’s produced and yet we’re not seeing increased illness. If there is \$4 or \$5 million being spent on MDP or any other program, perhaps it would be more useful spent on understanding how to better protect and prevent contamination.”

David E. Gombas, senior vice president of food safety and technology at United Fresh in Washington, D.C. adds, “In the thousands of samples tested by the MDP, we’ve seen that by the time a pathogen is detected and the brand owner is notified, the short shelf-life of the produce has passed. The brand owner is asked to recall expired product — product already eaten or discarded. A recall under those conditions has little opportunity to protect public health.”

Yet, industry is urged to pursue transforming such programs into something useful. “Moving forward, we need to see if the industry is willing to bring programs into its sphere of influence instead of killing them,” suggests Bill Marler, food safety lawyer at Marler Clark in Seattle, WA. “For example, some say the MDP would be better done before the store-level to allow time for results to come back. So, how do we work with that?”

“These market sample programs leading to so many recalls may be the only stick the government has to affect change in the industry,” says Will Daniels, senior vice president of operations and organic integrity for Earthbound Farm, headquartered in San Juan Bautista, CA. “The industry needs to stop arguing about what the government is or isn’t doing, what tests will do and not do and start taking some action toward really enhancing food safety.”

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"That's pretty much what happened with the development of the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and it worked well."

Regulators are called to have a greater grasp of the industry as they move forward with programs. "The regulatory community must acknowledge the care, custody and control element of our produce procurement process," says Westside's Patricio. "There are two sides to this. First is the paper trail of brokers and other transactional handlers who facilitate the transaction and therefore should be held to a

standard. Second, there is the physical control and custody of the actual product as it makes its way to market."

"Regulators need to focus resources on establishing science-based minimum standards for the safe production of produce as required by Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA)," states T&A's Van Camp. "Random-testing-based recalls at the end of a product's shelf-life that has no association with outbreaks or illness needs to cease. This serves only to confuse the public about the safety of the food supply."

Ultimately, responsibility in a recall situation can reach anyone involved in produce. "Operations don't have to do anything wrong to be caught up in a recall," cautions United's Gombas. "Operations who think, 'I'm doing the right things; I'll never have a recall,' will be woefully unprepared when the FDA calls to say a pathogen has been detected in their product, and even less prepared for an implication of illness. Most everyone knows the FSMA gave the FDA mandatory recall authority, but how many know under what conditions the FDA can exercise that authority, or the authority to seize product or revoke a facility's registration effectively putting them out of business? Any company that thinks they can wait until the FDA asks for a recall to find out is in for a painful experience."

"The risk of a food safety incident is true for everybody," adds York. "We can do everything right that the best science tells us and still have issues and be legally accountable for it. It's the nature of our business. Our good intentions don't mean much when someone is harmed; they don't remove us from liability."

Size, type of production or specific commodity does not exempt anyone from food safety or recall probability. "I always have concerns when I hear growers of any size or persuasion intimating that food safety is a problem for some other persuasion of grower," says Earthbound's Daniels. "It should be a concern for every grower, everywhere."

"It's ultimately about shared accountability across the supply chain," says Lorna D. Christie, executive vice president and chief operating officer for the Produce Marketing Association. "One of the lessons learned from this year, in particular, is that food safety is not a scalable issue. Further, in our litigious society everyone who touches the product is potentially liable. Companies need to ensure they and everyone they do business with have a food safety business model."

What Can The Industry Do?

The crux of recall mitigation starts with exceptional food safety programs. "Regulations will set minimum standards for everyone, but good players will always be doing more than they need to," says Marler of Marler Clark. "The companies I never sue are the ones who look at any new regulation or idea as a minimum of what they're going to do and then figure out ways to exceed it."

"The more intervention strategies in place to understand the risk of what produce suppliers are selling, the better," says Costco's Wilson. "The industry is under a tremendous amount of



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An Earthbound Farm's Quality, Food Safety & Organic Integrity employee pulls samples from raw product pallets.



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pressure from the government and retail sectors, yet they're doing a great job with us. We're a long way from done, but we're getting there."

Fear of a recall should be met head-on. "Recalls are the elephant in the room," says Amy Philpott, senior communications director with Watson/Mulhern LLC, a life sciences communications and public affairs consulting group in Washington, D.C. "My advice is to

look the elephant in the eye and figure out how to avoid being stepped on if the retaining walls fail. I challenge every produce company to put their recall team through a full blown mock recall — not the traceability exercises that companies must do for audit compliance, but a comprehensive drill that really tests the company's ability to carry out a recall."

Philpott continues, "The mock recall must

simulate the pressure and tight timelines, demand decision-making at the highest levels of the company, require a mock news release, include simulated conversations with customers and consumers, and incorporate media relations. It will be humbling, but well worth the investment and the opportunity to learn, even if the lessons and the preparation are never needed."

Effective management of a recall yields rewards and is inclusive. "A good crisis management program can make or break a company," says PMA's Christie. "The elements of crisis management include risk assessments for all your partners along the supply chain. Our industry is interwoven. We've operated like that in many areas, and we need to apply it to food safety as well."

"What a company does before, during and after a recall affects its brand integrity more so than the recall event itself," says Philpott. "A company's brand integrity will be judged based on what the company did to try to prevent the problem, what it does to protect public health and customers if there is a problem, and what the company will do in the future to prevent a similar occurrence."

Training and preparing for a recall should be

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WHAT ABOUT THE CONSUMER: WILL INCREASED RECALLS RESULT IN CONSUMER PANIC OR COMPLACENCY?

Will increased recalls result in consumer panic or complacency? The plethora of recalls in the past year and rise of notorious ones has led to speculation on how the consumer will react. "Outside of the health risk, the true cost of recalls is the loss of consumer confidence and a decline in the consumption," says Wesley Van Kamp, vice president legal and general counsel for Tanimura & Antle, in Salinas, CA.

The answer to this question is elusive. "After the 2006 spinach incident, PMA tracked consumer confidence in food safety for a year," says Lorna D. Christie, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Produce Marketing Association, in Newark, DE. "We saw consumer confidence dip, then return to pre-crisis normal within a year. However, that study is five years old and there have been numerous food safety incidents since so we're not certain it would track the same today. If we look at our 2011 Hartman Research, it indicates food safety is a basic food quality that consumers expect and is important."

Immediate consumer reaction to illness-causing outbreaks is usually negative, but questions remain as to the effects of repeated non-illness recall events. "There is a risk that consumers can become immune to all the recalls," warns Tim York, president of Markon Cooperative Inc., in Salinas, CA. "But it can also cause damage to the public's perception about our products if there are repeated and large-scale events like with Jensen and Chamberlain farms."

"In a serious outbreak and recall, consumer confidence in that product will diminish," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets, in Parsippany, NJ. "It took fresh spinach over a year to recover, and I believe there are still consumers who will not buy spinach after that large recall. The way the recall was handled — a complete removal of all spinach from store shelves — may have caused its effects to linger."

Making Connection

Consumers are becoming more educated and aware. "They know what's driving illness and are aware when people try to make a difference," reports Will Daniels, senior vice president of operations and organic integrity for Earthbound Farm, in San Juan Bautista, CA. "Whenever there's a recall in the news, we see an increase of contact with our consumer operators and an increase in visits to the food safety portion of our website."

Regardless of circumstances, the industry must pursue greater links with the consumer. "Our business model must be able to adapt to these issues," says Christie. "The consumer is now in our board room. It's about building relationships with customers and consumers as opposed to a business-to-business approach."

"There needs to be a greater connection between consumers and industry," agrees Bill Marler, food safety lawyer at Marler Clark, in Seattle,

viewed as a valuable company investment. "I've had companies tell me that since it doesn't prevent the problem, it isn't worth the time or money," says Philpott. "Preventing problems is

and should be first priority, but every company should also have a clear plan of what to do if there is a problem."

"Keeping out of the news and court-

rooms certainly should be considered valuable," states Earthbound's Daniels. "We have been able to reduce our liability insurance premium as a result of our program. We also

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consumer is now in our board room. It's about building relationships with customers and consumers as opposed to a business-to-business approach."

"There needs to be a greater connection between consumers and industry," agrees Bill Marler, food safety lawyer at Marler Clark, in Seattle, WA. "Everyone all the way down the chain needs to be aware of this. You can't go through life thinking the worst will happen but you must come up with some strategies to pay attention to these issues and make it a culture of your business."

Effectively reaching the right consumers is a complex pursuit. "Communication to stores and the public must be timely and connection to media channels must be utilized to keep the public informed properly," says Kneeland.

"While looking at epidemiology levels, I found a significant amount of people who got sick from consuming the product after the recall," says Marler. "This shows us that the recall isn't completely effective. We need to find a better way to get the information out to consumers that is more useful."

Effective Notice

Retailers are concentrating on ways to better communicate with customers, including directly contacting them. "Our loyalty program allows us to track purchases and contact our customers directly," says Craig Wilson, vice president of quality assurance and food safety for Costco in Issaquah, WA. "Targeting a consumer because she bought an item and thus gets the notice is more effective than a general recall notice in the press."

need to realize that producing an item people will eat should drive us toward improved food safety efforts."

Splendid has been involved with the

National Mango Board and its crisis management information, which proved invaluable.

"We hired a crisis management team as well as an attorney," reports Nienkerk. "I was able to

Wegmans Food Markets communicates recalls in a variety of ways, depending on the specific situation. "We communicate to the stores and provide signage to be posted at POS in situations where a product has been recalled but it's not a brand or variety we carry," explains Dave Corsi, Wegmans' vice president produce and floral in Rochester, NY. "We do this to help reassure our customers that the products we offer are not involved in the recall action. We also do this if we have a product that is involved. In many situations, the product being recalled is past its useful or expected shelf-life, but we want to make sure customers are aware of the recall just in case they still have the item at home."

Wegmans also posts information about the recall on the corporate website, which is updated regularly. "And, we use our customer loyalty card information to contact customers directly when we are able to identify customers who have purchased an item involved in a recall," adds Corsi. "Our customers have responded positively to this and have appreciated receiving information in this manner. As more produce items have individual bar codes, this will become more viable."

United Supermarkets follows a strict recall protocol. "If there is even a hint of an issue, we aren't going to sell it to our customers," says Tommy Wilkins, United's produce procurement director, based in Lubbock, TX. "Because our shoppers trust us, they will get right back into a product once the recall is over. We had people buying spinach after that issue, and right now we've got guests wanting to get back into processed onions."

connect to the right people and get up and running quickly, but it is a good idea to have a plan and know the right people to call before something happens." **pb**

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In Lake Worth, FL, Two Hispanic Stores Beat Wal-Mart In Produce Pricing

The big discovery of this Wal-Mart Pricing Report is how competitive the Latino retailers are in this Palm Beach County region.

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



For over a decade, the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report has recorded and analyzed not only how Wal-Mart has priced produce, but also how the competitors in communities where it operates respond to Wal-Mart's pricing.

For conventional supermarkets, competition with Wal-Mart has been tough. Some chains have responded not so much by competing with Wal-Mart as by getting out of its way. This can take the form of either moving upscale by careful store placement and closing certain locations or by changing assortment, typically to become the “anti-Wal-Mart” by emphasizing service, perishables and organic and de-emphasizing conventional groceries, either reducing grocery assortment to make room for larger perishable departments or changing grocery assortment to handle specialized items, say regional sugarcane-based soda rather than Coke and Pepsi.

The whole move to urban stores with small footprints, though justified in various ways, is, in fact, best understood as an effort by conventional supermarket chains to open in places in which a Wal-Mart supercenter is a more distant competitor.

Increasingly, though, Wal-Mart is finding its reputation as the

low-price-leader under assault, not so much by conventional grocers but by specialists. Sometimes, these specialists are deep discounters, such as Save-A-Lot and Aldi, but, increasingly, they are ethnic grocers. Indeed, the move by conventional grocers to get out of Wal-Mart's way facilitates this trend, as grocery chains abandon locations in low-income areas — often areas home to many immigrants — and thus free up locations that are often seized upon by entrepreneurs from various ethnic groups to set up specialized grocers focused on the needs of the local community.

There is much irony here. Wal-Mart built its empire on the “Store of the Community” program, but these ethnic retailers, like many urban independents, have many advantages that make groceries available to people where big chains can't:

1. Razor-Focused Assortment

Unlike a larger store that must draw from a larger area and thus cater to many demographics, these specialized stores tend to have a highly specific clientele. So every decision on assortment can be measured against the needs and desires of a specific customer. What looks like a store serving Asians to the outsider is actually a store serving Koreans. Sometimes the immigrant community is from a specific city or province

How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter

Region	% over		% over		% over	
	Store	Wal-Mart	Store	Wal-Mart	Store	Wal-Mart
Connecticut-5/02	Super Stop & Shop	.23%	Shaws	.34%	Big Y	.36%
Salt Lake City-10/02	Harmon's	.2%	Smith's	.6%	Albertson's	.12%
South Florida-2/03	Super Target	.22%	Publix	.31%	Winn-Dixie	.52%
Dallas, Texas-10/03	Albertsons	.23%	Brookshires	.7%	Kroger	.19%
	Neighborhood Market	-1.2%	Tom Thumb	.27%		
Portland, OR-3/04	Albertsons	.30%	Fred Meyer	.22%	Haggen	.27%
	Safeway	.37%				
Phoenix, AZ-8/04	Albertsons	.22%	Bashas'	.25%	Fry's	.15%
	Safeway	.17%				
Palm Springs-10/04	Albertsons	.19%	Jensen's	.60%	Ralphs	.16%
	Vons	.20%				
Detroit, MI-1/05	A&P Food Basic	-.17%	Farmer Jack	.24%	Kroger	.28%
	Meijer	.3%				
St. Louis, MO-5/05	Dierbergs	.22%	Schnucks	.14%		
Houston, TX-9/05	HEB	.15%	Kroger	.30%	Fiesta Mart	-0.3%
Atlanta, GA-11/05	Harry's	.18%	Ingles	.16%	Kroger	.25%
	Publix	.13%	Target	.3%		
Denver, CO-5/06	Albertsons	.16%	King Sooper	.21%	Safeway	.25%
Portland, OR-10/06	Albertsons	.32%	Fred Meyer	.21%	QFC	.54%
	Safeway	.30%				
Toronto Canada-7/07	A&P	.35%	Brunos	.28%	Loblaws	.13%
	Sobeys	.45%				
Kansas City, KS-10/07	Dillions	.20%	Hen House	.15%	Hy Vee	.18%
	Price Chopper	.13%				
Los Angeles-4/08	Fresh & Easy	.15%	Stater Bros	.8%	Ralphs	.25%
	Vons	.14%				
Orlando, FL-10/08	Publix	.32%	Super Target	.22%	Whole Foods	.38%
	Winn Dixie	.28%				
Phoenix, AZ 4/09	Wal-Mart Markewtside	.23%	Wal-Mart Neighborhood	.7%	Bahas	.30%
	Fresh & Easy	.32%	Fry's	.27%	Safeway	.37%
Raleigh, NC 9/09	Food Lion	.24%	Fresh Market	.31%	Harris Teeter	.35%
	Kroger	.21%	Super Target	.11%		
Philadelphia 4/10	Acme	.17%	Genuardi's	.22%	Giant	.26%
	Super Fresh	.21%	Wegmans	.5%		
New Jersey 10/10	FoodBasics	-1%	Pathmark	.15%	ShopRite	.8%
Dallas 10/11	Albertson's	.25%	Central Market	.19%	Kroger	.21%
	Sprouts	-7%	Super Target	.10%	Tom Thumb	.51%
Savannah 6/12	Food Lion	.7%	Fresh Market	.51%	Kroger	-2%
	Piggly Wiggly	.27%	Publix	.22%		
Lake Worth, FL 11/12	El Bodegon	-9.5%	Presidente	-18.4%	Publix	.29%
	Sedano's	.647%	Winn-Dixie	.174%		



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PRODUCE ITEM	HOW SOLD	
Apples - Granny Smith)	Lb	
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	
Avocados — Hass	Each	
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	
Broccoli	Each	
Cabbage - Green	Each	
Cabbage - Red	Each	
Carrots — baby	12oz Package	
Cauliflower	Each	
Coconuts	Each	
Corn - Yellow	Each	
Eggplant	Lb	
Grapes - Green Seedless	11.8 oz	
Grapes - Red Seedless	11.8 oz	
Lemons - Bulk	Each	
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Lb	
Limes - Bulk	Each	
Mangos	Each	
Mushrooms - White Package	Pkg Wgt: 14oz	
Onions - Red	Lb	
Onions — White	Bag Wgt: 1lb	
Onions - Yellow	Lb	
Onions - Yellow Bag	Bag Wgt: 3lb	
Oranges — Navel	Each	
Papayas	Lb	
Peaches - California	Lb	
Peppers - Green Bell	Each	
Peppers - Red	Each	
Pineapple	Each	
Plantains	Lb	
Potatoes - Red Bulk	Lb	
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	5lb Bag	
Potatoes - White Bulk	Lb	
Sweet Potatoes	Lb	
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	
Tomatoes - Regular Large	Lb	
MARKET BASKET		

and the store focuses on that clientele. Price wise, this opens up opportunities. If the clientele is the type that likes to make salsa, a soft tomato — a product that would be rejected by a major chain — is a perfect buy and often is a bargain to boot. It is very difficult for Wal-Mart — and conventional supermarket chains in general — to compete on this level.

2. Flexible Merchandising

The best buys in the world don't help that

Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 5 Chains Price Comparison — Lake Worth, Florida Prices Available To The General Public

WAL-MART SUPERCENTER	EL BODEGON	% OVER WAL-MART	PRESIDENTE	% OVER WAL-MART	PUBLIX	% OVER WAL-MART	SEDANO'S	% OVER WAL-MART	WINN-DIXIE	% OVER WAL-MART
1.77	1.59	-10.17%	1.49	-15.82%	2.49	40.68%	1.98	11.86%	1.50	-15.25%
1.57	1.79	14.01%	1.29	-17.83%	1.99	26.75%	1.98	26.11%	1.40	-10.83%
1.18	0.69	-41.53%	1.00	-15.25%	1.00	-15.25%	0.79	-33.05%	2.00	69.49%
0.59	0.69	16.95%	1.00	69.49%	0.69	16.95%	0.59	0.00%	0.69	16.95%
2.48	2.37	-4.44%	2.79	12.50%	2.50	0.81%	2.49	0.40%	2.50	0.81%
0.64	0.69	7.81%	1.00	56.25%	3.87	504.69%	1.39	117.19%	0.69	7.81%
0.72	0.69	-4.17%	2.07	187.50%	2.67	270.83%	1.19	65.28%	0.99	37.50%
1.78	0.89	-50.00%	0.89	-50.00%	1.27	-28.65%	1.12	-37.08%	1.79	0.56%
2.58	2.89	12.02%	1.49	-42.25%	3.99	54.65%	3.98	54.26%	2.99	15.89%
1.98	1.49	-24.75%	0.99	-50.00%	2.49	25.76%	1.98	0.00%	2.00	1.01%
0.50	0.25	-50.00%	0.33	-34.00%	0.82	64.00%	0.50	0.00%	1.00	100.00%
1.44	0.99	-31.25%	0.69	-52.08%	1.69	17.36%	0.99	-31.25%	1.69	17.36%
1.88	2.35	25.00%	2.06	9.57%	1.47	-21.81%	1.31	-30.32%	2.21	17.55%
1.88	0.88	-53.19%	0.81	-56.91%	1.47	-21.81%	1.31	-30.32%	2.21	17.55%
0.54	0.25	-53.70%	0.25	-53.70%	0.66	22.22%	0.50	-7.41%	0.66	22.22%
1.88	1.45	-22.87%	1.99	5.85%	1.99	5.85%	1.99	5.85%	3.49	85.64%
0.25	0.10	-60.00%	0.50	100.00%	0.25	0.00%	0.25	0.00%	0.20	-20.00%
1.38	1.47	6.52%	1.29	-6.52%	1.99	44.20%	1.98	43.48%	1.99	44.20%
2.98	2.96	-0.67%	3.13	5.03%	3.23	8.39%	3.32	11.41%	3.48	16.78%
1.18	1.19	0.85%	1.19	0.85%	1.35	14.41%	0.95	-19.49%	1.25	5.93%
1.18	0.79	-33.05%	0.69	-41.53%	1.29	9.32%	0.79	-33.05%	0.99	-16.10%
0.98	0.49	-50.00%	0.50	-48.98%	1.00	2.04%	0.69	-29.59%	1.25	27.55%
2.58	1.69	-34.50%	1.94	-24.81%	2.99	15.89%	2.99	15.89%	2.50	-3.10%
0.78	0.25	-67.95%	0.17	-78.21%	1.59	103.85%	1.70	117.95%	2.12	171.79%
1.18	1.79	51.69%	1.79	51.69%	1.49	26.27%	1.59	34.75%	1.79	51.69%
1.78	3.89	118.54%	1.69	-5.06%	2.69	51.12%	1.19	-33.15%	1.99	11.80%
0.78	0.59	-24.36%	0.50	-35.90%	1.50	92.31%	1.50	92.31%	0.85	8.97%
1.68	0.89	-47.02%	0.50	-70.24%	1.99	18.45%	0.49	-70.83%	1.50	-10.71%
2.98	3.49	17.11%	2.19	-26.51%	3.42	14.77%	2.88	-3.36%	3.99	33.89%
0.78	0.79	1.28%	0.25	-67.95%	0.67	-14.10%	1.50	92.31%	1.19	52.56%
0.98	0.59	-39.80%	0.20	-79.59%	1.33	35.71%	2.19	123.47%	0.80	-18.37%
2.97	2.59	-12.79%	3.75	26.26%	3.99	34.34%	2.74	-7.74%	3.75	26.26%
0.98	0.89	-9.18%	0.54	-44.90%	1.39	41.84%	0.57	-41.84%	0.80	-18.37%
0.88	0.49	-44.32%	0.50	-43.18%	0.99	12.50%	0.99	12.50%	0.99	12.50%
1.56	1.89	21.15%	1.09	-30.13%	1.99	27.56%	1.79	14.74%	1.28	-17.95%
1.74	1.19	-31.61%	0.69	-60.34%	2.29	31.61%	2.19	25.86%	1.69	-2.87%
53.01	47.97	-9.51%	43.24	-18.43%	68.49	29.20%	56.38	6.36%	62.21	17.36%

RED is adjusted price where package weight is different but can be adjusted for proper comparison.

much unless merchandising is flexible. These ethnic retailers can turn their stores on a dime. So if someone on a terminal is hung with peaches that are getting a little ripe, they will offer them at a price well under market to these specialized retailers. Because these retailers can change things around to move product, they will counter-offer with an even lower price and an offer to clean the vendor out. The offers are often accepted.

This might all happen at 8:00 AM, after the terminal market has finished its daily business and knows what it is stuck with. By noon, the

product is in the stores and the whole store has been remerchandised to greet customers with a giant display of the peaches at half the price Wal-Mart is selling them.

3. Buy from Anyone

Most chains now have a roster of food safety and other requirements that tend to constrain their supply chains. They can't accept a great deal from an unknown vendor because the company wouldn't even have a vendor number. Efforts to get around these requirements are

much less accepted than before.

Many of these ethnic chains don't constrain their supply chains; they buy produce from wholesalers, brokers and shippers based on price, quality and service. It gives them access to deals that the big boys can't touch.

4. Regulatory Relief

Although the rules generally apply to retailers both large and small, in practice, the ethnic specialists slip under the regulatory radar. Partly this is because the regulators

Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 5 Chains Price Comparison — Lake Worth, Florida Cardholder Prices

PRODUCE ITEM	HOW SOLD	WALMART SUPERCENTER	EL BODEGON	% OVER WAL-MART	PRESIDENTE	% OVER WAL-MART	PUBLIX	% OVER WAL-MART	SEDANO'S
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	1.57	1.79	14.01%	1.29	-17.83%	1.99	26.75%	1.98
Avocados — Hass	Each	1.18	0.69	-41.53%	1.00	-15.25%	1.00	-15.25%	0.79
Cabbage - Green	Each	0.64	0.69	7.81%	1.00	56.25%	3.87	504.69%	1.39
Carrots — baby	12oz Package	1.78	0.89	-50.00%	0.89	-50.00%	1.27	-28.65%	1.12
Corn - Yellow	Each	0.50	0.25	-50.00%	0.33	-34.00%	0.82	64.00%	0.50
Grapes - Red Seedless	11.8 oz	1.88	0.88	-53.19%	0.81	-56.91%	1.47	-21.81%	1.31
Lettuce - Romaine Bulk	Lb	1.88	1.45	-22.87%	1.99	5.85%	1.99	5.85%	1.99
Mushrooms - White Package	Pkg Wgt: 14oz	2.98	2.96	-0.67%	3.13	5.03%	3.23	8.39%	3.32
Onions - Red	Lb	1.18	1.19	0.85%	1.19	0.85%	1.35	14.41%	0.95
Onions - Yellow	Lb	0.98	0.49	-50.00%	0.50	-48.98%	1.00	2.04%	0.69
Oranges — Navel	Each	0.78	0.25	-67.95%	0.17	-78.21%	1.59	103.85%	1.70
Pineapple	Each	2.98	3.49	17.11%	2.19	-26.51%	3.42	14.77%	2.88
Potatoes - Russet 5# Bag	5lb Bag	2.97	2.59	-12.79%	3.75	26.26%	3.99	34.34%	2.74
Sweet Potatoes	Lb	0.88	0.49	-44.32%	0.50	-43.18%	0.99	12.50%	0.99
MARKET BASKET		53.01	47.97	9.51%	43.24	18.43%	68.49	29.20%	56.38

RED is adjusted price

focus on bigger players, partly because ethnic markets are more closed — people complain to regulators less, the inspectors come into the neighborhoods less, etc. Finally, the quick turn-around merchandising philosophy means many violations are gone before anyone notices.

In procurement, it means that if a wholesaler has a rejected load of, say, spinach bagged for foodservice, these retailers may buy

it, even though it is not labeled in a way to be legal for sale to consumers. They get it at a bargain price, blow it out and it is only in the stores for a few hours. Most likely nothing will happen, but Wal-Mart wouldn't touch it.

5. Family Crime-Watch

In many areas, retailers suffer from a great deal of theft — at the front-end, the back-end and from shoplifting customers. Typically,

these ethnic retailers have many family members on watch who are willing to risk violence to stop theft. Wal-Mart has nothing like this.

In addition, in many ethnic communities, the social opprobrium that would come from stealing from “their own” makes the problem more manageable.

Plus, ethnic retailers sometimes have some extra-legal methods of dealing with crime. Calling the police, pressing charges, etc., is a long, drawn-out, often expensive method of dealing with crime. Taking some guy down to the basement and explaining to him, in a physical way, why he ought to steal somewhere else is often cheaper and more effective.

Back To The Competition

For all the above reasons and more, ethnic retailers can thrive even as Wal-Mart attacks. Such is the case in Lake Worth, FL, where the 24th edition of The PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report has rolled into town.

It is not really a shock that Lakeland, FL-based Publix — by far the market leader — gets blown out of the water by Wal-Mart, coming in with a price level 29.2 percent over Wal-Mart. This is fairly common in markets where a dominant supermarket chain exists. Supermarket chains price against each other, so if there is a dominant player, it tends to price high.

Jacksonville, FL-based Winn-Dixie also gets blown out of the water, coming in with a price level 17.36 percent over Wal-Mart. But

PRESIDENTE SUPERMARKET'S FOCUS ON PRODUCE

[Excerpted from *GrocerySupermarket.net* October 20, 2011]

Today, Presidente Supermarket is one of the largest Hispanic supermarkets in the United States, enjoying special preference of non-Hispanic and Hispanic customers in Florida. The supermarket still makes efforts to reduce the costs and improve its operations, so as to continue to reduce the prices of its products. All these steps are made without any negative effect on the different products sold, [resulting in] annual increase of 20 percent in the customer base during the past five years.

Presidente Supermarket characterizes itself by lower prices. You should not be surprised to find meals that can feed over four people for less than \$10. However, you should not be fooled, because the ingredients

are wonderful, and the good thing is that most of them are locally produced. For instance, if you love bell peppers, you can get different types at Presidente Supermarket at low prices; quite cheaper than many other supermarkets in the city. Imagine being able to buy green peppers (3 lbs.) for 99-cents.

If you are the type who is not interested in anything unique or terribly fancy, you can really save your money as you shop at Presidente Supermarket. Doing that, you'll also be giving support to a local produce and a local business. Some veggies, like tomatoes, peppers and potatoes are cheaper than the prices of the competitors. However, most non-food products are somehow expensive and the options are a little limited. **pb**

	% OVER WAL-MART	WINN-DIXIE	% OVER WAL-MART
	26.11%	1.20	-23.57%
	-33.05%	0.99	-16.10%
	117.19%	0.59	-7.81%
	-37.08%	1.50	-15.73%
	0.00%	0.65	30.00%
	-30.32%	1.47	-21.81%
	5.85%	2.99	59.04%
	11.41%	2.63	-11.74%
	-19.49%	1.00	-15.25%
	-29.59%	1.00	2.04%
	117.95%	1.91	144.87%
	-3.36%	2.98	0.00%
	-7.74%	2.50	-15.82%
	12.50%	0.79	-10.23%
	6.36%	55.00	3.75%

with Winn-Dixie, there is a caveat. Winn-Dixie's price level drops substantially when loyalty card discounts are included. It winds up coming in at only 3.75 percent over Wal-Mart after calculating its loyalty card discount on select items. This seems to reflect a philosophy of picking up extra margin from customers not focused on price enough to inconvenience themselves by getting a loyalty card, but being competitive for its everyday shopper.

The big discovery of this Wal-Mart Pricing Report is how competitive the Latino retailers are in this Palm Beach County region.

Sedano's, a 34-store chain headquartered in Miami, FL, still gets beat by Wal-Mart, coming in at 6.36 percent over Wal-Mart's prices. But the other two Latino retailers studied, Miami-based 20-store chain, Presidente, and four-store independent, Supermercados El Bodegon, both beat Wal-Mart by a substantial margin, demonstrating that Wal-Mart's low price image is not likely to grow among the immigrant community.

Supermercados El Bodegon, based in West Palm Beach, FL, beats Wal-Mart produce prices by almost 10 percent! Its marketing focuses on its ethnic roots with its key slogan: *Sentir Latino!* or "Feel Latin!"

Presidente Supermarket focuses on price, with its slogan being: *Donde su Dinero rinde Más*, which translates as "Where you get more for your money." The company certainly is loyal to that slogan as it beat Wal-Mart by an

astounding 18.43 percent and took the crown in this the 24th edition of The PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Survey.

Supermarkets have long-learned that the competitive environment has changed and that the big competition is not necessarily another conventional grocery store opening across the street. Instead, the competition is a new supercenter in the region, a warehouse club, a Whole Foods, an Internet shopping service... None of these kill the grocer, but if each takes three or four percentage points off sales, it is tough to survive.

Now Wal-Mart may be finding that its challenge comes not from Target opening more supercenters or even giants, such as Kroger and Safeway, with whom it has managed to co-exist, but from hundreds, maybe thousands, of ethnic stores that do things Wal-Mart can't do well and can kill Wal-Mart on pricing while making a buck. That is a powerful competitor indeed.

We will look to future editions of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report to see how widespread this phenomenon is becoming. **pb**



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Produce sales average around 16-17 percent at all of New Leaf's seven locations.

New Leaf Community Markets Carves Its Own Niche

Independent California retailer applies local strategy to maximize buying power and steadily flourish in today's competitive market. **BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN**

Don't bother accessing the parking lot to determine what kinds of shoppers are combing the aisles of the subtly sophisticated but earthy New Leaf Community Market in Half Moon Bay, CA. The wide-ranging variety of cars reveals nothing because savvy shoppers, no matter their economic standing, are passionately buying organic and sustainably grown produce, local flowers and plants, as well as numerous other good-for-you items in this store.

Walk in the 27,000-square-foot store and you are likely to be greeted with a complimentary shot of local, freshly prepared wheat grass from the spirited juice bar attendee. Name your own juice combination or they will press, squeeze and blend their own concoction for you to sip while shopping. Gluten-free products are plentiful and the deli sandwiches are topped with organic vegetables and condiments. Freshly baked breads and pastries waft rousing fragrances into the peaceful atmosphere, which is conducive to shopping in this above-and-beyond natural food store.

Built in 2008, the shopping center store has the ambiance of a neighborhood coffee shop and the feel of a seven-day-a-week farmer's market, where people who genuinely appreciate fresh produce shop. The variety of bulk dates alone offered in the produce department is a clue, and further evidence can be found in the extensive mushroom display, where customers use tongs to grasp Trumpet Royale mushrooms at \$26.99 per pound.

Located 25 miles south of San Francisco, the Half Moon Bay New Leaf Community Market is one of seven stores for the Santa Cruz, CA-based independent retailer. New Leaf also operates two additional locations under a licensing agreement. A Pleasanton store is scheduled to open in mid-2013.

Started as a food co-op, the company's history has interesting twists and turns, and today, is owned by Scott Roseman and Rex Stewart. The quest to offer organic, sustainably grown and locally grown products seems to be followed with dedication. New Leaf boldly states the company mission on the wall as a reminder to shoppers: "Our mission is to

nourish and sustain our community."

Consumers can see how New Leaf defines local on the chart posted in the produce department. Titled, *Local Region*, the poster shows an outline map of California with the following Central Coast counties in bold: San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito and Monterey. Local is defined on the poster as "Product produced in our local regions." The *Buy Fresh Buy Local* is the Central Coast label saying: *Product must be made from at least 60 percent of ingredients grown in the same local region.*

Working Without A Warehouse

Independent retailers deal with challenges every day while also embracing the advantages of not having to answer to "the man." Operating without a warehouse and buying organic, sustainably grown and local produce for seven locations within California's Central

Editor's Note: "Lessons From Independent Stores" is a new series of articles in PRODUCE BUSINESS. Readers are encouraged to recommend independent stores that merit attention of their produce departments. Please send your recommendations to editor@producebusiness.com

Coast region could be a logistical and planning nightmare, but New Leaf seems to make it all work. When asked how the produce procurement is managed, Matt Landi, director of produce, says the process has evolved — even in the past 12 months.

The 27-year-old company arranges centralized wholesale buying with Earl's Organic Produce in San Francisco and maintains a backup wholesaler. "The relationship New Leaf has with Earl's Organics is a partnership



Side Note

PURCHASING PHILOSOPHY

“One notable point about our purchasing philosophy for produce is while we certainly want to provide competitive pricing for our customers, we don't do so at the expense of our relationships. Our goal is to maintain sustainable relationships that work for everyone involved. If our buying broccoli at a very inexpensive price means a farmer decides broccoli is not worthwhile to grow, what good does that do anyone?”



When I have a conversation about price with any of our vendors, whether it's large wholesalers or small independent farmers, I always ask the question, "What works for you?" Now this takes some trust as well as some knowledge of what else is out there. If a grower comes back 50 percent higher than anyone else, it obviously doesn't work for New Leaf or our customers. Typically, that's not the case.

When you conduct yourself in this fashion, your partners tend to follow suit because they realize that your success is essentially tied to theirs as well. These partnerships are beneficial for everyone involved, including the end user, because they end up getting a better quality product.”

— Matt Landi

model,” explains Landi. “Earl's acts as our wheels and warehouse and often the buyer. But we also buy direct from local growers.” New Leaf buys from large and medium size farms to a grower with 1½ acres, and if there is a farm the company wants to do business with, Landi can approach Earl's Organics and have the wholesaler make the arrangements. Depending on size, some local farms offer Direct Store Delivery. New Leaf uses its small transfer truck and delivers produce to the Half Moon Bay store twice a week. Ninety percent of the produce New Leaf sells is organic. The company buys from growers with proof of organic certification and requires liability insurance for every vendor.

Landi emphasizes the importance of planning and communication when working with growers. “We do crop planning with the growers and then send the list to all of our stores,” he details. “This helps with measuring the predictability with the stores.” Landi says New Leaf stores have working relationships with local growers, but the communication on pricing goes back to him in the Santa Cruz office.

Tapping availability of local and direct does not hinder the partnership between New Leaf and Earl's Organics. “When we are not buying local and direct, we give that business to our one wholesaler,” Landi explains. He indicates the partnership enables a favorable atmosphere for creating marketing strategies. And this favorable atmosphere seems to be leading New Leaf Community Markets to success. When looking at all seven locations, produce sales average around 16-17 percent of total store sales.

Building Buying Power

Landi admits maximizing the buying power has been tricky. “It creates direct

connection and we are still kind of grappling with that element.” He says the company's geographic location is fundamental for building sound relationships with growers because the Central Coast area of California is heavily populated with farms. “The local growers give us a crop plan or we go to them. Having access to these local farms helps with our buying power.”

Keeping produce displays abundant is not a problem, according to Landi, who credits planning as a vital tool. “Our priority is with our wholesaler and communicating about what months we're buying local. The quarterly planning meeting with our wholesaler is necessary and mutually beneficial.”

Landi describes a few of the challenges New Leaf faces with produce: “As a growing independent retailer, there is a constant balance between maintaining who you are and what made you successful in the first place, and taking some of the steps necessary for growth. Also as a growing chain of stores, we face additional challenges that wouldn't necessarily impact a single store. Many of our growers see us as larger, and it can create an expectation around how we manage the logistics of purchasing and receiving product.”

Educating Consumers

Landi agrees the company is strong on consumer education. “Education is one of our core values,” he says. “We're trying to make it a bigger tent and welcome everybody.” He adds, “We gather feedback both electronically and via in-store written comment cards. We take feedback very seriously because it's our customers who help make us better. If we aren't listening, we miss an incredible opportunity for improvement.”

New Leaf publishes FLAVOR, a flyer in



magazine format that presents recipes and articles on products and farms, grower profiles and a theme is featured every month. The website shows a seasonality chart showing geographic regions and crop availability. Landi believes customers feel connected to the stores as though they look to New Leaf as their neighborhood farmer's market. The social connection is also strengthened by New Leaf offering a full slate of cooking and nutrition classes available at multiple locations.

Carefully placed signage guides consumers

through the root vegetable section, where more than four varieties of beets are enticingly merchandised. Throughout the produce department, signage is consistent, obvious, and helpful as the product's origin is provided. New Leaf is smart not to underestimate the value of signage because it benefits the customers as well the store.

Attracting and Keeping Employees

Attracting and maintaining a healthy and dedicated work force seems to be a substantial design in New Leaf's success. Not being

unionized can be considered an advantage as an independent retailer. New Leaf invests in employees and department teams in several ways such as encouraging them to nurture the relationships with local growers and vendors. "If they feel invested into the buying process it's more advantageous," explains Landi. Store produce teams consistently stay in tune with what's happening locally — both with production and customer requests.

Beyond offering competitive salaries and the typical health and dental insurance, the company offers a significant employee discount, which increases with employment longevity. Landi applauds this strategy because with employees eating mostly organic foods, the company is helping to nurture a healthy workforce.

"New Leaf does a lot to encourage healthy lifestyle choices," asserts Landi. There also is a profit-sharing program based on store and on company quarterly profits. All of these worthy offerings and incentives are topped by the incredible, one-month, paid sabbatical awarded to employees after 10 years of full time employment. Landi notes there are some employees that have been with the company since it started in 1985. **pb**

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SPOTLIGHT ON MEXICAN IMPORTS — PART III



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF CERTIFIED GREENHOUSE FARMERS



Despite advantages of protected agriculture, the question of product labeling has been raised.

West Mexican Growers And Importers Lobby For Protected Ag

In this third part of an ongoing series, *PRODUCE BUSINESS* outlines another contested issue facing the West Mexico import industry: What can be called greenhouse produce? **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

The West Mexico produce industry has built a strong market in response to consumer demand, but has also struggled with various challenges throughout the years. “The West Mexico industry is a crucial supplier of fruits and vegetables to the United States and Canada not only in the wintertime, but also throughout the year,” says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Nogales, AZ-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA). “Over the years, we have been pushed to innovate and respond to many different challenges, including our current battle over tomato anti-dumping. However, our industry is resilient and forward-thinking.”

On the heels of the tomato debate comes another contested issue involving West Mexican production over what product has the right to be called “greenhouse” produce. “Right now, there is no official definition of what greenhouse is versus what protected agriculture is,” acknowledges Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing, Inc.,

located in Nogales, AZ. “However, some U.S.-based producers want a specific marketable greenhouse definition.”

“Unlike Certified Organic, there is no standard definition for greenhouse-grown produce,” adds Ed Beckman, president of Bellevue, WA-based Certified Greenhouse Farmers. “We believe when consumers purchase a product labeled as ‘greenhouse,’ they should be assured the product is grown in a defined greenhouse. To mislabel product is irresponsible to consumers, who increasingly want to know more about where their food comes from, and it is unfair to greenhouse growers who invest heavily in their greenhouses.”

The debate remains a thorny dilemma of definition, cost and technology. “The issue of officially defining greenhouse production is similar to an infatuation with Angelina Jolie,” jokes Martin Ley, vice president of Del Campo Supreme, headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “It’s such an emotional connection that people aren’t thinking clearly.”

“Those who are spending the most money on protecting their agriculture are trying to differentiate glass versus plastic or heated versus cold,” details T.J. Bauer, vice president with Al Harrison Co., located in Nogales, AZ. “The argument may be about differentiation, but the reality should be focusing on systems to maximize yield and minimize cost.”

What’s In A Name?

The gist of the problem lies in the lack of an official definition or clarification for what can be termed a greenhouse, versus other forms of protected agriculture. “Protected agriculture has no agreed-upon definition,” states Beckman. “Instead, it is a general term often defined as anything that helps control the elements. It’s mainly used to describe various systems for dealing with weather conditions. Shadehouses, for example, provide some protection against sun, and are therefore considered protected agriculture.”

“There are huge misconceptions,” says Bauer. “Even if you say ‘shadehouse’ to a

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Agencia Aduanal Mayer has conducted international business consulting, warehouse distribution and variety of logistics activities for more than 50 years. The company was founded in 1953 by Alberto Mayer Senior, being the first of the pioneers to bring growers and distributors together in the Mexico-U.S. agricultural trade industry. Building on his legacy, son Luis Mayer has evolved the business into a full logistics custom house brokerage for customers in the import and export business. Now with the third generation of family involved, the agency excels in providing the highest levels of service in international trade.

"We see ourselves as the critical link for those involved in the dynamics of foreign trade," states Luis Mayer, president of Agencia Aduanal Mayer, "It is our policy to exceed our customers' expectations of service across their operations. We offer Mexican and American customs brokerage service, all controlled under one system giving us a 30% faster rate in crossing and reporting."

As one of the largest cold rooms in Nogales and one of the few businesses serving two-way trade, Agencia Aduanal Mayer provides a range of professional services for U.S. and Mexican clients. From customs brokerage to warehousing to transportation and inspection services for both USDA and Mexican Agriculture SENASICA, the company works to ensure seamless service for its customers.

"We provide high quality logistics services

to our customers through a professional, efficient and friendly staff," says Mayer. "We are equipped with the most advanced information systems, allowing us to service our customers with proficiency and expertise."

EXPERT CUSTOMS FACILITATION

Agencia Aduanal Mayer is a full-service customs broker serving trade for both U.S. and Mexico with professional services for customs foreign trade, imports/exports and advice on customs matters.

As a Mexican-American Customs Broker, the company serves as the client's eyes during all points of crossing. It provides on-time shipment confirmation, consultation and legal services, and process planning for each company. Its customer service department ensures communication with clients and provides online customer reports as well as help with insurance and financial procedures.

Likewise the company specializes in U.S. Customs Compliance and Consulting, in-bond shipments, settlement reports and faster customs clearance, processing and release at the border. It is equipped with systems for monitoring the load through U.S. Customs and is fully integrated with FDA, USDA, and Mexican customs.

SECURE WAREHOUSING

Mayer Warehouse LLC offers secure warehousing for both shipment and storage purposes. It operates with over 220,000 square feet of both cold and dry warehouses. Services include reception and coordination of the merchandise from the U.S. and worldwide suppliers, as well as classification, labeling and loading of goods to be exported to Mexico. The company coordinates transport over the U.S. border and release procedures and customs clearance for all merchandise exported to Mexico by direct instructions





from the client's personnel. Facilities are closed and secure and utilize a barcode inventory system. Facilities also provide a container terminal for transfer and staging.

"We pride ourselves on our customer service orientation," says Mayer. "Inventories are sent daily via email, fax or through our online warehouse system. "We strive to ensure our customers are kept current of all related information."

Mariposa Inspection Terminal LLC

As an additional service, Mayer is a licensed warehouse facility for produce going into Mexico. "Apples, pears and stone fruit are some of the products we cross," says Mayer. "We also specialize in getting all types of seeds into Mexico."

Mariposa Inspection Terminal is a station where SAGARPA and SENASICA personnel perform phytosanitary inspection and verifi-

cation for fruits, vegetables and seeds going into Mexico. Mariposa also does inspection for USDA #1 table grapes as well as inspection processing and handling for tomatoes from Mexico for clients. It is one of the largest and most modern inspection warehouses with 60,000 square feet and 15 trailer doors for inspection. The facility has highly qualified equipment and personnel to carry out the inspection service and keep clients informed of every move.

EASY LOGISTICS

To most effectively serve customers, Agencia Aduanal Mayer offers a full line of logistics services including a control and inspection team, import-export traffic control, U.S. and Mexican customs coordination, Mexico and U.S. courtyard coordination, and export booking.

Transportation logistics include working with sea and air freight as well as rail and

road freight service on both full truckload and LTL basis.

"We maintain close contact with all the carriers," states Mayer. "We provide custom reports for clients and specific logistic management designed to meet individual needs. We take great pride and satisfaction in providing our customers with the highest degree of service continually striving for mutual growth with both new and existing clients."

LOCATIONS:

- Nogales, AZ & Nogales, Sonora
- Mayer Warehouse LLC
- MG International
- Mayer y Asociados S.A. de C.V.
- Mariposa International Inspection Station
- CMMV

Agencia Aduanal Mayer has four locations within México for customer support:

Sinaloa:

- Los Mochis
- Culiacan

Sonora:

- Hermosillo
- Cd. Obregon



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grower in Culiacan, it means something different than to someone 100 miles south of there. Everybody has their own definition.”

According to a publication from the International Food and Agribusiness Management Association, protected agriculture is a broad category of production methods where some degree of control over one or more environmental factors exists. Structures included under protected agriculture vary from the simplest, least expensive shadehouse, to plastic-covered houses, to high-tech glass greenhouses with climate control.

In September 2004, the State of California adopted a specific definition for the labeling of greenhouse-produced tomatoes. “It requires produce labeled as greenhouse to be

“Regardless if it is glass, plastic or screen, what makes any program work is a well implemented protocol. A glass greenhouse with poor agriculture practices has a greater risk than a shadehouse with a good program in place. No one should justify the value of a production system as being safer.”

—Eric Viramontes, Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture

grown in a fixed steel structure using irrigation and climate control and in an artificial medium that substitutes for soil,” details Bauer of Al Harrison. “California is the only

state to do this so far, and yet, it doesn’t specify glass or plastic.”

The lack of clarification has led to the debate over labeling or marketing product as greenhouse-grown. “Some growers and shippers would like people to think protected agriculture is the same as greenhouse-grown, but the two are different, and consumers deserve to know about the differences,” says Beckman of Certified Greenhouse Farmers.

Despite protests by protected agriculture proponents, efforts are underway by Certified Greenhouse Farmers to establish an enforceable definition for hydroponic greenhouse produce at state and federal levels. Beckman explains, “The definition defines greenhouses as a fully enclosed permanent aluminum or steel structure clad in either glass or impermeable plastic for the controlled environment growing of certified greenhouse or hothouse vegetables. It uses computerized irrigation and climate control systems, including heating and ventilation capability, a soil-free medium that substitutes for soil (under the greenhouse or hothouse), hydroponic methods, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Our effort is largely harmonized with one under consideration by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.”

However, as technology advances it may complicate an effective definition. “There are a lot of new hybrid designs coming up,” reports Bauer. “We’re looking at ways to heat shadehouses that are geo-thermal. We’re looking at having louvered roofs to regulate temperature. The argument is going to get more complex and difficult as these hybrids take over.”

Practical Considerations

The arguments ultimately come down to comparing production systems. “In reality, ideal production is a combination of growing location and materials to yield the best possible product,” says Bauer. “Simply, if you’re in Montreal in January, you need the highest

Side Note

BACKED BY CERTIFICATION

The market, in general, benefits by two aggressive production systems pursuing accolades in certification. Members of Certified Greenhouse Farmers adhere to a rigorous certification system. “Our members must undergo a Global Food Safety Initiative benchmarked audit, and while others may stop after a food safety audit, our system goes above and beyond that,” says Ed Beckman, president of Certified Greenhouse Farmers, located in Bellevue, WA.

Members are audited annually by SCS Global to a practice-based sustainability standard that evaluates structural and environmental controls, water resource management, IPM procedures, plant nutrition management, ecosystem management and integrated waste management. “We’ve also recently begun a partnership with SureHarvest to take this sustainability program to the next level,” reports Beckman. “As part of this effort, we’ll be collaborating with third-party stakeholders — including buyers and NGOs — to understand their sustainability priorities.”

Certified Greenhouse Farmers’ expected result is a next-generation sustainability-certification platform based on the principles of performance metrics, technology innovation, continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement. “SureHarvest CEO, Dr. Jeff Dlott, had told us it will be the first comprehensive performance-based system in agriculture,” says Beckman.

“The initial focus will be on developing environmental metrics — including water, energy and nutrient use efficiencies — that support the definition advocated for by Certified Greenhouse Farmers, and are scalable for various sized growers who have a shared commitment to greenhouse growing.”

The Protected Agriculture industry in Mexico also adheres to a strict certification program. “We have an aggressive and proactive program agreed to by our members,” reports Eric Viramontes, CEO of the Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. “Our protected agriculture growers are working with proactive attitudes so we can promote our industry as one of the most competitive and responsible.”

The program is called *Blindaje*, meaning “armor” in English. “It consists of five competitive levels,” explains Viramontes. “It is GFSI-compliant, meaning all members must have an international benchmark food system certified by a third-party. All members must comply with official requirements at origin and destination like the Senasica Risk Prevention Program and FDA. It is PTI compliant — all members must have traceability. There is a social responsibility aspect whereby all members must have certified social programs complying with international standards. We do monthly self-auditing and bi-annual third-party certifications.”

pb



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Grower Alliance, LLC partners with a variety of Mexican fruit and vegetable growers to import a wide range of top-notch products for retailers, foodservice, wholesalers, distributors, and brokers in the U.S. and Canada. This grower partnership structure, the heart of the organization, allows the company to provide a wide range of products throughout the entire year.

The group was formed by Jorge Quintero (sales), Luis Caballero (head of Mexican operations), and two growers in Mexico in August of 2007. Here, Quintero shares some of the vision behind Grower Alliance.

Q: What is the principal benefit of an organization like Grower Alliance?

We facilitate the distribution of fruits and vegetables to consumers. Through food safety programs instilled in all of our growing operations and the strategic growing areas we work with, we are able to distribute our commodities between October and July. Our PrimusLabs certified warehouse is essential to our business as we are able to set up orders and pay special attention to make sure the right product goes on the right orders.

Q: How many growers do you currently work with and is that number increasing?

We are currently working with about 12 to 16 growers. At this point we are comfortable with that number of growers for our sales capacity, but have not dismissed the opportunity to work with new growers. Our

primary plan at this time is to actually grow the company by assisting in our growers' growth, so there is a sense of loyalty between us. By helping the growers expand their operations, we in turn receive more product that helps our company grow.

Q: Are there any new products, varieties or packaging options buyers should be aware of?

At the moment we are doing trials in different ways to accommodate our customers' needs. Whether it be a modified atmosphere bag, specialty packs, or value-added presentations, we are able to work with our customers in any specific fashion they wish.

Q: What other new things are you doing to expand the business?

With the acquisition of our building in July of 2011, we are able to offer in-and-out services to other companies that might need it, as well as rent office space to them. We are also offering consolidation services for companies outside of Nogales that want to load in one location as opposed to picking up in different warehouses. Since we have focused on having a constant supply through the Nogales season on our core items, we have been able to extend our commitment with our customers to have season-long contracts. This has also allowed us to develop our relationships with retail stores, to allow us to get our products to the consumers quicker.

Q: What was the main objective when

Grower Alliance was formed?

Our main objective was to be independent and to offer our services to the industry. We wanted to be straight forward with our customers and be honest with them with the product we were shipping. We wanted to establish a core group of growers with whom we could grow our company together and eventually set up season-long contracts to benefit consumers, our customers, and the growers as well as us.

Q: What are the principal challenges you face in the business right now?

The principal challenge we face in our business right now is the end of the Tomato Suspension Agreement. The absence of such a U.S.-Mexico agreement will affect the consumer the most by them having to pay more for the product and experiencing a lack of different varieties of tomatoes. Our growers will also be in a tough situation as they will either cut back on their growing operations (which they have invested plenty in) or receive very low marginal returns. Another issue is the economy -- even though we are blessed to be in a business of importing perishable food and everyone has to eat, we are still facing an overall drop in demand because consumers are only buying exactly what they need as opposed to buying extra.

Q: Where do you see Grower Alliance going in the future?

I see our company being aligned with a solid group of good growers where we have consistent quality and supply of our





core items throughout the Nogales season. I also see our relationships with our customers improving where we can perhaps create joint ventures.

Q: What kind of feedback have you had from buyers/customers?

Our customers have given us positive feedback as a whole. They are happy with the way we do business, and are comfortable when they are purchasing product

here. We have heard that we do a great job in giving our customers exactly what they need. We have been told we are easy to work with and have created some good relationships along the way.

Q: What really makes Grower Alliance successful?

I believe our honesty and desire/ability to work with our customers has made us successful. We are honest and up front and

it helps avoid many problems down the line. The fact that the owners of the company are close knit and have a clear idea as a whole were we want our company to go only helps. We have also extended our reach into our communities, where we play a part in assisting any non-profit organizations we encounter. I believe in being part of the solution, not being part of the problem!

GROWER ALLIANCE, LLC

Tel: 520-761-1921 • Fax: 520-377-9189 • www.groweralliance.com

KEY PEOPLE TO KNOW

Following are the key people involved with Grower Alliance who can be an asset to your business:



Jorge Quintero, Jr.
Sales, Managing Member
(daily sales, contract planning and advertising)



Jorge Quintero, Sr.
Sales Manager, Managing Member
(marketing director, daily sales)



Luis Caballero
Mexican Operations, Managing Member
(contracting growers, planning production schedule, grower relations)



Jaime Martinez
Head accountant & grower relations



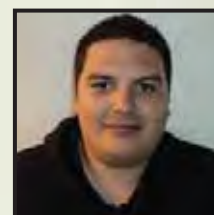
Frank Hernandez II
Sales



Maritza Guevara
Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable



Armando Robles
Warehouse Foreman



Jose Villareal
Dispatcher





PHOTO COURTESY OF APACHE PRODUCE IMPORTS

tech glass-enclosed greenhouse to get the result. On that same date, if you're growing in Culiacan, you don't need anything."

"Greenhouses provide optimum climate controls that allow for high-quality produce year-round," counters Beckman. "While some may argue that climates of particular regions don't require such stringent control, the benefits of a true greenhouse structure stem well beyond the quality and yield of product produced."

"Protected agriculture is about enhancing nature, not competing with it," responds Eric Viramontes, CEO of the Mexican Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico. "These technologies are developed to protect and manage the elements. The more elements you have to control or manage, the higher your cost and investments, so better climate conditions offer a competitive edge."

Supporters claim enhanced food safety and environmental aspects with greenhouses. Beckman says, "In addition to producing high-quality produce year-round, greenhouses offer valuable benefits in terms of food safety and environmental performance. Because of the structures themselves, produce grown in greenhouses are protected from animal, pest and disease intrusion, and since vegetables are not grown in dirt, soil-borne diseases and microorganisms can't infect produce. Also, because there is no soil, there is no need for herbicides or soil fumigants."

"Wise water use and limited pesticide use are other key benefits," continues Beckman. "Greenhouses recapture and recycle water so less water is used per acre in greenhouses than produce grown in soil. Also, greenhouses often use less pesticides than field or

protected agriculture growers."

However, others assert protected ag, in general, offers these same benefits. "Regardless if it is glass, plastic or screen, what makes any program work is a well implemented protocol," says Viramontes. "A glass greenhouse with poor agriculture practices has a greater risk than a shadehouse with a good program in place. No one should justify the value of a production system as being safer."

"Water recycling is a practice we are currently using in different systems throughout Mexico," adds Viramontes. "It is not exclusive for glass technologies. Some systems use soil, but employ the same irrigation technology as hydroponic systems, so the efficiency in water use is also present. Whether the grower uses soil or artificial substrate is a technical decision. Much calculation takes place because whatever nutrients the soil is not providing, the grower will feed it through the irrigation."

Financial aspects also play a role. Del Campo's Ley maintains, "It's not logical to invest in a glass house with heaters that I will never turn on because I grow in a tropical area. In fact, where I grow, the glass will be counterproductive to my plants because it's too hot. So to do it just to garner a certain perception or label doesn't make sense. Each grower needs to find the right growing technology for the climate and circumstances where they're growing."

"Some claim that because Mexico has gone to greenhouse or protected ag, costs are higher," adds Alejandro Canelos, owner/director of Nogales, AZ-based Apache Produce Imports LLC, and chairman of the board of the FPAA. "As one of the largest growers, I can tell you that going full-scale

"It's not logical to invest in a glass house with heaters that I will never turn on because I grow in a tropical area. In fact, where I grow, the glass will be counterproductive to my plants because it's too hot. So to do it just to garner a certain perception or label doesn't make sense. Each grower needs to find the right growing technology for the climate and circumstances where they're growing."

— Martin Ley, *Del Campo Supreme*

from outdoor to indoor has dropped our cost on a per-unit basis. This whole argument is just a distraction. Companies are looking for a way to put limitations on us for their own personal gain."

The End Perspective

Both sides argue for the good of the consumer. "In Europe, where the greenhouse industry was developed, buyers and consumers don't care what production system is used," states Ley. "They care about the quality, consistency and assurance of supply."

"Buyers and consumers just want the best possible product at the best possible price," says J-C's Chamberlain. "Whether it's open-field or shadehouse or glass house, I don't think it really matters for them. They just want quality, available product, and fair pricing."

Al Harrison's Bauer advises, "Whether it's field-grown, shadehouse or greenhouse shouldn't matter if your supplier is giving you good product. It makes more sense to focus on marketing a sweeter, or tarter or prettier tomato than to differentiate if it was grown under glass or hydroponic. We must consider food safety and social responsibility issues, but that can be done no matter what type of

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Produce buyers around the U.S. and the world rely on Mexico as a top partner in providing high quality produce year round. Since 1994, U.S. imports of fresh fruits and vegetables from Mexico have increased 380 percent. To help support buyers, Mexico offers a variety of programs and agencies providing a wealth of assistance to those trading with Mexico.

DIRECT BUYING PROGRAM & TRADE MISSIONS

The Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico offers TRADE MISSIONS to help buyers enhance the value chain of produce from Mexico by organizing business agendas with Mexican suppliers. More than 20 of the largest U.S. retail firms have visited Mexico under this program.

There are several types of Missions.

1. Customized Mission: This is when a particular buyer or company is interested in specific products or suppliers. They can request custom organization of a trip designed just for their specific needs.
2. Mission Linked to Tradeshow: SAGARPA organized missions designed for those interested in attending a specific Mexican trade show. Buyers receive assistance with travel arrangements, outside meetings and tours, and visits to production areas. Shows that have traditionally linked missions with

them include ANTAD Guadalajara, Expo Agro Sinaloa, Agro Baja, Expo Agroalimentaria and Exporganicos.

3. Supplier Visits: SAGARPA puts together specialized group trips to visit specific production areas and commodities of interest, as well as other useful venues like packing facilities or processing plants. Itineraries are planned according to the groups wishes and interests.

MEXICAN FRESH PRODUCE EXPORTERS DIRECTORY

The Directory is a marketing tool with the main objective of promoting the exportable supply of the Mexican produce sector. It includes a master catalogue with information on growers, firms, production, availability, volume, seasons and varieties, among other information. It also offers integrated public and private databases and regular updates of registered growers. Available in an annual printed edition, a CD-ROM, and website.

Link: www.mexbest.com

TRADE SHOWS

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of Mexico under the MexBest image has participated in the following trade shows:

- WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW
- SCAA
- NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST
- UNITED
- SUMMER FANCY FOOD SHOW
- SOUTHWEST EXPO SHOW
- EXPO COMIDA LATINA
- NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO EAST
- PMA FRESH SUMMIT

Key shows in Mexico that buyers may be interested in attending include:

- EXPO AGRO SINALOA
- ANTAD
- ALIMENTARIA
- AGRO GUANAJUATO
- EXPORGANICOS

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact the Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico:

Froylan Gracia

Counselor for Agricultural Affairs
(202)728-1729

froylangracia.sagarpausa@verizon.net

1911 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20006



In recent years, the Ministry of Agriculture



MEXICAN MELON GROWERS FOCUS ON FOOD SAFETY

Melons production in Mexico embraces advancing food safety practices and technology and is an integral supply for markets across North America. The growing conditions themselves in the northwestern part of the country -- warm, arid weather with deep-aquifer irrigation wells serve to inhibit microbiological contamination. For Cantaloupe melons, field and packing shed standards have been developed in conjunction with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Mexican state and federal food safety agencies. Additionally, exported Mexican produce of any type must pass a wide variety of inspections to enter the U.S. which ensures only the highest quality products reach retail shelves.

To be able to export cantaloupe melons to the U.S., all Mexican producers must adhere to a series of standards set by the Mexican federal agency charged with food safety (SENASICA) in conjunction with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In addition to government oversight in both the U.S. and Mexico, the vast majority of cantaloupe and honeydew producers acquire third-party certification by companies recognized in the U.S., Canada, and across the globe.

Melon growers throughout Mexico have

installed world-class equipment and technology. Stainless steel tables are consistently used for sorting, and forced air pre-coolers are present at nearly every packing facility. Following guidance from SENASICA, cantaloupe melons for export are cleaned using a chlorinated solution, to control for microbiological contamination and remove any soil from the exterior of the fruit.

In the state of Sonora, one of the largest growing areas for cantaloupes in all of Mexico, shed packing is the industry standard so as to maintain precise control over melon handling and packing conditions. These advanced packing houses also implement control mea-

sures around the facilities, such as contour grading and placement of gravel, to ensure that water moves away from the structures and doesn't pool near the packing facilities.

Worker education and cleanliness is another priority with focus on ensuring that all individuals who handle fruit do so in the safest and most secure manner. Packing shed workers are given classes in food safety techniques so they not only follow a company's food safety requirements but also understand the reasoning behind the protocols for working with food and the significance of Good Handling Practices.

The Mexican Federal agency, SENASICA, has created a risk-reduction program for the production and handling of various agricultural commodities. Melon growers in Northwest Mexico have been aggressive in meeting the requirements of this certification. Third-party certification of both field and packing sheds is more and more common among exporting melon growers. Growers understand that instituting a system of best practices and facility certification is becoming a necessity — not just to appease customers, but to ensure that fruit is produced under the best possible conditions and that only the highest quality produce is made available to consumers.





Many Mexican tomatoes are greenhouse-grown, yet they are displayed among field-grown tomatoes with no distinction made in-store.

structure the product was produced in. Buying decisions should focus on the customer's product specs."

Certified Greenhouse Farmers encourages buyers to learn about growing methods. "They need to ask the right questions," suggests Beckman. "If they are buying protected agriculture produce, ask what types of structures the produce was grown in. It's also important to ask what is being done to protect against food safety issues and related to environmental performance. Water use, pesticide use, recycling and how growers are contributing to local communities are all questions worth asking. Further, how is this data tracked and measured over time?"

In the end, no one wants misled or confused consumers. "When purchasing a product labeled as greenhouse-grown, consumers should be assured it was grown in a true greenhouse and isn't simply field-grown produce masquerading as greenhouse," claims Beckman of Certified Greenhouse Farmers. "Unfortunately, the increasing demand for greenhouse-grown produce has caused some growers and shippers to purposefully mislabel product. While we believe there is room for all types of growers, when consumers purchase a product labeled as greenhouse, that label should mean something."

"Industry disputes only confuse consumers and when you confuse consumers, they don't feel comfortable and they step away," cautions Ley. "These disagreements create a mistaken perception with the consumer that perhaps something is not as safe as the other. These disputes are more counterproductive than beneficial for the industry."

Future Outlook

Despite the difficulties, the West Mexico industry is positive about the future. "The U.S. consumer is becoming more knowledgeable and seeking out better quality and

“Whether it’s field-grown, shadehouse or greenhouse shouldn’t matter if your supplier is giving you good product. It makes more sense to focus on marketing a sweeter, or tarter or prettier tomato than to differentiate if it was grown under glass or hydroponic. We must consider food safety and social responsibility issues, but that can be done no matter what type of structure the product was produced in.”

— T.J. Bauer, Al Harrison Co.

unique products,” says Apache’s Canelos. “I see this trend continuing and hopefully increasing consumption. Mexican importers, distributors and growers will be there to meet those demands.”

Increasing consumption is touted as necessary for the entire industry. “We all still have a problem within our success in that we’re not significantly increasing the tomato per-capita consumption,” says Del Campo’s

Ley. “There are success stories

we can use as a model, like the berry industry that’s seen significant growth in per-capita consumption. Tomato continues to be a key category in the produce department, but with all the variety and growth, we should have a much higher increase in consumption. Not enough attention has been put on this, and the way to achieve it is with broader collaboration amongst all the actors of the industry.”

“We really need to focus on consumption,” agrees J-C’s Chamberlain. “Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of U.S. and Mexican trade, we need to focus on the positive. Look at how much the tomato and other vegetable categories have grown over the past 10 years.”

Choice and options may be key to increasing sales. “The best way to increase consumption is to increase choice and give consumers more of what they want,” suggests Canelos. “Give consumers options and flavor.”

New varieties under development in Mexico are said to represent tremendous opportunity. “There are significant improvements happening throughout the world in the tomato industry,” reports Ley. “The tomato industry is a global industry and a lot of really good varieties exist with more flavor and more smell. We’re achieving varieties that can carry and sustain those attributes as they move through the distribution channel. We’re rising to the challenge of bringing a better tasting, more appealing tomato to the consumer.”

Working together, the West Mexico industry forges ahead. “Producers need to utilize industry associations to help take on the issues,” advises Brent Harrison, president of Al Harrison Co. “As members of an association, you’re going to be heard and be able to work through issues. Working together will help better lead the industry into the future.” **pb**



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF SUNKIST GROWERS LLC



Eye-catching displays of items such as pears and citrus will boost winter sales.

Use Holidays To Warm Up Winter Produce Sales

By marketing and merchandising specific products built around the numerous winter holidays, every month is sure to have positive produce rings. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

There are two cool ways to sell more produce in the winter. First, capitalize on the biggest food holidays of the year such as Christmas and New Year's by merchandising fruits and vegetables as prime ingredients for everything from party fare to traditional dinners and even food gifts. Secondly, capture customers' desire to eat healthfully and lose holiday pounds by promoting fresh produce in January as well as selling the idea of fresh produce as staple fixings for Super Bowl and Chinese New Year's fare.

Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral at Rice Epicurean Markets, an 8-store chain based in Houston, TX, says, "The holidays are what drive some of our biggest produce sales during the winter."

HANUKKAH: December 8, 2012

"The timing this year of Hanukkah in relation to Thanksgiving and Christmas spreads out these eating and gift-giving holidays, allowing retailers to focus on each one," says Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Frieda's, Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "At the same time,

there are ingredients in common at each of these three holiday meals such as root vegetables and potatoes."

Mashed potatoes are a Thanksgiving and Christmas staple, while potato pancakes, also known as *latkes*, are a Hanukkah tradition. Because of this, Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail for the Eagle, ID-headquartered Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), says, "Potato sales are strong from mid-November through December."

Not only are Russets popular, Ralph Schwartz, director of category management and director of value-added marketing for Potandon Produce LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID, says, "Specialty potatoes sell well in November and December, as many consumers use them for holiday entertaining, and some of the more unique varieties really add differentiation to these holiday events. For example, we see purple potato sales spike in December in certain markets. Retailers should ensure they are carrying and displaying specialty potatoes in a prominent spot during the holiday run-up." He suggests, "Merchandise these varieties on the main display tables along with the traditional bagged Russets, and give recipe options

to drive customers toward them."

Randy Shell, vice president of marketing for Bancroft, WI-based RPE, expects a very large supply of potatoes this year, with excellent quality. "This will drive a significant amount of promotions across the potato category for this season," he notes.

Schwartz agrees, adding, "We expect to see 10-lb. bags and larger used as key sale items, and possibly as loss-leaders to help retailers capture dollars."

However, Ted Kreis, marketing director for the East Grand Forks, MN-based Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA) points out, "While retailers have the chance to move a lot of potatoes this winter because of attractive market prices, in some case, margins should come down to more reasonable levels. To be fair to consumers, retail prices should be more in line with current market conditions. This will increase profits through both attractive margins, but also volume."

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S: December 25, 2012 and January 1, 2013

According to Robert Schueller, director of

“Advertise and display a minimum of four varieties: Bartlett, Anjou, Red Anjou and Bosc. Research shows that greater sales are generated with four to six varieties than a two-pear ad, as this quantity creates a strong pear destination.”

— Roger Pepperl, Stemilt Growers, Inc.

public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, “Displays should be colorful and festive and filled with product for these two joyous holidays.”

“Freshly squeezed orange and grapefruit juice is perfect for making party drinks, so emphasize that Texas citrus is thin-skinned and full of juice — as we say ‘heavy for its size,’” advises Paula Fouchek, marketing director for the Edinburg, TX-based Edinburg Citrus Association.

Apples and pears pair well with cheese on appetizer party platters. Bob Koehler, lead regional marketing manager for the Milwaukie, OR-based Pear Bureau Northwest, says, “We offer wine, cheese and pear wheels that help customers know what is best to mix and match. In addition, some retailers will pick a particular

cheese and pear combination and promote them for two weeks during the holidays. Others will put a freestanding display with a couple of cases of pears by the cheese in the deli. These are both excellent ways to spur impulse purchases of pears.”

“Another way to mix-and-match,” Koehler adds, “is different pear varieties in the same ad as well as displayed together. One Northeast retailer, for example, does a beautiful job of sprinkling red-skinned pears among the green in an orchard bin display unit, creating an eye-catching display.”

Pear-o-ramas run in early December keep the category working, says Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, LLC, in Wenatchee, WA. “Advertise and display a

minimum of four varieties: Bartlett, Anjou, Red Anjou and Bosc. Research shows that greater sales are generated with four to six varieties than a two-pear ad, as this quantity creates a strong pear destination.”

Sweet potatoes and fresh cranberries are two indispensable ingredients of a traditional Christmas dinner. The quality of this year’s sweet potato crop looks excellent, according to George Wooten, owner and president of Wayne E. Bailey Produce, in Chadbourne, NC, who adds, “We’ll have adequate supplies for a 12-month program.”

Garber Farms, in Iota, LA, is experimenting both in growing and marketing a limited quantity of a new variety of sweet potatoes called the Orleans, explains partner, Matt Garber. “Its main attribute is that it produces more consistently sized sweet potatoes. If all goes well, we’ll grow more next season.”

Since harvest is complete by October and growers then work off a stored crop after that, promotions are easy to plan with retailers. Wooten notes, “Retailers typically promote the week before Christmas and two weeks after. It’s also a good time to increase the number of SKUs displayed and promoted: large bulk, 3-lb. bags, 4-pack tray-packs, individual microwavable and triple-washed steamer bags.”

Ninety percent of fresh cranberries are sold in November and December, reports Bob Wilson, principal partner and managing member of the Wisconsin Rapids, WI-based The Cranberry Network. “December is a cornerstone of our fresh cranberry business, and retailers can now feel confident of promotable availability. That said, it’s important to order weekly or every other week to keep a fresh inventory. We pack to order, which helps in rotation, eye appeal and sales.” This season, the Cranberry Network will debut a low-sugar recipe for traditional cranberry sauce using Stevia on its 12-oz. bags.

Also new this year, Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc., in Lakeville-Middleboro, MA, will launch a marketing campaign geared toward expanding usage of fresh cranberries. Scott Simmons, senior manager of global produce and commodity sales for Ocean Spray, shares, “We’re providing retailers with 5x7-inch POS cards with recipes for cooking and decoration on the front and back; there will be different recipes for October, November and December. In December, the recipes are for a Cranberry Gorgonzola Tart, and the other provides instructions of how to decoratively use cranberries in a flower vase,” he details.

Apples and pears merchandized in fruit baskets and gift boxes are popular during the

Side Note

PEARS AND CRANBERRIES FEATURED FOR HOLIDAYS AT RICE EPICUREAN MARKETS

Produce and floral departments come together at Christmastime at Rice Epicurean Markets, an 8-store chain, in Houston, TX, and are featured both as ingredients as well as decorations. Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral, explains, “We’ll run a pear-o-rama with pears on ad usually two weeks prior to the holiday ads. At that time, we’ll bring in a display of every pear that’s available like Anjou, Bartlett, Bosc, Comice, Seckel, Forelle and Concorde. We’ll do demos, too, and try to pair pears with other recipe ingredients.”

In addition, Luckak’s creative floral staff used directions supplied in Pear Bureau Northwest’s *Decorating with Pears* consumer brochure to fashion Christmas trees out of fresh pears. The idea was so popular that not only did customers buy the ready-made pear trees, but they also asked staff directions for making the tree and bought several pounds of pears to do the job themselves. Luchak says, “The nice thing is that you can enjoy the pears as a holiday centerpiece and then eat them for dessert as soon as they fully ripen.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST

Pears aren’t the only fruit Rice Epicurean Markets promotes for holiday decorating, Luchak adds, “We’ll also feature fresh cranberries to put in glass cylindrical vases with floral arrangements. **pb**

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holidays, notes Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Co, in Yakima, WA. "Make consumers aware that these items are available by displaying them in holiday-themed produce destinations," he advises.

Edinburg Citrus packs 20-lb. gift cartons of its Texas Red Grapefruit. Fouchek describes, "The graphic box is colorful; highlights the beautiful interior of the fruit; and the graphics include a red bow on the top with a gift tag."

Sunkist Growers LLC, in Sherman Oaks, CA, also offers holiday-themed cartons of its Navels. Julie DeWolf, director of retail marketing. "Many families have long-standing traditions that involve giving gifts of citrus.

HEALTHY EATING: January

There's a seasonal shift in January where New Year's resolution-making and healthful-eating take center stage, points out Melissa's Schueller. "This means many shoppers try to eat more fresh produce in an effort to take off pounds gained during the holidays," he says.

Berries, citrus, packaged salads and apples are the Top Four selling produce categories in terms of dollar sales during the months of December, January and February, according to Nielsen.

As for apples, Sage Fruit has "teamed up

"This is a great time for retailers to host 'citrus extravaganzas' where they promote as many varieties as possible. We often see, in some of the more progressive retailers, huge displays of up to seven or eight different kinds of citrus and huge flyer ads supporting these displays."

— Julie DeWolf, Sunkist Growers LLC

with NBC's *The Biggest Loser* and exclusively pack our fruit into *Biggest Loser*-themed apple and cherry materials," details Sink. "To go along with our packaging, we also have *Biggest Loser*-themed pop up bins, poly bags, tote bags and posters. We first rolled this program out with cherries and had great success. We are looking forward to carrying that success into the 2012/2013 apple season. This will coincide very well with New Year's resolutions and the beginning of *The Biggest Loser's* 14th season," he adds.

Sinks continues, "One trend we have been seeing the past few years is retailers waiting until the winter months to roll out club variety apples. The main driver behind this is the popularity of the Honeycrisp apple. Last year, Honeycrisp volume was up 35 percent," he

reports. "Once the buzz of new crop Honeycrisp begins to slow down, that is when retailers will move into other popular club variety apples to help drive sales. We have the Sonya apple that is available well into the winter and spring months."

Similarly, Stemilt doesn't start to market its Piñata apple until January. "We're anticipating 250,000 million cartons this year and have rebranded the carton with a shiny, high-graphic carton of an apple floating in the ocean with a Palm tree on the stem," describes the company's Pepperl. "Piñata has a classic apple flavor with a tropical twist. We suggest retailers use the carton to build waterfall displays."

Just about every variety of Northern Hemisphere citrus is in season at some point between



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FRESH MARKET HOLDS RECORD FOR WORLD'S LARGEST ORANGE DISPLAY

Case and gift box promotions of Navel oranges are a tradition in early December at Associated Food Stores, a Salt Lake City, UT-based cooperative that supplies nearly 600 independently owned retail supermarkets. The retailer capitalized on the peak of domestic citrus season and the ability to sell in quantity in the weeks leading up to Christmas by building the world's largest orange display on December 2, 2009, a record that still stands. Leigh Vaughn, director of produce and floral, explains, "We partnered with Sunkist Growers and brought in four truckloads or more than 164,000 pounds of Navels. It took five hours and 20 volunteers to build the display at the Fresh Market in Centerville, UT, which was two pallets wide and two pallets tall with a 25-foot banner over the top."

The entire store joined in the celebration

with the bakery, for example, selling orange butter flake rolls with orange frosting. Santa made a guest appearance in-store, as did city council members. A number of school children toured the store and display and received goodie bags filled with fresh oranges, fruit snacks and orange peelers.

Oranges were on ad at \$5.99 for the 13-lb. gift boxes and \$7.99 for the 38-lb. cartons.

Vaughn says, "We opened the display on a Wednesday and sold through 55 of



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNKIST GROWERS LLC

the 76 pallets by Friday. It was a great promotion and a wonderful way to kick-off the citrus and holiday seasons." **pb**

December and March, says Sunkist's DeWolf. "This is a great time for retailers to host 'citrus extravaganzas where they promote as many

varieties as possible," she points out. "We often see, in some of the more progressive retailers, huge displays of up to seven or eight different

kinds of citrus and huge flyer ads supporting these displays. In addition, retailers should definitely be communicating the Vitamin C

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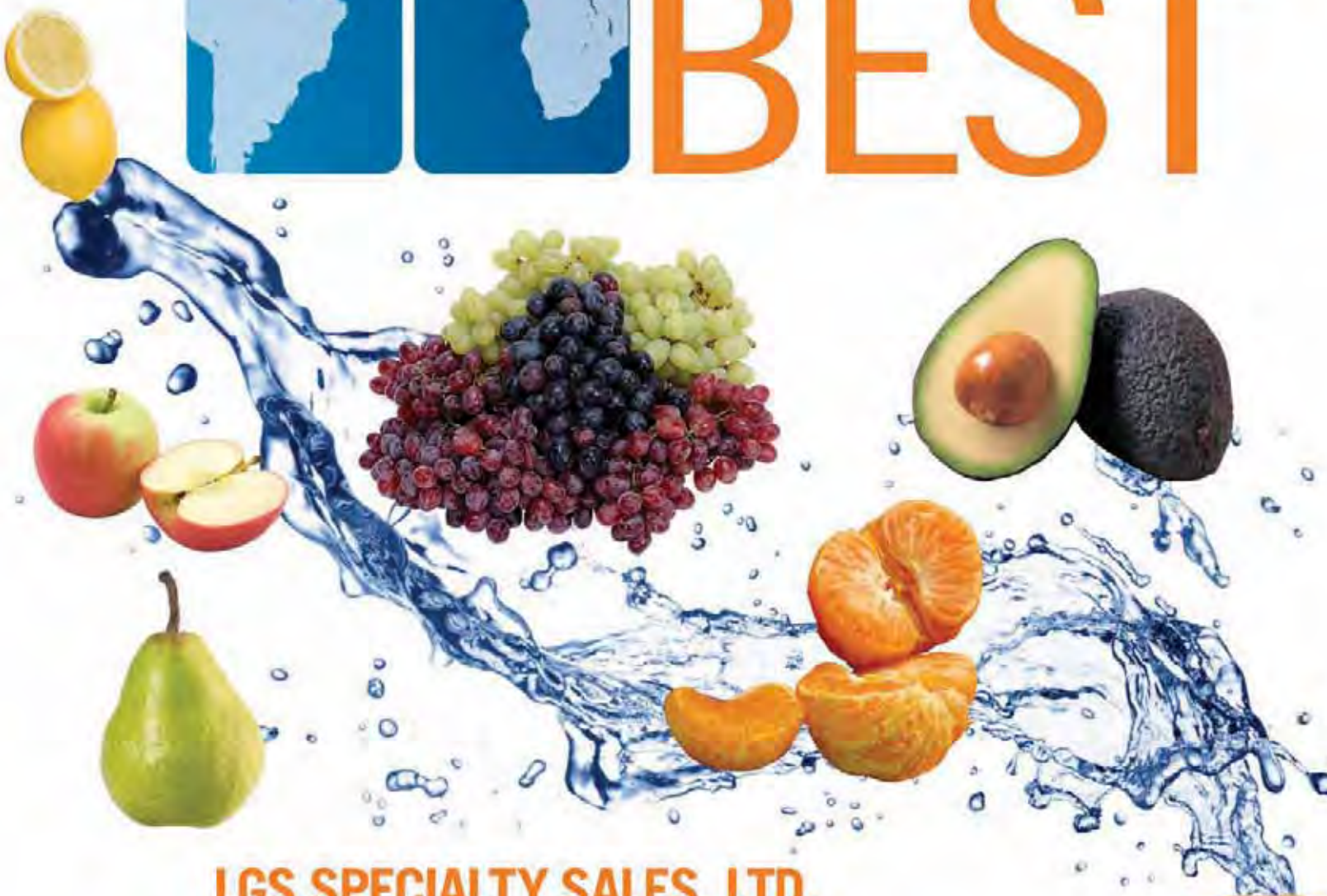
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content of citrus, as winter is cold-and-flu season, and consumers need to be reminded that citrus is a Vitamin C powerhouse that can help boost the immune system. Displays should highlight the nutritional value of citrus and also include information on taste profiles, as this would be a perfect time to get consumers to try something new like a Moro orange, a Cara Cara Navel, a Pummelo or a Minneola Tangelo.”

Cross-promote citrus with nutrition in mind, suggests ECA's Fouchek. “Sections of our grapefruit and oranges can be added to lettuces for a simple salad, so placing them near the

bagged salads and salad dressings give consumers a quick and easy idea,” she says. “Add another level to this by placing chopped nuts, avocados, and sweet onions in the display. Suggest adding pre-cooked chicken strips to the salad to make it a complete meal.”

SUPER BOWL: February 3, 2013

Everyone knows Super Bowl is a snacking holiday. Frieda's Caplan recommends, “Promote fresh jicama, sugar snap peas and baby, colored cauliflower rather than the regular carrots and celery. Or, retailers can feature the meatless

AVOCADOS SCORE BIG SALES AT NORTHGATE MARKETS

February is one of the best months for avocado sales at Northgate Markets, a 29-store chain, headquartered in Anaheim, CA, explains assistant produce director, Alfonso Cano. “The Super Bowl is in the beginning of the month and we do a huge business in avocados at this time.”

One of the sales tools Cano employees are football-themed cardboard shipper display units provided by the Washington D.C.-based Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA). “We fill these with ripe avocados and place them in high-traffic areas like by the chip aisle, by the beer or at the front checkout to generate impulse sales.”

Cano also partners with the CAIA to run Super Bowl-themed display contests with his produce managers that have generated double-digit increases in sales. “In reality,” says Cano, “we promote avocados every week of the year, ripen them ourselves to be sure and have ripe fruit consistently available to our customers, and we carry a number of SKUs. For example, there will be a large, or 40 or 48 count, small, or 70 count, a 4-count bag, Florida green, smooth-skinned, and in January and February, we'll bring in some of the Bacon variety. Some customers choose the Bacon because they are a lower price point, while other customers look for something new to try. However, 90 percent of our avocado sales are the Hass variety.” **pb**

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Habanero Chile recipe from our *Purple Kiwi* cookbook to promote a variety of fresh produce items such as onions, bell peppers, fresh garlic, tomatoes, habanero chiles, cilantro and basil.”

Guacamole is king for Super Bowl, so it makes sense to merchandise bags of avocados along with a recipe to use the entire bag at one time for a great-tasting bowl of guacamole to use on sandwiches or in soups or salads for game-day celebrations, recommends Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission. “Consider supplementary placement of hanging bags of avocados near check-out to capitalize on impulse sales. Display avocados

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with complementary produce items such as chiles, tomatoes, limes, lemon and cilantro to build a stronger produce sales ring.”

The Washington D.C.-based Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA) has created a unique campaign that retailers can use

during the football season or following the Big Game. CAIA’s outdoor billboard campaign from November to January will feature its *Grab Some for the Game* football theme, while February and March will promote health and flavor with its new *MMMM...That’s Good!*


visuals. Maggie Bezar, marketing director for CAIA, says, “We offer secondary display bins that can be utilized in the chip, meat and front-end of the supermarket to help increase impulse shopping for avocados. The key to secondary displays outside the department is care and handling by the produce manager to check that the display is full.”

Beyond guacamole, potato skins are another Super Bowl staple. New this year, the IPC is partnering with Hormel Real Bacon Bits for its annual *Potato Lover’s Month* retail display contest. Pemsler remarks, “February is great not only for *Potato Lover’s Month*, but with Super Bowl at the beginning of the month, it makes a great tie-in and promotional opportunity by featuring all the fixings for potato skins.”

CHINESE NEW YEARS: February 10, 2013

This traditional Chinese holiday has enjoyed resurgence in terms of retail promotions over the past couple of years, reports Caplan. “One reason is that Asian cuisine is very popular,” she notes. “Capitalize on this by first running some type of ad with two to three items such as baby bok choy, snow peas or ginger root, or known best-sellers like eggroll wrappers, won ton wrappers and tofu. Then, educate produce managers






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Specialty potato sales spike during the holidays as consumers use them in dishes made to entertain, such as Roasted Mini Potato Salad on Bruschettini.

about Chinese New Year's and encourage them to build destination displays. They can even merchandize rice cookers in the produce department. Some retailers have successfully run display contests around this theme."

Interest in Asian leafy greens has also heated up, adds Melissa's Schueller. "There are more

than 30 different kinds such as Bok Choy, Napa cabbage, Gai Lan and Choy Sum," he details. "Use signage for awareness and to provide recipe ideas, decorate with shelf-strips and banners to draw attention and run key items in store ads."

Citrus is a customary fruit for Chinese


New Year's, says Sunkist's DeWolf. "We offer a brochure to help consumers understand how best to peel and eat a Pummelo, a very popular item during lunar New Year, but one that can be intimidating because of its size," she notes. "We eliminate the mystery behind this amazing piece of citrus and encourage retailers to display it with one of our secondary display units. During this holiday, retailers need to ensure they have ample supplies of Navels and Pummelos, as well as stem-and-leaf Mandarins."

VALENTINE'S DAY: February 14, 2013

Think red for Valentine's Day, suggests Schueller. "Promote red Caribbean papaya, strawberry papayas and guavas."

Red Anjou pears are in promotable volumes at this time, as are Pink Lady apples.

Beyond this, Edinburg's Fouчек suggests, "Build a display that features Texas Red grapefruit, strawberries, strawberry glaze, crepes and whipped topping, which can all be used to make a simple, light dessert for a loved one. Whenever possible, tie in a demo with these ideas so consumers can taste the difference that our sweet fruit brings to the table." **pb**




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Displaying tie-in items adjacent to their intended items can increase sales by as much as five times.

Vegetable Sales-Boosters

Tie-in products sold in produce increase fresh item sales. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

Consumers are including more fresh vegetables in their daily menus for many reasons. One good reason is that retail produce departments are providing more tie-in products, making it easier to use and enjoy fresh vegetables. Whether it's refrigerated salad dressings for salad kits; dips for fresh veggies; bags of croutons or tortilla strips to add crunch; glazed nuts; or dried herbs or berries to sprinkle on for extra flavor, they all help build fresh vegetable sales.

Refrigerated Dressings And Dips Push Fresh Veggie Sales

"Made fresh in small batches without preservatives, unlike the items found on the grocery shelf, our dressings complement fresh veggies," asserts Doug Hawkins, Jr., chairman of the board and senior business development manager for Litehouse Inc., in Sandpoint, ID. "We believe in keeping fresh with fresh, increasing produce rings and helping give consumers a better quality product. Our Blue Cheese Dressing is our No. 1 product, doubling as a dressing and a dip. Homestyle Ranch is a favorite of parents for convincing kids to eat fresh produce. Newer are our pourable dressings: Sesame Ginger, Balsamic, Orange Citrus, and Thai Peanut cross over from being just

dressings into being fantastic cooking sauces," he details.

To assist retailers, Litehouse offers racks for its dressings and dips that cut a ribbon into displays of carrots, celery or heads of lettuce. "This provides an attractive color break, showcases the variety of products available, and helps consumers see tie-in possibilities," explains Hawkins.

James D'Agosta, senior vice president of retail for Brea, CA-based Ventura Foods, points out, "Practically any fresh vegetable can be cross-promoted with Marie's refrigerated dressings. When paired with produce, the fresh dressings can drive incremental dollars and margin with minimal shrink. The bagged salad section has the highest amount of companion purchases, so is a natural shelving placement for our dressings."

Using effective POS materials to create a strong linkage between fresh vegetables and dressings delivers consumer benefits and assists in driving increased sales and profits. "Displaying our Coleslaw Dressing next to cabbage with attached recipes or coupons helps consumers transform a commodity into a meal component," adds D'Agosta. "This also is true with Blue Cheese Dressing and asparagus, or Sesame Ginger Dressing and broccoli."

David Lim is the produce manager at Lunardi's Supermarkets, Inc., a South San Francisco, CA-based 7-store food chain. "Merchandising refrigerated salad dressings next to packaged salads provides more choices for our customers," he acknowledges. "Ranch is the most popular of the dressings."

Refrigerated vegetable dips have become increasingly popular, especially for entertaining. T. Marzetti Co., a Columbus, OH, marketer of refrigerated dips, provides consumers with a wide selection from Ranch to Dill. "Our Marzetti Otria Greek Yogurt Veggie Dip line is innovative and complements fresh vegetables," comments Mary Beth Cowardin, senior marketing manager for produce/dips/dressing/grocery. "The dip is made with Omega-3, has 60 calories per serving and comes in five varieties, ranging from Spinach Artichoke to Cucumber Dill Feta. More stores are placing produce dips near pre-cut vegetables. We recommend merchandising the dips near a variety of vegetable options for convenient pairings for consumers."

Marzetti also markets refrigerated dressings, and Cowardin reports that balsamic- and fruit-based dressing are gaining in popularity. The Simply Dressed and Simply Dressed & Light dressings contain no preservatives, trans-



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KITCHEN TOOLS HELP BUILD FRESH VEGETABLE SALES

The right kitchen tool can be a major asset for any fresh vegetable preparation. Having the most frequently used tools readily available in the produce department makes it much easier for customers to experiment with new preparation techniques and can help build fresh vegetable sales. “Kitchen tools are an important addition to our produce department,” acknowledges Jensen’s Madala. “We use display racks so consumers can quickly see what’s available. During peak seasons, such as the corn period, we’ll display more corn holders in an area adjacent to the corn.”

The Chef’n Corp., based in Seattle, WA, manufactures several products that help sell fresh vegetables by offering everyday consumers an easy food preparation option. It offers unique veggie brushes that mimic the vegetables themselves; tools to slice mushrooms and corn; and heavy-duty mandolins that make easy work out of tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers and more. John Sweatt, director of national sales, asserts, “Whenever we have an opportunity to have our vegetable or fruit prep tools in front of the actual food it is intended to be used on, two things happen. First, our sales increase, but what happens next is surprising to many of us in the industry and especially produce managers — food sales actually increase because consumers see a quicker, more efficient way to prep their favorite produce item. It also encourages new and inventive ways to cook and prepare fresh vegetables and fruits.”

The company offers end-cap header signs, floor display merchandisers with header POP, counter display units with POP, and shelf-talkers to grab consumers’ attention. The products are regularly featured in well known women’s and cooking publications, making consumers



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF MSC INTERNATIONAL
PHOTO AT LEFT COURTESY OF
BRADSHAW INTERNATIONAL INC.

aware of the different tools. One interesting tool that is being seen in more produce departments is the storage pod. Especially with the state of the economy, consumers are looking for ways to have less waste, but still enjoy fresh vegetables.

MSC-International, based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, markets storage pods for tomatoes, onions, peppers, garlic, and a variety of fruits. “These items are growing in popularity as consumers see how well they keep the vegetables they have purchased,” says Patrick Garaughty. “We recommend placing the pods close to the actual item they relate to, to be most effective.”

Nextep, Inc., headquartered in Reno, NV, markets produce protector bags. “Produce is the best location to sell our bags because of the impulse drive to protect the produce being purchased at the same time,” suggests Jim Moore, senior vice president. “The best way to merchandise the bags is to display them near the fresh items for which they’ll be used.”

The produce kitchen gadget line, ProFreshionals, marketed by Bradshaw International, Inc., headquartered in Rancho Cucamonga, CA, is found in most major supermarkets, according to Bert Tanimoto, marketing/communications manager. “Our Produce Keepers are very popular, with one the favorites being the Asparagus Keeper,” he reports. **pb**

“Adjacency is key to growing sales. Items merchandised in produce automatically provide a meal solution to the retail customer... Our research shows that when the items are displayed adjacent to the companion item, sales will increase up to five times, as opposed to when displayed on a rack at the side of the produce department.”

— Charles Olins, Concord Foods Inc.

fat, high-fructose corn syrup, MSG or artificial flavors. “Cross-merchandising helps drive sales of our products and fresh vegetables,” she notes. “Popular pairings for the Classic Dressing flavors include: Poppyseed with fresh spinach; Caesar with romaine hearts; and Slaw with pre-cut cabbage.”

Salad Kits And Flavored Products Inspire Creativity

Linsey Foods, Ltd., in Markham, Ontario, Canada, markets a variety of salad kits that contain all the extras required to make a restaurant-quality salad. For example, the Caesar Original contains creamy Caesar dressing, grated Parmesan cheese, bacon-flavored bits, and multi-grain croutons. The individually pouched ingredients are added to salad greens, then tossed and served. The kits are shelf-stable, so they can easily become extras in consumers’ pantry. “When merchandised near lettuce displays, the ET TU salad kit sells at three times the rate as when on a shelf,” reports Dixie Michie, marketing manager. “Merchandising in produce near the romaine or other lettuce creates recall for regular users and impulse sales for new or occasional users, resulting in increased romaine or other salad green sales.”

Linsey’s shippers contain header cards that sit on the back of the display, and designs and messaging are switched regularly to maintain interest. They can be created for specific in-store promotions, such as cross-promoting with private label romaine hearts, or for more



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toppings, such as Crispy Onions Lightly Salted and flavored Tortilla and Wonton Strips, as well as a wide selection of roasted, toasted or glazed nut and fruit toppings. "Our products can be easily added not only to salads, but also other non-salad dishes that utilize fresh produce, such as butternut squash or tomato bisque soup topped with croutons; burgers, loaded with lettuce, tomatoes and our Crispy Onions; and lettuce wraps, filled with sautéed fresh produce and wonton strips," details McMath.

To assist the retailer in marketing its products, Fresh Gourmet offers shipper displays and special promotions. Cents-off on bagged salads, a Crispy Onion/ Green-Line Green Bean holiday promotion, or a cross-promotional display with NatureSweet Cherub Tomatoes are examples of tie-ins with fresh vegetables.

Jensen's Finest Foods, an 8-unit retailer headquartered in Palm Springs, CA, displays salad dressings above the packaged salads to complement them. "To effectively cross-merchandise, you have to have an impulse buy in mind," remarks Jim Madala, director of produce. "We carry Litehouse and Marzetti's dressings over our packaged salads and offer 12 assorted varieties of each to give the

customer a selection. We cross-merchandise on our wet rack with salad toppers such as dried cranberries or flavored almonds to provide consumers with easy ways to add increased interest in vegetables."

Fresh Dried Herbs, Seasonings And Special Wraps Expand Produce Selection

"Retailers can increase their impulse sales by offering fresh flavorings beside their fresh produce," asserts Karen Caplan, president/CEO at Frieda's, Inc., located in Los Alamitos, CA. "Placing these flavor enhancers in the produce department gives consumers ideas on how to cook with fresh vegetables, as well as creating a destination display and opportunities for cross-merchandising. Our line of fresh and dehydrated herbs, dried chiles and mushrooms, with their complementary flavors, helps create fresh vegetable sales." She details, "Our Tomato Pesto and Black Garlic are popular flavorings for fresh vegetables."

French-style crepes and egg roll wrappers are other offerings from the company, providing possible tie-in items to build fresh vegetable sales. The crepes are shelf-stable and ready to display. Promoting pumpkin crepes



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH GOURMET

with fresh pumpkins during the fall season is a timely suggestion. The egg roll wrappers do require refrigeration, but are still a great option for cross-merchandising opportunities.

Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA, supplies produce retailers with crepes and tamale kits as tie-in products that help boost fresh vegetable purchases. Robert Schueller, director of public relations, reveals, the tamale kits are particularly popular with Latino consumers. The kits contain a recipe brochure, and merchandising them with fresh and dried chiles helps build sales of both.

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“Retailers can increase their impulse sales by offering fresh flavorings beside their fresh produce. Placing these flavor enhancers in the produce department gives consumers ideas on how to cook with fresh vegetables, as well as creating a destination display and opportunities for cross-merchandising.”

— Karen Caplan, Frieda's Inc.

Sun-Dried Tomatoes Add Flavor To Fresh Vegetables

Sun-dried tomato products are becoming more popular and add another cross-merchandising opportunity for retailers to increase fresh vegetable sales. “Our research shows that consumers utilize sun-dried tomatoes as a value-added ingredient in recipes incorporating fresh vegetables,” states Gary DeAtley, president and CEO of Danville, CA-based Sun Dry Foods. “Sales are often impulse-driven and are maximized in produce, where consumers are more inclined to be responsive to new recipes and usage ideas. Sun-dried tomatoes are natural tie-ins with salads, broccoli, mushrooms, asparagus, and other fresh produce,” he details.

The company's sun-dried tomato halves in oil or the cello-packed halves are most popular among consumers. Its research shows “heavy users” of sun-dried tomatoes tend to purchase more fresh vegetables and enjoy cooking and experimenting with new recipes and usage ideas. Smoked sun-dried tomatoes are the fastest growing segment of the category, according to DeAtley.

“When consumers visit the produce department and are putting together a dish like pasta primavera with broccoli, carrots, zucchini and onion, tossing in our Bella Sun Luci dried tomatoes in oil and Italian herbs complete the flavorful dish,” emphasizes Mary Ellen Mooney, owner of Chica, CA-based Mooney Farms. “As an added bonus, we only

pack these items in 100-percent-pure olive oil, so they are heart-healthy and infused with seasoning. Another great produce-partner is a ready made salad kit with bagged fresh spinach. Toss in any of our bagged dried tomato varieties for added flavor and nutrition,” she suggests.

The company offers a full-color, single six-pack tray that fits conveniently anywhere in the produce department. The item can be filled with any of five dry variety products. Also, two new metal floor displays offer a small footprint, full-color graphic headers and hold either a

case of all four dry varieties or a case of all the oil-packed tomato products.

The recent economic problems have not seemed to affect sales of many vegetable tie-in products, although they may be viewed as higher in price than alternatives. Most companies comment that more people are preparing meals and eating at home, and thus are willing to spend a bit more money at the grocery store. As such, they welcome products that can make food preparation and serving healthy, flavorful meals with more fresh vegetables easier and satisfying. **pb**

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Imported Sweet Onions: Spanning The Global Calendar

Once domestic product finishes up, it's time to take advantage of high quality onions arriving from offshore countries like Peru, Mexico and Chile. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

More consumers are learning every day that they can slice into a sweet onion and be delighted that their kitchen does not smell, and even more delighted that these special onions do not bring tears to your eyes. As Bland Farms owner, Delbert Bland, of Glenville, GA, says, "They only make you cry when they're gone!" With the highest quality product coming from fields on both sides of the equator, sweet onions need never be gone as retailers can follow the calendar around the globe.

The Global Calendar

Most retailers would prefer to merchandise domestic sweet onions as long as they are available because they are more local. "We use domestic sweet onions whenever they are available," confirms Dan Sutton, director of produce procurement for produce at Albertson's, based in Boise, ID.

Usually, quality sweet onions are available out of Georgia or California through August, and this may be one of the years when supply runs a little short toward the end of the

summer. "The storage is 30 to 120 days, depending on the year, details Barry Rogers, president of Melbourne, FL-based Sweet Onion Trading Co. "Vidalia had a tough growing year, so it was closer to 30 days this year."

As the domestic product becomes unavailable, true sweet onions have to come from the Southern Hemisphere, as the best sweet onions are short-day varieties. Brian Kastick, president of Oso Sweet Onion, in Charleston, WV, details, "The imports start in mid-August with Chilean and Peruvian onions, which go until the Mexican onions start in February. In the East, the Vidalia onions start in early April, and in the West, the California onions start in May. For a true sweet onion, not a fake or an imposter, you should start importing in mid-August through the holiday season."

Most suppliers offer onions from Peru after the season is over in Vidalia and California, and use Mexico and Texas to bridge the brief gap before the Vidalia season starts again in the spring. Bland notes, "We ship out of Georgia from April through August. We start in Peru in August and ship until February or March; the food safety conditions in Peru exceed some of

the food safety conditions in America. We fill in with onions from Texas and Mexico, but it's a different type of onion. It does not have the same flavor profile as the Vidalia or Peru."

Even grower-shippers in Georgia generally believe the flat sweet onions coming out of Peru are as good as you can find. "During the winter months, we import sweet onions from Peru and Chile as a part of our year-round program," remarks John Shuman, president and sales manager of Reidsville, GA-based Shuman Produce Inc. "Peruvian sweet onions are typically available from late August through February, and Chilean sweet onions are available, on average, from mid-January through mid-March."

In merchandising, the quality of the onions far outweighs the country of origin. "I think it's more important to bring attention to the sweet, mild flavor of the onion than it is to tout or hide its origin," asserts Shuman. "Research has shown almost negligible sensitivity to imported fresh produce. Peru is a great trading partner with the United States and has a trustworthy reputation with the American consumer — and the flavor and quality of a Peruvian sweet

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onion is second to none during its availability.”

Some U.S. shippers offer a mix of domestic and imported sweet onions during this off-season. According to Matt Curry, president and sales manager of Curry & Co., Inc., located in Brooks, OR, “The major sources of winter sweet onions come from a couple of different areas. Over the past several years, the domestic market has expanded its sweet onion offerings. For example, we market Hermiston Sweets, which originate in the Hermiston, Oregon, region and are available now through December. On our import side, we are focusing on sweet onions from Peru, which are available from August until as late as February, depending on the season,” he continues. “Our Peruvian onions are the flat-shaped onions that many consumers associate with sweet onions, especially in regions such as the Southeast, where Vidalia sweets are king. Chilean sweet onions are also popular during the winter months.”

The best winter marketing strategy for sweet onions depends on your location, and on the origin of the onions. “We feel it always makes sense to highlight your sweet onions, regardless of their origin,” says Curry. “Sweet onions have increased sales with more shelf space and more marketing support. They offer a higher ring to

retailers, and if consumers aren’t aware that you’re carrying something special, you are potentially losing sales dollars. The way you highlight sweet onions will vary with each retailer’s overall onion marketing plan. If you are marketing a Pacific Northwest sweet onion and you’re a retailer in this region, highlight the fact that it is a local or regional onion. If you’re a southeast retailer marketing a Peruvian sweet onion, perhaps you say it is the best winter sweet onion available,” he details.

The March of Promotional Opportunities

Each shift in the source of sweet onions over the course of the year brings with it an opportunity to reset the merchandise and start another sweet onion promotion. Curry contends, “Retailers can benefit from the seasonality of sweet onions. Celebrate the season and announce that new crop onions have started, or that these sweet onions are available for a limited time. This can help consumers feel that there is something new and exciting with a sweet onion.”

The arrival dates of sweet onions from different parts of the globe conveniently correspond with calendar events that can be cause for promoting sweet onions. “Each of these

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“We recommend including sweet onions on a display in the center of the produce aisle, stocking both bulk and bagged products to satisfy customers’ needs, depending on demographics.”

— John Shuman, Shuman Produce Inc.

gives you a chance for a promotional program,” acknowledges Oso’s Kastick. “The Peruvian or Chilean onions are good for the Super Bowl; Mexican onions for St. Patrick’s Day, and Californian or Vidalia onions for the summer holidays. It’s a great product because you can reset it so many times during the year. With large displays of both bulk and bagged onions, this could be one of your highest grossing items,” he asserts.

This march of promotions gives retailers frequent chances to continue increasing the number of consumers educated about and devoted to sweet onions. “There are regions of the United States, such as the Southeast, where sweet onions are easily identified and recognized by consumers,” recognizes Curry & Co.’s Curry, “or in other regions with strong local sweet onion programs such as the Northwest and Texas. In other parts of the country, we feel there are still huge opportunities to grow sweet onion sales — this is where retailers especially need to let their customers know that they have something different.”

Sweet onions are a growing category, and benefit from prominent and visible displays. “Signage, larger displays, perhaps even secondary displays, can help call attention to sweet onions,” remarks Curry. “If you treat your sweet onions with excitement — almost like a seasonal item — that you’ll reap the rewards and your consumers will as well.”

Prominent displays, especially during the holidays, drive sweet onion sales. Shuman of Shuman Produce suggests, “Sweet onions are best merchandised by clearly communicating with consumers their inherent sweet and mild flavor. It’s important to keep in mind that displays drive sales. We recommend including sweet onions on a display in the center of the produce aisle, stocking both bulk and bagged products to satisfy customers’ needs, depending on demographics. Taking the winter holidays into consideration, sweet onions also present a great opportunity for cross-merchandising for an increased ring at the register.”

Most consumers recognize the flatter onions as sweet, and equate that type of sweet onion with quality. “All sweet onions should be carefully merchandised to highlight their sweet,

mild flavor,” adds Shuman. “We recommend that retailers strive to define sweet onions in the produce aisle for consumers through the use of signage and other POS. Our Peruvian sweet onions make it easy for consumers to identify their sweet, mild quality through the flat shape and yellow skin color indicative of a sweet onion. It’s these qualities that are typical of a Granex variety onion — a true sweet onion — that research has shown consumers recognize.”

What Makes The Second Sale?

An eye-catching, informative display of good looking onions may make the first sale, but the key to a sweet onion program is bringing them back for more. “You get higher gross sales and repeat customers if you have a true sweet onion,” maintains Oso’s Kastick. “There’s a lot of retailers tempted to use western onions that aren’t really sweet but have a lower FOB. But you get it home, cut it open, and you start crying and your house stinks.”

That means the key to a sweet onion program is product that will pass the test in consumers’ kitchen. “A retailer likes something that looks good and will attract consumers; consumers will tell you after they taste it,” says Derrell Kelso, owner of Onions Etc., Inc., located in Stockton, CA.

That is why the consistent quality of the product is the key to a successful sweet onion program. “You can advertise all you want and get customers to buy them the first time, but to get them to buy the second time you need a good product, and you need a consistent product,” says Bland of Bland Farms.

Retailers can run sweet onions through a number of tests to ensure that they are getting a sweet tasting product. “We test the Brix on them with a spectrometer,” reveals Albertson’s Sutton. “We also use the pyruvic index that measures the chemical that makes them hot. You can have an onion that has high sugar, but is still hot, so we stick with growers that give us what we want.”

Suppliers can also send their product to the National Onion Lab for testing to certify the sweetness. “We are committed to working with National Onion Labs to test and certify our Sweetie Sweet onions,” declares Teri Gibson,



director of marketing and customer relations at Peri & Sons Farms, headquartered in Yerington, NV. “After conducting the pungency tests, they test for compounds that cause eye-tearing, then those that make the onion taste sweet. But most importantly they examine each lot for flavor — including bitterness and other negative flavors. There are sweet onions that have no pungency, but also have absolutely no flavor. What good is that?”

Peri & Sons Farms sells about 350 million pounds of onions a year with sweet onions — namely their Sweetie Sweet — accounting for about 10 percent of the company’s volume. “Since its market introduction in 2003, Sweetie Sweets’ popularity has continued to grow,” reports Gibson. “We think it’s mainly due to consistency in the quality, shape, marbled color, and most importantly, the taste. Sweetie Sweet is truly sweet.”

The flat, sweet onion has the best eye appeal, but the jury is still out on whether the flat onions are always the best sweet onions. “The primary difference is the shape of the onions versus the flavor of the onions,” notes Curry & Co.’s Curry. “Unlike many marketers, we feel there is room in the marketplace for both the flat- and bulb-shaped sweet onion. Each retailer has different needs, and we work closely with our partners to identify the most consistent onion that’ll fit their program the best.”

There is even evidence from objective testing that bulb-shaped sweet onions can match flat sweet onions in taste, if not in visual appeal. Rogers of Sweet Onion Trading acknowledges, “Consumers recognize the flat onion as being sweet. As far as taste-testing or pungency-testing, there is no difference. You can be domestic if you want until November. If you want a flat onion, you have to go to Peru by the beginning of September. Nonetheless, we taste-certify 90 percent of our offering. Our customers get quality no matter where the onions are grown.”

pb



The leafy greens category is experiencing a surge in popularity, thanks in part to consumers' health-conscious attitudes.

Leafy Greens Category Growth Demands Retail Attention

Leafy green sales are growing, but retailers must continue to work against storage and marketing challenges. **BY NICK EVANS**

Open the September 2012 issue of *Bon Appétit* and you'll find that the popular magazine recently gave its "2012 Dish of the Year" award to a kale salad. If you need more evidence of the growth of leafy greens, just ask Todd Luecke, brand manager for Glory Foods, a Columbus, OH-based CH Robinson company. "According to Freshlook/IRI data, sales of 1-lb. bags of kale are up 60 percent from the previous 52 weeks, as of July 17, 2012," he reports.

But even with mainstream publicity, selling bulk or packaged leafy greens in a retail environment can be challenging. While some leafy greens like cabbage and kale are sturdier than others, the entire category of produce is still finicky, at best. If not properly stored and maintained, leafy greens degrade quickly. On top of that, many consumers are still unfamiliar with the products and pass them by.

Retailers need to be informed about the proper ways to store and care for leafy greens and be willing to invest in marketing techniques to help familiarize their shoppers with



PHOTO COURTESY OF RATTO BROS.

them, or their produce investments will literally wilt on the shelves.

Bulk or Packaged?

One of the first decisions retailers must make when purchasing leafy greens is whether to buy them in bulk, sometimes referred to as "naked," or in packaged form. While packaged and wrapped leafy greens have their advantages, retailers shouldn't disregard bulk products.

For packaged greens, there can be cost effective benefits for the retailer. Tim Greene, director of sales at Hollar and Greene Produce, headquartered in Boone, NC, explains, "Retailers' advantage [with packaged greens] is that they can eliminate cross-contamination at a store level. Also, identification at the cash register can increase speed and... eliminate pricing errors and long lines due to confusion of products."

Packaged greens can still result in a more



color to the American dinner plate with mesclun salad mixes. Now, we need not just color, but flavor. That's why arugula and watercress are doing so well."

Salad mixes, too, have had to evolve beyond just spinach and mesclun to meet new consumer demands. Ande Manos, sales and marketing associate at Babé Farms, in Salinas, CA, says, "Whether it is retail or foodservice, the end-user is always looking for new and different flavor components in a salad blend. As a result, salads are now metamorphosing

expensive product for the end consumer though, due to processing and packaging costs. For some greens, bulk products are more popular. "Bunched naked greens outsell packaged greens by a large margin," according to Frank Ratto, secretary of Ratto Bros, Inc., located in Modesto, CA. The company has found great success with its "naked" produce in ethnic markets. Ratto explains why his company has decided to forego packaging on the greens it sells. "We are a traditional and pure company, so we like to sell fresh vegetables that consumers can smell in the markets," he says. "There's just nothing like getting a fresh head of lettuce or collard greens right out of the field."

Packaged greens sales are on the rise, however. Ashley Rawl, director of sales and marketing at Pelion, SC, Walter P. Rawl and Sons, Inc., remarks, "We are definitely seeing a shift to more value-added greens from the bulk category. Both segments are growing, however, the growth in value-added is significantly higher than bulk."

Retailers should experiment with packaged and bulk greens to see what their consumers are most interested in buying. Some demographics might be willing to pay more for well-packaged, value-added products, while some groups still prefer bulk goods.

Marketing Flavor

Gone are the days when only iceberg lettuce and spinach sat under the mister in the produce section. Today's supermarkets are being flooded with interesting varieties of leafy greens: specialty kales, baby arugula, and watercress just to name a few. These greens are all great nutritional products for consumers, but they need to offer more than just nutrition to sell in today's market.

"The next big thing in produce is flavor," says Andy Brown, vice president of marketing at B&W Quality Growers, located in Fellsmere, FL. "Ten years ago, we introduced

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“Temperature off the shelf is the most important. We give specific instructions about temperature; you don’t want to leave delivery pallets out on the receiving dock for hours in the sun while you organize your cooler.”

— Ryan Talley, Talley Farms

into ‘super salads,’ and include components like arugula, kales, mustard greens, chard, cabbage, hearty herbs and micro greens.”

Stores would be wise to focus on flavor when promoting leafy greens. Consider having small salad samples out so consumers can actually taste all the different flavors that these specialty leafy greens can provide.

Shrink-Wrapped Marketing

Beyond extending shelf-life, companies are

moving to packaged greens because they offer an easy opportunity to educate consumers on preparations and usage. Packaging ensures that there is some type of marketing in place for each variety of leafy green. Green of Hollar and Greene, says, “One advantage of shrink-wrapped cabbage is the opportunity to communicate recipes, nutritional values, and grower values to the end user.” In other words, the packaging itself can be used to inform consumers.

While this is important, a more subtle marketing benefit is the certainty that consumers are actually finding the product for which they are looking. In a day where consumers are hunting down specialty greens that they may have read about online or in a magazine, they may not know exactly what these greens look like on the shelf. Therefore, packaging becomes critical. Brown remarks, “The real benefit of packaging is product identification. If you want consumers to try something new, you need to have the name prominently displayed on packaging. It is much more consumer-friendly.”

Think Outside The Bunch

Besides on-package marketing, promoting leafy greens can be tricky. Retailers can’t easily move the leafy greens around the store because of their strict storage requirements. But educating the consumer should still be a focus. As Tom Thompson, strategic sourcing manager at Eden Prairie, MN-based CH Robinson, states, “Anything you can do on the rack with POS material to educate consumers on the health benefits of greens, to try another variety of greens, or to incorporate greens into a new dish, will ultimately lead to increased sales as consumers’ palates evolve.”

To find new marketing ideas, retailers should use resources provided by the growers first and foremost. Brown reveals, “We have an extensive database and micro-websites with updated recipes for each product.” He recommends www.watercress.com as a good example of how growers are providing information for consumers and retailers. Stores should take advantage of these free resources to get ideas for recipe cards that could be displayed alongside the products.

As retailers begin to focus more on bulk greens, it helps to show consumers how to prepare them. Be sure to have salad spinners, cutting boards, and maybe a few knives nearby so shoppers can purchase the tools they need to prepare the greens. Retailers should also pass along storage tips so consumers feel confident purchasing the greens and can get the most out of their purchase. Remind shoppers that bulk greens will keep longest if they are kept cold and dry; don’t wash the greens until they are ready to use them. Ratto adds, “Once you wash them and process them, the greens start to break down.”

Maybe one of the most critical tips for retailers trying to increase their leafy greens sales is simply to make sure they are consis-

Side Note

LEAFY GREENS REQUIRE TLC

Leafy greens are some of the most delicate items in the grocery store. They wilt easily, shrink, and can look unappetizing if not properly handled. Retailers wanting to make the most of the category should spend time thinking about how to maximize shelf-life by providing an ideal retail space for these products.

A nicely laid out leafy green section can help drive sales, but Andy Brown, vice president of marketing at B&W Quality Growers, located in Fellsmere, FL, warns retailers to make sure they handle the greens correctly. His company is a top grower of watercress, and when it comes to that specific green, he remarks, “It is extremely perishable. It will dry out within a day and has to be in a mister section or displayed in water. Retailers have to be sure to remove it and place it in a cooler overnight.”

B&W also offers packaged watercress to retailers in 4-oz. bags. The micro-perforated film on those bags gives the greens a much-improved 14-day shelf-life.

Whether in packaged or bulk form, maintaining proper temperature is essential. “It’s almost impossible for retailers to have the perfect cold storage space in their stores for the array of fruits and vegetables they market,” acknowledges Frank Ratto, secretary of Ratto Bros, Inc., in Modesto, CA. “The key to a longer shelf-life,” he continues, “is to not break the cold chain for the greens. That’s a chal-

lenge, however, when the greens are merchandised on the racks as they are exposed to the retail elements. They aren’t going to get as great a shelf-life if they had been stored at an ideal temperature and conditions.”

There is a simple way that retailers can maximize the life of their produce. As Ratto states, “Buy the freshest product you can from people who preserve the cold chain. Also, don’t over-order, and encourage retail employees to manage and cull displays as necessary.” If the greens look good in the stores, there is a better chance of them selling before they wither.

In many cases, mistakes are made regarding storage before the greens even hit the shelves. Retailers should be prepared for deliveries before they arrive. Ryan Talley, vice president of Talley Farms, headquartered in Arroyo Grande, CA, states, “Temperature off the shelf is the most important. We give specific instructions about temperature; you don’t want to leave delivery pallets out on the receiving dock for hours in the sun while you organize your cooler.” Also, be diligent in sorting out rotten food so it isn’t stored with fresh. Talley adds, “If something does go bad, get rid of it right away. Don’t leave it in the cooler or on the shelves.” Be prepared to maintain recommended temperatures once you receive the leafy greens and have people on hand to sort through spoiled product. **pb**



tent in the placement and supply of leafy greens. Jan Berk, vice president at Oxnard, CA-based San Miguel Produce, Inc., explains, "It is very important to give leafy greens a consistent home in the produce department

where consumers can find them every time they return to the store."

Triggering Other Sales

There are very few consumers who will go

into a grocery store and buy just leafy greens. But, people who do purchase leafy greens will most likely buy other high-end items. B&W's Brown reminds, "It's a good time for specialty greens like ours. They are a great item for retailers because customers that buy leafy greens are profitable customers." Even if the store makes little on the leafy greens, these items almost always trigger additional purchases. Brown continues, "Someone who buys watercress is likely to also buy a nice bottle of wine or other higher end products."

Retailers can move items around to help these triggers. Greene recommends serving green cabbage accompanied with Marzetti dressings. Not only should retailers place these items close together in the store, but they should also encourage this type of simple pairing with recipe ideas, samples, or coupon combinations.

Rawl & Sons' Rawl suggest retailers should consider seasonal uses when cross-promoting greens. "We encourage our customers to promote the various uses at different times of the year," she says. "For example, promote juicing by tying in items such as berries, carrots, apples and kiwi." **pb**

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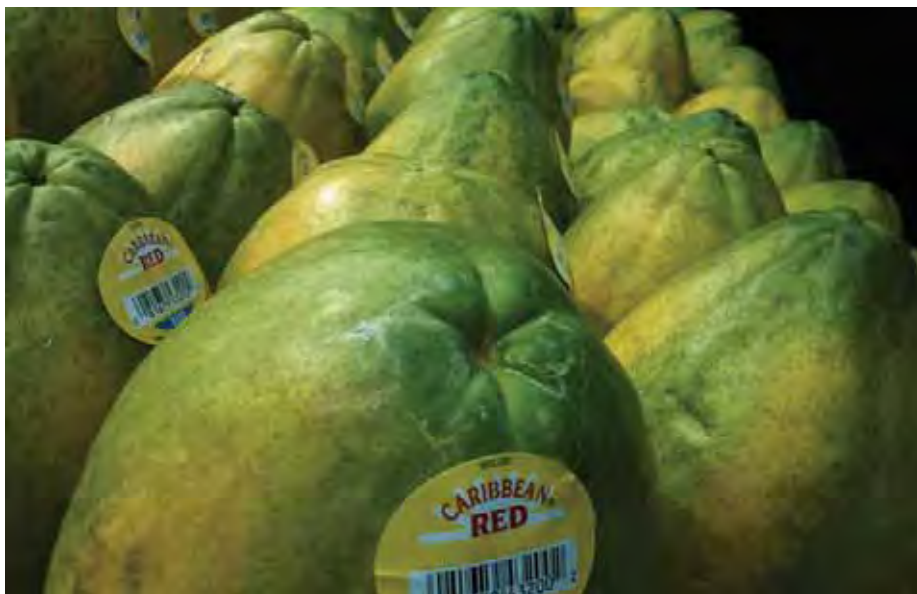


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Caribbean Red papayas and green plantains are only two of the many items the United States imports from Central America.

A Unique Identity For Central American Imports

With a distinctive year-round niche, Central America is proving itself to be a reliable source for a variety of high quality produce. **BY JANEL LEITNER**

Quality and variety define a successful program for Central American exports. Dunia Miranda-Mauri, trade commissioner at the Miami, FL-based Guatemala Trade and Investment Office, explains, “The produce from Central America, and particularly from Guatemala, is important to the American market because of consumer demands and our quality, variety, and competitive prices. Our geographical proximity gives us a competitive edge for U.S. marketing and distribution.”

“We have established the best post-harvest practices, along with exemplary knowledge of maintaining the cold chain and expeditiously moving the product from source to customer,” states Charlie Eagle, vice president business development for Southern Specialties, based in Pompano Beach, FL. “These factors, combined with continued sampling of seed varieties and farming technology, create the vertical integration model that enables us to provide our customers with the best value.”

Michael Warren, president of Central American Produce, headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL, agrees, “I see mostly opportunities for retailers with produce from Central America. We all have a good track record and have proven good quality with food safety as a priority.”

Offering a variety of produce during winter months is always beneficial. “Bananas, plantains, melons, pineapples and mangos represent as much as 13.5 percent of retail produce sales annually, and each of these items is heavily sourced from Central America,” reports Alan Guttman, president of Plantation, FL-based Fresh Quest, Inc.

Why Central America?

On tables across the United States, one significant recognized need is that of plentiful, good quality produce. “If you were to take a list of the products available during winter months in many parts of America, you would have a drab palate,” states Eagle. “From Central America’s offering you’ll find a variety like French beans, snow peas, sugar snap peas,

limes, berries, hand-peeled baby carrots, rainbow carrots with tops, papaya, mangos, radicchio, and more.”

Product availability from Central America is a valuable asset. “When domestic production is ending, Central America plays a vital role in filling in production gaps,” explains Peter A. Warren, key account sales at Ayco Farms, in Pompano Beach, FL. “Central America has become very proficient in producing volume items for the U.S. market.”

Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce, in Coral Gables, FL, states, “Our premium



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bananas are always readily available even during the summer months.”

“The imported fruit makes a great bridge to fill in the gap when there is not an abundance of U.S. produce,” explains Nancy Grace, produce manager at Georges Dreshertown Shop N Bag, an independent, upscale, family-owned supermarket in Dresher, PA.

Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals LLC, in Homestead, FL, adds, “Central America has the supplies that meet North American demands for produce, and this demand has grown from seasonal to year-round.”

An abundant variety of produce helps to make healthy eating choices even easier for the consumer. Michael Warren suggests, “Products like pineapple and mango grow year-round in Central America, allowing consumers to enjoy these popular items daily. Items like melons are available when the growing season ends stateside.”

“Seasonally, the items we get from Central America make sense to merchandise as they are the best eating during their peak season,” explains Greg Calistro, executive director of produce & floral at Modesto, CA-based Save Mart Supermarkets.

The Central American climate assists in providing a quality product. “Each of our varieties of products is grown in microclimates that offer excellent growing conditions for those products,” explains Eagle of Southern Specialties. “Guatemala, for example, is blessed with various altitudes for growing that include rich volcanic soils as well

as ideal temperature conditions.”

Market proximity translates into freshness. Warren of Central American Produce explains, “Central America is a great option for fruits and vegetables because they require only a few days transit time by vessel to arrive in the United States.”

Miranda-Mauri of the Guatemala Trade and Investment Office says, “Our geographical proximity to the U.S. ports of call permit us quicker and more frequent access to distribution centers. The quality and freshness of our products in the market results from this proximity.”

Prime Seasons For Promoting

Central America offers particular opportunity during fall and winter months. “Fresh Quest ships cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon, Galia melons, yellow honeydews and Italian-type cantaloupes from late November to the end of April,” reports the company’s Guttman.

“Knowledge of when the peak season is for each item is important so consumers can sample the items, and also so we can increase the display size. During peak season, when products eat best, promotion is the best way to increase consumption.”

— Greg Calistro, Save Mart Supermarkets

Calistro adds, “For our company, bananas, variety melons, cantaloupe, mangos and gold pineapple are popular during fall and winter.”

“U.S. consumers expect to have fresh melons on a year-round basis,” acknowledges Warren of Ayco Farms. “However, the real winner in the winter deal has been the advent of mini watermelons — all retailers want to be the leader in this sector!”

Tropical and exotic items present additional sales prospects. “For tropicals, there’s the gorgeous red of Caribbean red papayas that can add to fall festivities and continue to brighten up winter days,” says Ostlund of

Brooks Tropicals.

Miranda-Mauri reports, “Popular items for the American market are oriental vegetables, tropical fruits like papayas and mangos, Cantaloupe, organic bananas, plantains, berries, mini vegetables and rambutan.”

“We are involved with mangos, pineapple and papaya, which are popular year-round,” explains Warren of Central American Produce. “We begin melon imports of Cantaloupe, Honeydew, and watermelon and hard squash for the winter and spring season that complements the end of the domestic season.”

Fresh produce helps enhance any holiday table. “Fresh coconut has captured space on our dining tables, turning every dish it graces into a hit,” remarks Ostlund. “The extra time and effort it takes to go fresh is increasingly becoming an option to many consumers.”

Michael Warren states, “We see our supply of mixed vegetables spike during the holidays.”

The increasing popularity and consistent supply of limes make for great winter promotion. “North Americans are willing to squirt lime juice on just about everything from fruit to dessert and every slice of meat in between,” recognizes Brooks’ Ostlund. “A plate of lime quarters is often found next to butter and other condiments.”

Ayco’s Peter Warren adds, “Limes have high volume and great quality from November to May, so why wouldn’t you merchandise and promote?”

Promote New And Exciting Products

Promoting new produce items can help increase sales. “Recently, we have seen a strong push toward new varieties of melons such as Italian-type Cantaloupe, Galia melons and yellow Honeydews,” explains Guttman of Fresh Quest. “Cross-promoting these melons adds variety, color and a taste of something new to retail melon displays.”

Christou of Del Monte reveals, “We are working on enhancing our existing vegetable line with unique varieties. Del Monte has a full pipeline of innovative products to address the changing scope of consumers’ needs and tastes.”

Eagle of Southern Specialties reports, “At the PMA convention, we will be introducing our Southern Selects French beans, sugar snap peas and hand-peeled Brussels sprouts in high-graphic, resealable pouch bags with handles [all of which are grown and shipped from Central America].”

Green papaya demand is growing, too. “Green papayas are immature papayas,” explains Brooks’ Ostlund. “They are not ripe, nor will they ripen. They are a popular item in Asian



PHOTO COURTESY OF BROOKS TROPICALS LLC

“What is most important is for consumers to be certain that the products we offer from Guatemala and all the Central American growing regions are quality-assured. A tremendous amount of attention is paid to both the quality of the product as well as food safety.”

— Charlie Eagle, Southern Specialties

cuisine that’s also being introduced into mainstream markets with Asian fusion cuisine. Our green papayas are food-safety-certified from harvesting crew to fields to packing house to distribution centers. We are the only green papaya distributor with that distinction.”

The popularity and demand for value-added products is rising. “Processed products from the agricultural sector have grown 37 percent from 2006 to 2011,” reports Miranda-Mauri of the Guatemala Trade and Investment Office.

Guttmann remarks, “Fresh Quest offers pre-packaged microwaveable, ready-to-eat value-added French beans and sugar snaps in Guatemala.”

Innovative packaging adds a new variation for value-added. “This year, Del Monte introduced its proprietary Controlled Ripening Technology [CRT] 3-lb. banana bag designed to help retail customers improve sales in the banana category,” explains Christou. “The CRT bags extend the shelf-life of bananas by up to three days and improve produce appearance and quality due to less handling and moisture retention. Other benefits include saved labor, fewer deliveries and reduced shrink.”

“Value-added is the future,” says Peter Warren of Ayco Farms. “Modified Atmosphere Packaging and cut fruits and vegetables could play a huge role in the future of this area.”

Value-added Central American fruit helps bring summer flavors to the winter season. “The fresh flavors of pineapple, melons and cantaloupe are a key component of fresh-cut fruit suppliers during this season,” says Calistro of Save Mart.

Grow More Sales

Having a promotional strategy in place helps keep sales growing. “Planned promotions with the suppliers will keep Central American produce as a great option for the consumer,” explains Michael Warren of Central American Produce. “Central American produce remains a staple in retail, and consumers expect to see these items 52 weeks

a year.”

New ideas in cross-merchandising help invigorate promotions of Central American produce. “As the audience expands their appetite for dishes such as guacamole and salsa, they are also expanding the ingredients they use,” says Ostlund of Brooks Tropicals. “Make the expansion produce because it’s the healthier choice. A small bin of limes can fit almost anywhere — by the fish counter and even several places within the produce aisle. Make it second nature to pick up a lime for a dish the consumer has in mind.”

Grace of Dreshertown adds, “We make our displays large and they sell, because now, more than ever, more people are buying fresh.”

Attractive and informative displays are key. Michael Warren suggests, “Produce with high visibility signage on nutrition and fresh quality will help.”

Ayco’s Peter Warren states, “Promoting, merchandising, demo-ing and large displays are all helpful in catching consumers’ attention.”

Proper knowledge of the product by the stores is important as well. Calistro of Save Mart says, “Knowledge of when the peak season is for each item is important so consumers can sample the items, and also so we can increase the display size. During peak season, when products eat best, promotion is the best way to increase consumption.”

Christou agrees, adding, “Produce managers should be familiar with seasonality, availability, shelf-life, etc., so they they can answer consumer questions.”

“Educated produce handlers will keep the product moving and maintain displays looking bright and fresh to continue to build consumer confidence,” says Michael Warren.

Keep ripe produce easily visible to help the consumer with choices. Ostlund suggests, “Keep the fruit easy to reach by rotating ripe fruit to the front of the display because when a consumer wants ready-to-eat, they don’t want to dig deep.”

Appropriate storage is also significant. “The cold chain is very important, reminds Michael Warren. “Produce will look better and last longer with good cold chain management.”

Continuous promotion of the quality and dedication of Central American product will yield rewards. “What is most important is for consumers to be certain that the products we offer from Guatemala and all the Central American growing regions are quality-assured,” states Eagle of Southern Specialties. “A tremendous amount of attention is paid to both the quality of the product as well as food safety.”

pb



Mexico's ideal location allows for a virtual year-round crop of two different avocado varieties.

Well Supported Marketing Sparks Retail Promotions Of Mexican Avocados

Growers and marketers of avocados from Mexico offer retailers fun and informative ways to stimulate sales all year long. **BY STATHI AFENDOULIS**

According to Eduardo Serena, marketing director for The Avocado Producers and Exporting Packers Association of Michoacán (APEAM), headquartered in Uruapan, Michoacán, Mexico, “What makes avocados from Mexico different from other avocados is that they have been perfected over centuries in Mexico, the land where avocados originated...trees naturally bloom several times a year, producing avocados that are consistent in flavor and available year-round.”

APEAM and the Coral Gables, FL-based Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAIA) are leading the way in providing retailers unique promotional opportunities that go beyond the traditional uses for avocados. No longer assigned to just guacamole and seasonal uses, customers now have access to this versatile fruit all year long. Bill Tarleton, director of marketing and communications for Mission Produce Inc., of

Oxnard, CA, states, “With two crops a year from Mexico, one Hass and the other Flor Loca, we have the capability to continually guide our retailers to the best quality fruit all year long.”

Jacqueline Bohmer, marketing director for MHAIA, details, “Our marketing efforts include national print media, TV, radio, a mobile tour and social media. We also have programs that help retailers promote avocados at the store level.” Bohmer cites a recent article published in *The Wall Street Journal's* Personal Journal section on September 17th that discusses the growing popularity of avocados, sharing nutrition, availability, versatility, selection and storage messages.

Extending Usage

According to suppliers, Mexico is leading the way in providing new ways for consumers to use avocados as a healthy substitute for meals, snacks and entertaining. Serena acknowledges, “Customers are becoming

more health-conscious and aware of what they eat. But one thing they don't want to sacrifice is great taste and flavor.” Avocados are being presented as a good substitute for butter and oil — a healthy alternative to foods high in saturated fat.

Retailers can leverage this movement through consumer education and promotional programs provided by the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board. Emiliano Escobedo, executive director of the board, cites its nutrition research program, created in 2011, which “focuses on creating awareness and improving understanding of the unique benefits of avocados to human health and nutrition.” He adds, “Our research focuses on four key areas: heart health; weight management; diabetes and healthy living, the goal of which is to increase the per-capita consumption of avocados in the United States.”

At United Supermarkets, LLC, a 51-store chain based in Lubbock, TX, Tom Wilkins,

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Avocados from Mexico continue to be the #1 selling avocado in the U.S.* providing retailers with high quality fruit that is consistent in flavor and available year-round in a variety of sizes.

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*Source: AvoHQ



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Avocados From Mexico is now airing new creative promoting the message, Avocados from Mexico "Make Good Food Better." Celebrity Chef Jamie Gwen is currently starring in TV spots for the General Market



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MHAIA's Pinterest account, the association's newest social channel, which launched in September, now features 10 boards that include recipes, tips and fun avocado-focused inspirations, have already attracted 112 pins in less than one month

director of produce procurement, reports his company provides Dietitian Tours to guests, where they can learn about healthy eating habits. Wilkins reports, "Our company has recently created a full staffed nutrition department dedicated to providing our guests with better baking and eating options."

Holidays provide another opportunity for retailers to help consumers participate in promotional activities, as demonstrated by APEAM's *Spookamole* Sweepstakes. Halloween continues to grow as a major holiday with increased spending, and the *Spookamole* campaign is being used to position avocados as a rich, creamy and healthy party food. It also extends the holiday into the Hispanic market in celebration of *Día de los Muertos*. These campaigns will run from October 1 through November 2, and will feature special ads on Facebook and a microsite with guacamole recipes, party drinks, and Halloween-themed dishes.

"Planning a retail program around consistent supply and quality is crucial to the success of any promotional programs" states Ed Figueroa, avocado category manager at L.G.S. Specialty Sales, Ltd., headquartered in the Bronx, NY. Timing is everything, especially during the holidays and beyond. Mexican marketing associations spend millions of dollars to keep avocados in the eyes and minds of consumers, so any type of marketing and merchandising in the store has to be finely tuned to the delivery and stage of ripeness of the avocado. Figueroa contends, "Pre-ripened fruit is a good strategy for the retailer, especially when combined with a good choice of sizes, year-round."

By using a well-planned strategy of procurement, centered on Mexico's year-round ability to produce high quality fruit, and the efforts of its marketing associations and their programs, retailers can extend sales of avocados all year.

Promote On Social Media

Nowhere is the opportunity greater to touch base with your customers than online and the social media sites. Both APEAM and

MHAIA offer programs that promote the use of avocados in a variety of ways.

MHAIA's Pinterest account, the association's newest social channel, which launched in September, now features 10 boards that include recipes, tips and fun avocado-focused inspirations, have already attracted 112 pins in less than one month. Continued growth is anticipated across social channels over the next few months, as they are leveraged in a variety of ways to bring programming efforts to more fans digitally.

Facebook likes to the MHAIA have increased 27 percent since July, driven by the Hispanic Heritage Month program activation and sweepstakes, select Facebook advertising and the earned media coverage that prompted the positive buzz this season. The Facebook audience directly reflects desired targets and markets in Chicago, Atlanta, New York, Houston, Dallas, St. Louis and Philadelphia.

A focused effort is also underway to increase Twitter followers, which have already jumped over 8 percent since July.

Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 - October 15) highlighted the Mexican origin of avocados and offered numerous ways to reach Hispanic consumers, including an Amazing Avocados from Mexico Sweepstakes; Univision TV and online media promotions featuring Roberto Santibanez and his morning show *Despierta America*; and ads in *People en Espanol*, *Vanidades* and *Vista* magazines generating 7.2 million impressions.

Starting in November, MHAIA will launch a special sweepstakes on Facebook where fans can enter to win a trip to New York, NY, and an exclusive culinary visit with Roberto Santibanez.

Also in November, the promotions will continue on Pinterest, with the *Pin It to Win It Party*, where pinners are invited to upload their favorite avocado recipe photos to a dedicated MHAIA After Party board for a chance to win exciting prizes. The promotion will end in December with a Twitter party hosted by fan-favorite chef Roberto Santibanez to give followers fun, festive ways to include avocados in their holiday dishes.



“We like to offer our customers three options for purchase: 32s, 70s and bagged fruit. This dedication to quality and consistency has kept avocados the top-selling item in the produce section for the past five years.”

— Jeff Fairchild, *New Seasons Market*

Old-fashioned Promos Work, Too!

Retailers can take advantage of these and other programs offered by the two associations on more traditional media as well. The marketing of avocados is being presented on television and radio to both the general and Hispanic markets. *Extra TV* featured *Extra* host Mario Lopez on September 6, highlighting the versatility, year-round availability and nutritional value of avocados.

On radio, MHAIA hit the airwaves again beginning on September 3, and will run through October 21 in 16 key markets across the country. This program will deliver 12,000 spots to women 25 to 54, creating more than 70 million impressions. The same buy was introduced in eight key markets to Spanish language stations, delivering over 6.7 million impressions to Hispanic women 25 to 54.

The Avocados from Mexico *Taste the Wow Tour* kicked off on August 25th and will continue through November 4th, with two *Taste the Wow* vans spreading avocado WOW across the country. The tour will conduct 33

events at ballparks, as well as women’s, food-and-wine and health-related events. Almost half-a-million consumers will be exposed to avocados from Mexico, where they can sample recipes and receive brochures with recipes, health benefits and selection and prep tips.

And if that isn’t enough, Avocados from Mexico is proud to sponsor one of the largest food service trade conference this fall. The Multi-Unit Foodservice Operators Conference attracts more than 425 operators who represent 200 of the nation’s largest and fastest-growing chains.

Avocados from Mexico was also a gold sponsor of the Culinary Institute of America’s *Latin Flavors, America Kitchens* conference that recently took place at the CIA’s San Antonio campus in October. The conference focused on Latin cuisines, its future on American menus and the advancement of Hispanic culinary professionals. Avocados from Mexico was featured in the curriculum, culinary demonstrations and meals for attendees throughout the 3-day conference.

All the above programs are available to retailers through MHAIA and APEAM.

Promote to Profit; Profit from Taste

One thing among avocado growers, marketers and retailers alike, is their desire to offer the best fruit to consumers every day of the year. Working together, they all strive to maintain the highest standards of consistency and taste in the fruit they bring to market.

Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales and marketing for Calavo Growers, Inc., headquartered in Santa Paula, CA, sites the passing of the Hass Avocado Promotion Order, an act of Congress that created the Hass Avocado Board, as a crucial part of avocado marketing. Wedin states, “The assessments created by the Promotion Order directly support the California Avocado Commission and the Mexican Hass Avocado Import Association, for the purpose of advertising, promotion, public relations and trade relations. Calavo works hand-in-hand with these associations, to promote avocado sales to the United States and Canada.”

Jeff Fairchild, produce director of New Seasons Market, a 12-store chain in Portland, OR, strives for the same consistency, and works with American and Mexican growers, to assure that his customers get the avocados they want. Fairchild states, “We like to offer our customers three options for purchase: 32s, 70s and bagged fruit.” Fairchild will stay with growers throughout their peak season, and not switch over too early, in order to maintain the consistency his customers demand. “This dedication to quality and consistency has kept avocados the top-selling item in the produce section for the past five years.” **pb**

Produce In Foodservice: What's Hot? What's Not?

From finger limes to microgreens and everything in between, **PRODUCE BUSINESS** talks to the top flavor-makers in the industry to bring you a cheat sheet of the up-and-coming produce items making their way into the foodservice field. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CULINARY VISIONS PANEL

Vegetarian dishes, such as Sicilian Chickpeas with Spinach, are taking center stage at restaurants on nights apart from Meatless Mondays.

Fresh produce has enjoyed an ever-growing place at the table. Now, fruits and vegetables are moving center-stage in everything from fine to casual, QSR and campus dining. Driving this trend is enhanced variety and availability combined with inspired cooking techniques that rival traditional taste bud tempters such as steak or seafood.

If there's any doubt about fresh produce's key ingredient status in flavor revolutions on menus across the nation, just look at the Top 20 Trends identified in the Washington, DC-based National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot in 2012* survey of nearly 1,800 chef members of the American Culinary Federation (ACF).

Branden J. Lewis, chef instructor at Johnson & Wales University's College of Culinary Arts, in Providence, RI, explains, "Locally grown produce is second only to locally sourced meats and seafood. Other Top 20 trends that relate specifically to produce are hyper-sourcing from local or restaurant gardens, healthful kids' meals, sustainability, farm-branded ingredients, and culinary cocktails made with fresh ingredients like herbs."

Here are 10 examples of how these foodservice produce trends are playing out on the plate.

1. Greens With An Attitude

The evolution in American's embrace of more intense flavors can be traced through the popularity of greens. According to Jonathan Milder, research librarian for the New York, NY-based Food Network. "It started with iceberg, then progressed to spinach, mesclun and arugula; now we're living in a kale moment."

Sharon Olson, executive director of the Culinary Visions Panel, a Chicago, IL-based research firm that provides insights into new products, menu development and emerging trends, acknowledges, "Kale is hot because it's so super-powered and nutritionally dense. Even more important is that chefs have cracked the code on what makes it taste good. For example, kale chips: kale leaves sprinkled with olive oil and kosher salt and baked until crisp and crunchy. Even kid's will eat them because they're just like potato chips."

Another reason for kale's popularity lies in its different varieties, explains Martha Holmberg, director of communications and content for the New York, NY-based International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) and Portland, OR-based cookbook author. "Tuscan kale, also known as Cavolo Nero or black cabbage, has bluish green long or paddle-

shaped leaves that are sweeter, less bitter and more tender than other types. The key is that kale shouldn't be served in big pieces like iceberg lettuce. To taste good, it needs to be finely chopped." A cooked example of this is Tuscan kale leaves sliced thin, sautéed quickly in olive oil, shallots and garlic and finished by braising in chicken broth. Raw Tuscan kale is used in salads. For example, sliced as thin as angel hair pasta, some chefs toss the leaves with a Caesar-type dressing, while others more creatively mix with a sweet, salty, crunchy combination of grapefruit slices, anchovies and pine nuts.

However, kale may be on the cusp of losing its 15 minutes of fame, says Milder. "Chefs are already taking a closer look at hearty greens such as Swiss chard, mustard and dandelion greens," he details

2. Roots: No Longer Your Grandma's Veggies

There's a renewed interest in root vegetables driven by the need to eat seasonally and source locally. According to Patricia 'Kelly' McClay, dean of the Academy of Culinary Arts program at Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) headquartered in May's

right on target



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Landing, NJ, beets are leading the charge. “There’s such a large variety to work with: red, gold, white and even candy cane-striped,” she details. “We’ve learned that oven-roasting makes root vegetables like beets sweeter. Just look at the popularity of roasted beet and goat cheese salads. Even the tops of roots like beets and carrots are used to mix with other salad greens or braise as a side dish with a little onion for sweetness.”

Everyone is looking for the next ‘it’ root vegetable and turnips are it, especially with the farm-to-table folks. Holmberg maintains,

“Japanese white turnips or Hakurei turnips are sweet and juicy. They are being roasted whole with olive oil, salt and pepper; steamed with fresh herbs; and sliced raw like a radish and mixed into salads.”

Kevan Vetter, executive chef and manager of the culinary product development for Sparks, MD-based McCormick & Co., caramelizes root vegetables such as turnips, parsnips and carrots, and incorporates them with fennel, onions, garlic and unsalted chicken stock to create a creamy sauce. Vetter then uses this sauce to make a toasted farro

risotto, which he tops with a portion of pan-seared citrus herb halibut garnished with arugula and julienne peppers. “It’s a very flavorful, produce-rich indulgent dish that’s less than 500 calories and low in sodium and fat,” he exclaims.

3. Fruits: Berries, Mangos And Finger Limes, Oh My!

Berries, a popular category in retail for the past several years, have now picked up on sales on the foodservice side, reveals Craig Carlson, executive vice president of category manage-

Three Sure-Fire Ways To Profit From These Trends

Foodservice distributors and chain restaurant buyers can capitalize on these fresh produce trends by implementing three strategic tactics.

1. Do Ask, Do Tell

Vendors should seek out local chefs to have a finger on the pulse of what they want and what they are looking for, recommends Marshall Shafkowitz, director of academic services for Chicago, IL-based Le Condon Bleu North America. “It’s not just about a chef buying from me; it’s about him taking the time to seek out what I want. One way distributors can do this is to host a chef roundtable or forum. After all, if a vendor helps me drive my business, I will end up driving his.”

On the other hand, Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, director of programs and culinary nutrition for the Strategic Initiatives program at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, in Saint Helena, CA, advises, “Distributors should hire a corporate or consulting chef who can share with their customers new recipe ideas. This should be photo-documented because a picture tells a thousand words, and then posted on a chef’s blog or sent out in an e-newsletter.”

US Foods, in Rosemont, IL, and one of the nation’s largest foodservice distributors, does just this with its *The Scoop* magazine, explains Craig Carlson, executive vice president of category management for produce. “In this fall’s issue we featured seasoned Baby Bella sliced mushrooms and provided suggestions, such as use in pizzas, omelets and salads. It helps chefs to differentiate

themselves. We can e-mail the magazine or our territorial managers hand it out to customers.”

In a similar way, foodservice professionals at McCormick & Co., headquartered in Hunt Valley, MD, put together an annual Flavor Forecast, shares Kevan Vetter, corporate executive chef and manager of culinary development for the McCormick Technical Innovation Center. “The forecast is designed to offer chefs inspiration,” he says. “People are more willing to take a chance on a new flavor when it is first presented in an appetizer, soup or salad rather making a full-blown commitment on an entrée.”

2. Embrace And Expand Your Variety

Embrace new products even though they may have limited or sporadic availability, advises Gina Nucci, director of healthy culinary innovation for Mann Packing Co., Inc., in Salinas, CA. “Whenever you add another SKU, it can make more work and headaches. However, chefs like to try something new. Just communicate the availability in advance so they can plan accordingly.”

Expand the number of varieties of an item that you carry, suggests Martha Holmberg, director of communications and content for the New York, NY-based International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) and Portland, OR-based cookbook author. “For example, if you carry only Russian kale, add Tuscan kale and highlight it. Also, look for Heirloom or Heirloom-type produce such as radishes or carrots in different colors.”

3. Source Locally And Call It Out

Some distributors have started sourcing locally, and this is a step in the right direction, says Patricia ‘Kelly’ McClay, dean of the Academy of Culinary Arts program at Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) in May’s Landing, NJ. “Chefs today don’t just want the super-farm products without any personality or product from half way around the world when it’s available right in their own backyards,” she explains. “Sure, we still depend on distributors to source nationally and globally, but distributors also need to do more to search out local when it’s available.”

Sharon Olson, executive director of the Culinary Visions Panel, a Chicago, IL-based research firm that provides insights into new products, menu development and emerging trends, agrees. “Chefs don’t have the time to set up sourcing from 10 different farms to assure consistency of supply as well as food safety and traceability, but a distributor can go the extra mile and do this for their customers,” she notes. “This can be for the collective good: fresh and seasonal on a large scale. More chefs might buy when they know locally sourced produce is available.”

Sell the vision, advises Branden J. Lewis, chef instructor at Johnson & Wales University’s College of Culinary Arts, in Providence, RI. “Don’t just list products by name and price. If it’s special, say so: hydroponic, organic, the farm or farmer who grew it. The more a distributor can give information, the greater ability a restaurant has to advertise the story behind their ingredients.”

pb

“Locally grown produce is second only to locally sourced meats and seafood. Other Top 20 trends that relate specifically to produce are hyper-sourcing from local or restaurant gardens, healthful kids’ meals, sustainability, farm-branded ingredients, and culinary cocktails made with fresh ingredients like herbs.”

— Branden J. Lewis, Johnson & Wales University’s College of Culinary Arts

ment for produce at Rosemont, IL-based US Foods. “Strawberries and blueberries are now available on a cost-effective, year-round basis, and breeding is creating berries with better flavor profiles,” he acknowledges.

One impetus to the berry craze is the skyrocketing consumption of yogurt, says the Food Network’s Milder. “Greek yogurt is the latest smash hit, and what do you top it with? Berries,” he notes. “There’s a health halo around both of these foods.”

Antioxidant-rich fruit drinks are driving purchases of berries and mangos, Milder adds. “Mangos, especially, have been a beneficiary of the juicing and juice bar trend.”

Chefs and mixologists alike have discovered finger limes, points out Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., based in Vernon, CA. “Because they are only available out of California from August to early January and are one of the Top Five most expensive produce items on a per-ounce basis, finger limes are used more as a garnish in drinks, seafood, sauces, salads and desserts than as a main ingredient,” he explains.

4. The Four Seasons

“Since everyone has the same access to chicken, fish and steaks, it’s fresh seasonal produce that dictates the menu design and distinguishes and differentiates a menu,” contends Scott Samuel, chef instructor and strategic initiatives conference chef for the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Greystone, in Saint Helena, CA.

The intensity of flavor of something like just-picked tree-ripe peaches simply cannot be replicated, agrees ACCC’s McClay. “We’ll grill the peaches and toss them with Buttercrunch lettuce, pecans, a citrus vinaigrette and goat cheese,” she details. “The flavor of the peaches is so fresh and they’re so syrupy that they just coat the goat cheese. This dish won’t work with imported peaches or ones trucked five days across the country from California.”

When sourcing locally, call it out, recom-

mends Johnson & Wales’ Lewis. “For example, ‘North Star Farm’s zucchini,’ he says. “Four words, rather than one, draws attention to the vegetable. Then, don’t hide it in something like an au gratin. Use a simple preparation method in the spirit of the season like grilled or sautéed with pine nuts. No one paid attention to vegetables in the past, but foodies today are looking at the whole ensemble on the plate, not just the lead guitarist.”

5. That ‘Something Different’

According to Marshall Shafkowitz, director of academic services for the Chicago, IL-based Le Cordon Bleu North America, “Beyond simply sourcing locally, chefs today are looking

for the next new thing that will give them an edge. Organic lost favor as soon as Wal-Mart started selling it. Instead, chefs are looking for ‘Heirloom, limited-season and local fruits and vegetables with intense flavors like green Zebra tomatoes, purple carrots and Cayuga beets.”

Heirloom products offer a whole new set of ingredients with which to work. McClay recalls, “This summer, we received some fantastic Golden Cherry tomatoes that we blistered in hot oil and tossed with Kosher salt and cracked black pepper. They were a highlight on the menu and made a beautiful presentation.”

Chefs are also branching out to a number of different varieties. For example, Johnson & Wales’ Lewis puts a new twist on old fashioned succotash by using giant Lima and Scarlet Runner beans. He also makes Horseradish gnocchi with goat cheese and five types of locally grown radishes.

Pinky-finger-long and colored red-and-white, French breakfast radishes are ‘in,’ says IACP’s Holmberg. “I’ve seen them served as an appetizer at a fancy catered affair dipped in butter and salted with the green tops intact, much like a chocolate-dipped strawberry.”

Micro greens are also hot, adds Samuel of the CIA. “Instead of parsley, chefs are using

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“Because they are only available out of California from August to early January and are one of the Top Five most expensive produce items on a per-ounce basis, finger limes are used more as a garnish in drinks, seafood, sauces, salads and desserts than as a main ingredient.”

— Robert Schueller, *Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc.*

micro-arugula,” he states. “There are over 50 kinds of microgreens, each with a definitive flavor and distinctive bite that can be incorporated into dishes in a variety of ways.”

6. Hiding In Plain Sight

There’s been a revival of carrots and cauliflower at the chef level. The Food Network’s Milder explains, “Chef Daniel Humm at New York City, NY-based Eleven Madison Park has created a carrot tartare using carrots he sources from a farmer in the Hudson Valley. The carrots are freshly grated tableside and served with a tray full of ingredients such as mustard oil, smoked bluefish and the yolk of a pickled quail egg.”

Similarly, culinary professionals in the Food

Network’s test kitchen have developed recipes for veggie chili substituting grated cauliflower for ground beef and mashing cooked cauliflower into Russets for a new twist on mashed potatoes.

“The sign of truly influential chefs,” says Milder, “is using everyday foods people don’t really think about and delight in discovering the delicious possibilities that turn these ingredients into a fine-dining trend.”

7. Pickling And Preserving

Chefs are reexamining the way they cook. Edward G. Leonard, former ACF president and vice president of culinary education at Le Cordon Bleu North America, notes, “Instead of boiling, it’s all about flavor.”

Olsen of the Culinary Vision Panel says, “In



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIA/AT GREYSTONE

Culinary cocktails made with fresh-pressed juices and fresh, macerated herbs are among the most recent trends.

addition to bringing Brussels sprouts back in vogue by roasting, more chefs are pickling their own cauliflower, carrots and peppers and serving them as sides for items like Paninis.”

On the cusp of trendiness are chefs preserving fruits and vegetables such as locally sourced tomatoes at the height of ripeness for later use in sauces and soups. At ACCC, students use peaches and tomatoes in gelato and sorbets to extend the season, says McClay. “We’ll also dehydrate and freeze the fresh herbs that we grow,” she adds.

8. Drink Your Fruits & Veggies

Mixologists are the new superstars, suggests Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the Eagle, ID-based Idaho Potato Commission. “More than a sliced orange garnish, we’re seeing fresh-pressed fruit juices, a variety of vegetables and fresh, lightly crushed herbs like mint, basil and lemon verbena mixed with vodka, gin and bourbon to create designer cocktails.”

Gym-goers are latching on to coconut water for its electrolyte content, points out Melissa’s Schueller, while mixologists and chefs are using it to craft coconut water mojitos and coconut water-mango smoothies.

9. The Global Goodness Of World Flavors

As the culinary landscape grows, and cultures continue to mix in the same geographical locations, there seems to be a growing selection of fruits and vegetables. Owen Klein, research and development chef for Chicago, IL-based Culinary Sales Support, Inc., and consultant chef for Salinas, CA-based Mann

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“The amount of choices seems to grow as people bring the fruits and veggies they are familiar with to their new homes. The choice trends are both regional, like New Mexican Hatch Chiles, and visually based, like Argentinian Purple Potatoes.”

— Owen Klien, *Culinary Sales Support Inc.*

Packing Co., Inc., expresses, “The amount of choices seems to grow as people bring the fruits and veggies they are familiar with to their new homes. The choice trends are both regional, like New Mexican Hatch Chiles, and visually based, like Argentinian Purple Potatoes.”

The interest in world flavors is driven not only by a greater availability of ingredients, but search for authentic flavors, adds Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, director of programs and culinary nutrition for the Strategic Initiatives program at the CIA at Greystone. “Campus dining is leading this. For example, students are used to eating Oaxaca Mexican one night, Korean Kobe beef the next and authentic Mediterranean the night after,” she points out. “In many of these cuisines, fruits and vegetables dominate the plate.”

“Global tastes are playing out in simple ways, too, such as loaded fries topped with Kimchi, BBQ pork and seafood,” notes Odiorne.

“Also in more elaborate presentations, examples include eggplant with honey and the Tunisian hot chili sauce called Harissa, and squash with pancetta and red curry for a touch of Thai,” adds McCormick’s Vetter,

Other innovative examples include salad bars where all offerings reflect a Mediterranean or Asian theme, rather than a random assortment of fresh produce, and use of Moroccan-inspired Tagine spices to prepare locally sourced vegetable such as eggplant.

10. It Doesn’t Have To Be All Or Nothing

The mindset in menu development has been all or nothing. In other words, serve meat to meat-lovers and vegetables to vegetarians. Today, thanks to movements like Meatless Mondays, there are more carnivores on the



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHNSON & WALES

Chef instructor at Johnson & Wales, Brandon Lewis, created a new twist on an old favorite with his dish of Horseradish Gnocchi with assorted local radishes, summer sauce and goat cheese.

hunt for satisfying plant-based meals. In fact, according to a 2011 poll conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of the Vegetarian Resource Group, while 5 percent of Americans said they never ate meat, fish, seafood or poultry, a whopping 33 percent admitted to eating vegetarian meals a significant amount of the time.

No longer does a vegetarian plate mean a heap of boiled or steamed vegetables. Vetter notes, “Instead, chefs like Thomas Keller at the French Laundry are using their inspiration to elevate produce to star-status and create entire vegetarian tasting menus.”

“However, the mindset in menu develop-

ment doesn’t need to be all or nothing, in other words, all meat or no

meat,” re-minds Myrdal Miller. Take the signature ShackStack of chef Danny Myer’s Shake Shack in New York, NY. It’s a cheeseburger topped with a Portabella mushroom, rather than the typical QSR two beef patties. Rare roasted Kobe beef topped with Napa cabbage, watercress and shredded green papaya, dressed with fresh lime vinaigrette is an example from the Culinary Visions Panel of how produce is moving more to the center of the plate. **pb**

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10 Ways To Merchandise Citrus

Whether it has arrived from California, Texas, Europe, South America, South Africa or South Florida, citrus from around the world is a popular category for produce departments across the country, and can add plenty of ring when merchandised creatively. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



Regardless of its country of origin, citrus remains a popular choice of produce with consumers.

The vital and vibrant citrus category continues to evolve. Consumer preference is bringing the easy-peelers closer to Navel oranges every year. As the number of popular varieties increases, so too does the prime promotion season, which now extends far beyond the holidays.

Cost-conscious consumers in difficult times are making bagged citrus more popular relative to bulk citrus. Thus, “It’s important to study trends to see what customers are buying,” advises Mark Bassetti, senior vice president for customer development at Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL. “For example, bags are selling better than bulk as customers perceive the bag to be more of a value.”

Here are 10 tips from citrus experts to help maximize sales in this vital and changing category.

1. Promote The Best Fruit, Not The First Fruit

There is a temptation to promote the first fruit of a particular variety to arrive at the market. The problem with this approach is that the first fruit is rarely the best fruit. “We generally do not recommend ‘first-to-market’

promotions,” remarks Matt Reel, director of sales at IMG Citrus, based in Vero Beach, FL. “While it can be exciting to showcase a new variety or season, we like to make sure the consumers are delighted with their purchase. As such, the ideal time to promote any variety of citrus is when the eating quality is at its best.”

According to Darrell Genthner, director of marketing and business development at Winter Haven, FL-based Noble Worldwide Management Corp., “It makes sense to promote when the fruit is at its peak of flavor for a great eating experience.”

There is a time, usually a few weeks into the harvest, when a variety is both at its peak flavor, and is available at promotable prices. “Always look at promoting when a particular variety is at its peak of flavor, taste and availability,” specifies Al Finch, vice president for sales and marketing at Florida Classic Growers, located in Lake Hamilton, FL.

2. Know Your Quality

Because quality drives repeat sales, it is essential to know how your citrus supplier controls quality. Neil Galone, vice president for marketing and sales at Orange Cove, CA-based Booth Ranches, suggests, “Ask your suppliers what kind of control they have on the consis-

tency. Because we only market what we grow, we have better control over the product. Our criteria for harvest are maturity and flavor. If you sell oranges from a number of different growers, that can lead to inconsistency. We still struggle with consistency a bit, even though we only sell our own fruit,” he says.

California growers have enlisted the aid of the state to develop a more complex and accurate standard than the ratio of sugar to acid to ensure early season citrus fruit quality. “We’re changing the minimum standards for early fruit,” notes Galone. “For the past 100 years, the maturity has been measured by the ratio of sugar to acid. For the past five years, the State of California has been conducting taste studies with consumers, and we have determined quantifiably what makes for a good tasting orange. We will be using what is called the California Standard, and we feel it will guarantee better tasting early fruit.”

3. Summer Need Not Be Totally Lost

There are possibilities for successfully promoting imported citrus in the summer months. Jim Weber, director of produce at Econo Foods, a division of Nash-Finch, based in Minneapolis, MN, contends, “We did a very good job promoting imports this summer. The

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“We did a very good job promoting imports this summer. The imports are doing better and better. Consumers are looking for imported Clementines and Australian Navels in July, August and September. Our sales of imported Clementines were probably up 50 percent over two years ago.”

— Jim Weber, *Econo Foods*

imports are doing better and better. Consumers are looking for imported Clementines and Australian Navels in July, August and September,” he details. “Our sales of imported Clementines were probably up 50 percent over two years ago.”

Nonetheless, summer is generally the season for cherries, apricots, nectarines and peaches to take center stage in the produce department, leaving citrus with a supporting role. “One of the challenges in promoting summer citrus is that you are competing with the tree fruit from California,” acknowledges Mark Greenberg, senior vice president of Fisher Capespan, in Gloucester City, NJ.

But in the summer, Navels are available from South Africa and Chile, and Clementines from Peru and South Africa, and Florida Classic’s Finch believes there are some opportunities to promote citrus even in this “off” season. “I’ve seen retailers successfully promote bulk Navels and 3-lb. bags of Clementines in the summer,” he says.

4. Build The Displays

Citrus is largely an impulse purchase, which makes effective displays essential. “Because citrus is an impulse purchase, location, allocation, signage and price will determine the sales,” Noble’s Genthner says.

Eye catching displays can increase citrus sales by double digits. Paula Fouчек, marketing director at Edinburg Citrus Association, headquartered in Edinburg, TX, advises, “During the peak of our citrus season, it’s a great idea to provide the consumer with a choice — bulk fruit for individual selection and bagged fruit for value. Plus, bagged fruit can help lift sales up to 30 percent,” she reminds. “Also, remember that eye-appeal is buy-appeal. Always have cut Texas Red Grapefruit on the display, and just by doing this, sales can increase by 10 percent. The beautiful interior color will attract consumers’ attention and their great taste will bring them back for more,” she adds.

There are possibilities for effective cross-merchandising of citrus with interesting companion items. “Our red grapefruit and oranges can be placed near bagged salads and sweet dressings for an exciting new salad idea; it can be paired with tropical, deciduous or stonefruit or a variety of berries,” Fouчек details. “Fruit salsas are very popular so both the oranges and grapefruit can be positioned near onions, jalapeno peppers and colorful bell peppers. A fruit dessert idea is as easy as merchandising grapefruit along with straw-

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berries and strawberry glaze with shortcakes, angel food cake or crepes. With these purchasing displays, a sampling of the product makes sense. We know that demos produce positive results with increased sales of product and happy customers. A demo can be as simple as offering sections of fruit and providing information on how to section it. Once consumers learn how to section it, preparation

ideas are limitless," she remarks.

There are also opportunities for small effective citrus displays at numerous locations outside the produce department. "Incremental displays are recommended at the front end of the store, by the entrances as an on-the-go snack; near the pharmacy as a source of vitamin C; or in the seafood department as a complement to seafood dishes," enumerates

Duda's Bassetti.

Trade organizations and some producers are ready to help with ideas and information that can be useful in putting together effective displays. "The Bartow-based Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC) will continue to provide citrus shippers with free POS materials for retailers' use including display cards, bin signs and banners to highlight fresh oranges, tangerines and grapefruit," says Karen Bennett Mathis, FDOC's public relations director.

Displays of citrus tote bags can be particularly effective. "We only had one citrus ad last year that featured bulk product because people are very interested in totes," reports Econo Foods' Weber.

5. Easy Peelers Are Still On The Rise

Consumer interest in Mandarins and other easy-peeler citrus varieties is still on the rise, and it will be a few years before U.S. supply can catch up with that demand. "Interest in Mandarins is still increasing, especially the seedless varieties," reports Joe LoBue, vice president for export marketing at LoBue Citrus, based in Lindsay, CA. "Navels remain the biggest category, but are followed closely now by Mandarins. Mandarin production is still

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developing. Acreage is still being put in, and some of the trees are still small.”

Imported citrus can help extend the season and expand the supply of easy-peeler fruit. “It’s a little different with the easy-peelers, like Clementines,” says Fisher Capespan’s Greenberg. “Imported Clementines [from Peru, Chile and South Africa] are available from the middle of May all the way through the end of the summer. Clementine prices usually hit promotable levels right around the Fourth of July, and stay there through August. Murcotts hit in September after a two week lull.”

6. Promotion-Worthy Varieties

Some citrus varieties are so well known and loved that their arrival can be cause for a promotion. The arrival of Meyer lemons, Clementines, Cara Caras, Florida Tangerines, California Navels and Florida and Texas grapefruit are all cause for promotion, according to Duda’s Bassetti.

“Consumers look for Texas red grapefruit and oranges and anticipate the fruit’s arrival in the fall,” asserts Edinburg’s Foucheck. “They are known for their sweetness and juiciness — perfect for eating fresh or for juicing. As a matter of fact, they are so full of juice that they are considered ‘heavy for their size.’”

You can build a promotion calendar around the arrival of the most popular varieties when they reach peak flavor. “First-of-the-season Florida Tangerines and Cara Caras, California Navels and Clementines/Mandarins warrant promotions,” Noble’s Genthner says.

These variety-oriented promotions work because, to a great extent, each citrus variety has its unique group of consumers. “A Clementine customer is different from a Navel customer or a Cara Cara customer,” Booth Ranches’ Galone says.

In addition to promoting varieties, it is also possible to promote new citrus packages. “For example, Duda’s new Meyer lemon bag, or our new ‘Grab-n-Go’ Clementine snack pack are new exciting packaging options for consumers,” says the company’s Bassetti. “Promote the 8-lb. bag when possible, with end-cap placement preferred.”

7. ‘Tis the Season

To promote citrus, that is. The peak time to promote citrus corresponds roughly with the

holiday season, but it starts a little sooner and ends a little later. “Thanksgiving is usually the first promotion, and by Christmas you can promote all the early citrus varieties,” says LoBue of LoBue Citrus.

This promotion season corresponds with the peak citrus harvest season in Florida, California and Texas, as well as imports of easy-peelers from Spain and Morocco. “For our Texas grapefruit and oranges, the peak of the season is from about mid-December through February,” details Edinburg’s Foucheck.

“The full season is from October-April.”

The absolute peak season for a wide range of citrus varieties in promotable volumes is the first few months of the year. “January through March is the peak season for citrus, with California, Texas and Florida all going with all items,” notes Duda’s Bassetti. “Promote during the peak season, and focus on regional promotions when possible,” he advises.

The first weeks of the year open up the possibility of promoting Minneolas and Cara Caras, in addition to the Navels. Some citrus fruit is available for early promotion, as early as the back to school season. “When it begins to cool down at the end of August, and kids go back to school, markets look to promote oranges,” Fisher Capespan’s Greenberg says. It’s a natural fit.

There is some domestic citrus still available all the way up to the very beginning of summer. According to Florida Classic’s Finch, “Typically, Florida citrus starts the last week of September with Tangerines, Navels and juice oranges. Our season in Florida ends the first week in June, but we have a storage program on Valencias that goes into July.”

It is advisable to build a citrus promotion calendar extending from the end of summer all the way up to the end of winter. Holidays, regional events, National Grapefruit Month (February), and a fall and spring event like Citrus Extravaganza and Back to School also offer possibilities for citrus promotion, according to Bassetti.

8. Citrus Is A Nutritional Powerhouse

There is a mega-trend toward healthier eating, and citrus can be promoted as a portable nutritional powerhouse. “There is nothing that compares nutritionally to fresh fruits and vegetables; fresh produce is second to none,” says IMG’s Reel. “Another key point to remember when merchandising citrus is that sometimes we get too caught up in appearance — I guarantee if you focus on putting a good tasting piece of fruit on the shelf for your consumer, your sales will increase. Nothing disappoints customers more than poor eating quality,” he adds.

9. Know Your Store

During this peak season, Bassetti believes retailers do well to carry a full line of citrus varieties including Navels — both conventional and organic Navels, a regional juice orange, Cara Caras, Tangerines, Clementines, Minneola Tangelos, lemons — again, both conventional and organic lemons, Meyer lemons, Persian limes, organic limes, Key limes,



“During the peak of our citrus season, it’s a great idea to provide the consumer with a choice — bulk fruit for individual selection and bagged fruit for value. Plus, bagged fruit can help lift sales up to 30 percent.”

— Paula Fouchek, Edinburg Citrus Association

grapefruit, organic grapefruit and Pummelos. The rest of the year, he contends a reduced selection should still include Navels, a regional juice orange or Valencia oranges, Clementines, Minneola tangelos, lemons, Persian limes, Key limes and grapefruit.

The optimal number of citrus varieties depends to a great extent on the size and consumer base of the store. “The larger chains might want to carry all the varieties available, but the smaller markets might just carry lemons, oranges and Mandarins,” LoBue says.

“I carry everything I can possibly get my hands on — Blood oranges, Cara Caras, Minneolas, Tangelos,” says Econo’s Weber. “If one supplier doesn’t have them, I go to another. You can’t have too many kinds of citrus.”

There is a basic minimum number of citrus varieties even the smallest market should carry. “A minimum of four varieties should be

carried during the year, which would include Tangerines/Clementines, Navels, juice oranges and grapefruit,” details Noble’s Genthner.

Other suppliers agree it is advisable to develop a plan that includes the number of citrus varieties suited for your store at different times of the year. Genthner adds, “The number of varieties you should carry at peak season depends on the strategic plan...if it calls for a full assortment you should be handling three different value propositions per category segment. Segments should include different targeted customer groups — bargain, traditional, quality-conscious and gourmet/trendy. Eating oranges, juice oranges, grapefruit, Tangerines and specialty citrus should all be included.”

10. Harvest The Global Orchard

In order to maintain good citrus selection year-round, Duda’s Bassetti maintains retailers should source citrus from Florida, Texas, California, Arizona, Mexico, Chile, Spain, Morocco, Israel, South Africa, Australia, Peru, New Zealand and Guatemala.

There are U.S.-based shippers who specialize in importing citrus to fill the harvest gaps from domestic orchards. “Our specialty is imported citrus,” noted Fisher Capespan’s Greenberg. “Navel oranges from South Africa become available in the United States from the end of June, or July. They are available through the summer months, then the Chilean navels ramp up in August.”

U.S. citrus growers are constantly working to extend the season during which they can supply the fruit. “Shipping October through April, retailers can source most, if not all, of their citrus category from the United States,” says IMG’s Reel. “While we are partial to the eating quality of Florida citrus, there is excellent citrus grown in Texas and California as well. During the summer months, there are many options for retailers to choose from, but the primary shipping points are Chile, South Africa, Peru and Australia.”

Some years, the weather cooperates and domestic suppliers can go even farther in extending their citrus windows. “The early Mandarins start in California in October; the Navels start in late October; and the Cara Caras start in December,” details LoBue. “Last year, the Navels went all the way to August, so we had domestic citrus almost year-round.”

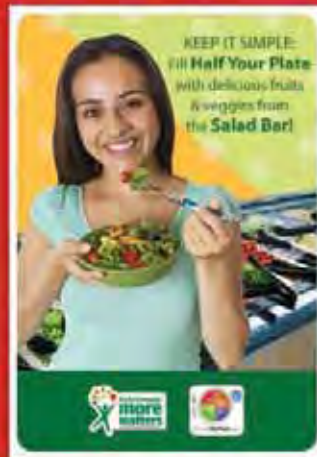
Consumers, however, are more concerned with the quality of the citrus than the country of origin. “People are looking for Navels and it doesn’t matter if they’re from Australia or Chile,” confirms Weber.

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Seven Ways To Sell More Bananas

As one of the most popular selections in the produce department, bananas deserve extra marketing attention. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



A nicely divided two-color program helps boost banana sales as consumers will want to buy some ready to eat and some for later.

It's ironic with all the interest in locally grown that the No. 1 selling fruit in the United States in terms of volume sales is a tropical import. What's more, it's a relatively recent addition to the North American diet, sold for the first time in 1876 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition for the princely sum of 10-cents each. Today, bananas contribute a sizable 5.7 percent of produce department dollars for the 52 weeks ending June 30, 2012, according to Nielsen Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based fresh food-consulting firm

Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral for Martin's Super Markets, a 20-store chain based in South Bend, IN, says, "Bananas are one of our Top Three items in both volume and dollar sales."

1. Stock The Staple

The conventional Cavendish banana still remains the most popular variety, according to Bil Goldfield, communication manager for the Westlake Village, CA-headquartered Dole Fruit Co. "Banana supplies were consistent through the first half of the year, meeting consumer demand, and we expect this balance to continue throughout the remainder of 2012."

Scott DiMartini, regional sales manager for Turbana Corp., located in Miami, FL, adds, "Since bananas are a 52-week business, we do see fluctuation in the market based on supply and demand. Some drivers are more predictable than others. For instance, back-to-school times might warrant a bump in overall demand for bananas.

However, banana sales didn't plummet right after Memorial Day this summer as they regularly have in the past, when competition for consumers heats up due to the abundance of domestic fruits, points out Bill Sheridan, vice president of sales and marketing for North America, for the Coral Gables, FL-based Banacol Marketing Corp. "We saw strong sales right through the summer and into September," he says. "Bananas are still a growing category."

2. Expand Your Horizons

Conventionally and organically grown Cavendish bananas are offered for sale to shoppers at Martin's Super Markets. Osowski notes, "We also carry plantains, baby and red bananas."

Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, Inc., headquartered in Coral Gables, FL, says,

"Consumers continue to have a keen interest in organic bananas. Supply is excellent and the demand for organic bananas has increased at a steady pace."

Consumers can expect to pay anywhere between 10- to 40-cents per pound more for organic over conventionally grown bananas, with the average around 20-cents. DiMartini contends, "The price increase may be worth the peace of mind to some consumers who choose to incorporate organic foods into their lifestyle. Many retailers want to give their shoppers the option between conventional and organic, so they will offer both at display."

Organic bananas are becoming increasingly popular, says Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president of Organics Unlimited Inc., in San Diego, CA. "Many shoppers buy them for health reasons, some for their flavor and some because they understand the environmental benefits to the farm workers of organic versus conventional growing," she details

Specialty bananas have become mainstream as today's consumers have developed more sophisticated taste profiles, contends Christou. "As interest in exotic foods continues to grow, so does the demand for exotic and specialty bananas," he points out. "Specialty



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bananas are the perfect complement to the Cavendish and a great way to help drive incremental sales.”

Four varieties of specialty bananas contributed nearly 3 percent of banana category dollar sales for the 52 weeks ending June 30, 2012, according to data supplied by Nielsen. These are plantains (2.3 percent), *Manzanos* (0.3 percent), babies (0.2 percent) and red (0.1 percent).

Plantains are the best-selling specialty banana at Rice Epicurean Markets, says Mark Luchak, vice president of produce and floral at the 8-store upscale chain based in Houston, TX. “The second most popular is the baby, or finger banana.”

Tiffany Breaux, corporate communications specialist at Chiquita Brands International, Inc., headquartered in Charlotte, NC, reports, “Demand for plantains continues to grow steadily each year as the increasing Hispanic influence in cuisine and culture has introduced the entire North American population to the variety of wonderful ways to prepare and consume this variety, whether in daily meal preparation or expanding restaurant menus.”

Velazquez de Leon notes, “Particularly with plantains, we recommend having recipes for cooking both the green and ripe plantains so that consumers understand the goodness behind both the green ones and those that may look like overly ripe bananas to the untrained eye.”

“In addition to plantains,” says Dole’s Goldfield, “baby bananas and red bananas are becoming more prevalent in the retail supermarkets.”

Specialty bananas require some specific merchandising tactics at retail. Turbana’s DiMartini explains, “These are items that are prepared and enjoyed differently, depending on the demographic, culture, or sub-culture of the consumer. As such, we are making efforts to market these items so that they appeal to a broader consumer base.”

3. Bagged & Non-Bagged

The preference for selling bagged versus non-bagged bananas seems to have stayed in the northeastern U.S., “where this practice originated to protect the fruit from inclement weather, to help vendors differentiate themselves and to keep clusters as a single-unit at the point of sale to reduce shrink,” explains DiMartini.

Customers’ desire to pick a specific number of bananas and to pick two stages of ripeness from two different clusters are two reasons why Rice Epicurean Markets sells non-bagged bananas. Luchak shares, “We tried the bagged, but didn’t have any luck selling bananas that way.”

4. Build Destination And Secondary Displays

According to Del Monte’s Christou, “A well-merchandised, large end-cap or island banana display always has a great return on investment.”

Luchak describes, “At Rice, we display our bananas either on 5x8-ft. freestanding displays or 5x6-ft. end-caps, depending on the size of store and store layout.”

Similarly, at Martin’s Super Markets, bananas are either merchandised on a 5-shelf 12-ft. wide wall rack or on a standard euro table, notes Osowski. “We’ll display everything together — the regular bananas, as well as the organics and specialty bananas,” he details.

Christou agrees with this method, noting, “A great way to merchandise specialty bananas is by providing them with ample visibility alongside other traditional bananas,” he says.

However, when it comes to organic bananas, DiMartini advises, “Display them either as a complement to the existing conventional display, or as a separate organic display offering all organic produce.”

In terms of where in the produce department is best to build the banana display, Dole’s Goldfield reports, “Our research indicates that a robust and properly merchandised banana display is most effective when welcoming consumers to the produce department with a front placement. However, some retailers have found that a banana display in the middle or back of the produce section does more to stimulate overall produce sales as a pull-through

mechanism,” he adds. “In these cases, since consumers are walking further to the fruit, there is simply no substitute for a well-marked, well-stocked display.”

Banana displays are built at the beginning of the produce department in some Martin’s Super Markets and toward the back in others. “Either way,” says Osowski, “we have secondary displays of bananas on spinner racks in the produce department and throughout the store, such as over in our deli.”

Secondary displays of bananas are built in the cereal aisle and in the bakery at Rice Epicurean. “We’ll create merchandising opportunities with, for example, banana pudding mix, banana bread mix, everything with bananas, so when customers see the display, they instantly think about buying bananas.”

Velazquez de Leon of Organics Unlimited Inc., adds, “We particularly like to see bananas in various other places around the store, such as in front of the yogurt, as single bananas at checkout, next to pre-made sandwiches and/or salads, or in the cereal aisle. These locations will encourage additional impulse purchase.”

“Cross-merchandising with secondary displays,” says Del Monte’s Christou, “gives retailers the opportunity to increase banana sales and sales of related products. Different ideas for cross-merchandising include pairing bananas with strawberries, other tropical fruit, cereal, salads, chocolate dips and peanut butter. Smoothies are becoming an important part of healthy lifestyles and bananas make a delicious ingredient for energy-packed smoothies. We also encourage retailers to develop secondary displays at check-out.”

Bananas can also be cross-merchandised and cross-promoted with themselves, says Banacol’s Sheridan. “For example, tie into a loyalty card program and offer for X amount of pounds of Cavendish bananas purchases, cents off on plantains or other specialty bananas. This is a great way to generate new sales.”

5. Target Specific Audiences

Bananas are unique in that 89 percent of all consumers purchase this item throughout the year, reveals Christou. “The colors, unique taste and interesting sizes of specialty bananas are appealing to kids and offer tremendous opportunities to increase consumption among younger consumers and adults who seek variety. Adults and seniors are more interested in nutritional information, convenience and pricing, so it is important to include this information when communicating with these groups.”



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“In addition,” Christou continues, “retailers should understand their customer demographics in order to stock the banana varieties that are in demand in their region and showcase the products effectively. For example, it would benefit a retailer to promote plantains and *Manzanos* bananas in an area where there is a high concentration of consumers of Hispanic origin.”

6. Price ‘Em Right

Bananas are one of the best value items in the produce department. Both Martin’s Super Markets and Rice Epicurean price bananas on an EDLP (everyday low-price) strategy.

In addition, as one of the highest consumed and loved items in the super market, Christou notes, “Many retailers consider bananas as a ‘loss-leader,’ even with very competitive pricing in order to attract shoppers.”

Yet, while it doesn’t seem like banana prices have changed in years, the cost of this favorite fruit is affected by supply and demand, just like its produce partners.

Chiquita’s Breaux says, “Weather in the areas of Colombia and Ecuador has been unusually wet and cloudy, putting pressure on exportable volumes. Given the low volumes out of South America, global supply is relatively tight this fall and demand in North America is very strong. Pricing has risen and should continue to move upward as winter approaches.”

In addition to weather, bananas have also experienced dramatically higher production costs. Not only fuel, shipping and trucking increases have had an impact, but many other factors also have contributed to this rise. Countries where bananas are produced have had improving economies, which has increased labor wages and revalued their currencies compared to the dollar. Governments have also imposed increased minimum price guarantees for their exports to reflect higher agricultural input prices such as fertilizers, herbicides, electricity, water, plastics and paper, explains Dole’s Goldfield.

Expert Advice On Controlling Shelf Life And Marketability

The secret to successful banana sales is simple, according to Bill Sheridan, vice president of sales and marketing for North America, for the Coral Gables, FL-based Banacol Marketing Corp. “But it can be difficult to execute,” he warns. “That is, have the right color, the right level of ripeness that your shoppers want on a daily basis.”

Scott DiMartini, regional sales manager for the Turbana Corp., in Miami, FL, agrees. “Retailers want enough color at the display that the product will be appealing to customers, but also will hold for a period of time,” he explains. “We see retailers experimenting with this balance often.”

Some retailers, such as Martin’s Super Markets, a 20-store chain based in South Bend, IN, that has its wholesaler do the ripening, primarily sell just one color of bananas or ripeness, says Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral. “This is due to the volume sold and we sell this volume by offering consistently ripe bananas to our customers,” he states.

Other retailers, like Rice Epicurean Markets, an upscale 8-store chain based in Houston, TX, offers customers a two-color program, says Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral, “or green and ripe.”

Two-color programs are very popular, notes Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, headquartered in Coral Gables, FL. “Displaying two color stages will provide consumers with the choice to purchase the product ready to eat immediately or to have some ready for the next days,” he points out. “This also allows there to

be good product rotation at the store level. However, it is best to have a larger variety at retail, as nothing can hurt a retailer’s sales more than not having color. For display purposes, the product should be separated by ripeness stage to facilitate different consumer choices.”

Proper ripening, daily or every other day store deliveries, and an understanding of supply and demand, all work together to control shrink.

Ripening technology has come a long way over the past decade. At store level, Del Monte introduced its proprietary Controlled Ripening Technology (CRT) 3-lb. banana bag earlier this year. The CRT bags extend the shelf-life of bananas by up to three days and improve produce appearance and quality due to less handling and moisture retention. Benefits also include labor savings, fewer deliveries and reduced shrink.

At the ripening room level, Steve Page, chief marketing officer and vice president of Catalytic Generators, Inc., headquartered in Norfolk, VA, reports, “The rooms themselves haven’t changed as much as have improvements in technology, such as in refrigeration, pressurization and air flow. With bananas, it’s all about internal temperature, or getting the core temperature of the bananas down fast and uniformly.”

“In the future,” says Page, “we’re working on building a generator with a sensor that can gauge the amount of ethylene already in a room and supply what is needed, rather than just putting out as much ethylene as it can. We’re close, but not there yet.” **pb**

“Many secondary factors now impact operations costs as well, such as the increase in research and development for more sustainable growing practices (low-water, low-waste, fuel-efficient equipment, etc.) both on the farms and in the ports; more certification and labeling requirements; continued investment in developing systems that ensure best food safety and traceability practices; and a greater emphasis on corporate responsibility programs in building housing, schools, hospitals and infrastructure in the growing countries

in which we operate,” Goldfield adds.

The costs of low retail prices are passed down the supply chain, squeezing margins for everyone, and has resulted in stress on the banana industry. Goldfield acknowledges, “I think consumers understand this and feel it’s inevitable at some point that the retail price will have to be adjusted to reflect the higher costs to produce.”

Rather than solely by price, Banacol’s Sheridan suggests, “Promote bananas by highlighting their healthfulness, rather than

“Some retailers have found that a banana display in the middle or back of the produce section does more to stimulate overall produce sales as a pull-through mechanism.”

— Bil Goldfield, Dole Fruit Co.

dropping the price. Bananas have a great nutrition story to tell.”

7. Tap Into Retail-Oriented Support

Suppliers offer a variety of ways to help retailers creatively promote bananas at retail. Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, says, “We offer signage for our specialty bananas with QR codes that provide customers information about the fruit and how to enjoy it.”

Last summer, Chiquita partnered with key national and regional retailers in which over 4,000 locations displayed POS materials to promote its branded bananas as the official fresh snacks of Little League baseball and softball. Of the customers who registered for the Chiquita FanFun app, which landed the company a 2012 Manufacturer Leader Award from the Shopper Technology Institute for shopper engagement, 28 percent visited a Chiquita banana retail location and checked in — showing retailers the company is using technology to drive customers to their stores. Breaux says, “Social media channels will be used to support the existing partnerships we have, including Little League baseball and softball, the Walt Disney Parks & Resorts Alliance, the USDA’s MyPlate initiatives, key retailer programs, CSR, and licensees.”

Dole continued its year-long *Go Bananas Every Day* campaign with its summer-specific initiative, *Nature’s Original Energy Bar*, which challenged active, health-seeking consumers to see the banana as an alternative to more costly sports drinks. This campaign was based on a May, 2012, study at the North Carolina Research Campus that found that bananas are as effective an energy source during and after exercise as the top-selling sports drinks. [PRODUCE BUSINESS covered this study in the Research Perspec-

tives column, “Athletes Benefit From Bananas,” in the October issue.] The multimedia program, which encompassed radio, digital ads, social media, public relations and in-store and in-gym collateral, successfully raised awareness and sales of the company’s branded bananas in key markets.

“Moving forward,” explains Dole’s Goldfield, “we’re adapting elements of *Go Bananas Every Day* and *Nature’s Original Energy Bar* to busy families during the holiday periods. We’re also continuing our popular *366 Ways to Go*

Bananas in 2012 program with daily, seasonally themed banana recipes, serving suggestions, household tips and other suggestions.”

Yonanas will also be a big part of Dole’s future plans as the company continues to position the banana frozen treat maker as the perfect solution to overripe fruit, says Goldfield. “This revolutionary machine has achieved solid nationwide distribution — from national retailers Target, Best Buy, Ace Hardware and Bed Bath & Beyond to local partners like Meijer, Fred Meyer and Wegmans.” **pb**

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Key Factors To Consider For Building Winter Asparagus Sales

Promoting asparagus during the winter months gives retailers an opportunity to increase sales. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**



Peruvian asparagus helps provide a year-round supply for the category and also gives an added boost to retailers' rings in the winter.

Traditionally a spring vegetable, asparagus has become more popular during the wintertime, resulting in greater potential for produce department profit. "Asparagus has grown in popularity in the winter months thanks to year-round supply contributed by Mexico and Peru," says LeighAnne Thomsen, marketing representative for Mission Produce, based in Oxnard, CA. "Consumers no longer view it as a specialty item, but as more mainstream, which helps maintain demand throughout the year."

"Asparagus is a well consumed item, and usually your good produce customers will be in the asparagus market," says Dick Rissman, produce director with Dahl's Food Stores, an upscale independent chain with 13 stores, in Des Moines, IA. "It's definitely something you want to cultivate for the winter months."

"Peruvian asparagus is a big dollar ring at the registers," advises Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets in Parsippany, NJ, with 25 Kings and 6 Balducci's stores.

The availability of such a fresh product in the winter is a plus. "Asparagus is very important during the winter months, since there are

fewer selections available in vegetables than in summer," states Robert Colescott, president and CEO of Southern Specialties, headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL.

"Asparagus is important for lifting produce sales during the winter months," adds Chloé Varennes, marketing and packaging administrator at the Los Angeles, CA-based Gourmet Trading Co. "Winter is the peak of the Peruvian asparagus season, leading to low prices and high quality, giving retailers the opportunity for holiday promotions."

Peru has risen to a significant role in supplying asparagus. "In 2011, the United States imported over 384 million pounds of fresh asparagus, of which Peru confidently represented over 189 million pounds, or over 49 percent," reports Priscilla Lleras, coordinator of the Miami, FL-based Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA).

The availability of Peruvian asparagus ties in well with peak promotion times. "While asparagus is available from Peru year-round, peak volumes occur in September/October, with steady volume carrying through the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays," adds Lleras. "High season is July through January, with its peak in September/October."

"The category is growing ever more popular and especially coveted at holiday events such as Christmas and New Year's," reports Cruz Carrera, sales associate/asparagus category manager for Mission Produce. "Easter is by far the most popular holiday for asparagus consumption, which often occurs closer to winter than spring."

Preserving Shelf-Life

One of the keys to preserving quality and shelf-life is cold chain management. "This is especially important upon receiving," says Tim Hallows, western region marketing manager for Mission Produce. "Orders that hit the dock cannot be allowed to sit for hours. Asparagus can wilt fast with heat. Get it put away in the cooler immediately upon receiving," he asserts.

"Cold chain management is crucial to shelf-life and quality," agrees Rick Durkin, director of business development for Miami, FL-based Crystal Valley Foods. "Proper humidity is also an important factor. Asparagus stored in a 'dry' cooler can dehydrate dramatically in as little as 24 hours, changing its appearance from fresh to looking old and dried out."

"Keeping asparagus fresh is the most important thing, and that means proper care



and handling,” adds King’s Kneeland. “Refrigerate when you can if possible; put in ice bins for a nice mobile display; and place in an inch of water overnight to rehydrate.”

Water is important but must be utilized correctly. “Retailers can make sure that the butt ends of the asparagus are on a moisture pad,” advises Julia Inestroza, marketing and merchandising manager for Gourmet Trading Co. “This ensures that the asparagus won’t dehydrate prematurely. One should try to keep the tips dry, and avoid any misters.”

“There are many opinions about displaying in water versus not in water,” states Hallows. “It’s important to remember not to get the tips wet; they will go mushy fast. Don’t allow product at room temperature out of water for long periods of time as it will go limp. Standing in water can preserve it from drying out, but the water must be kept fresh and trays have to be kept clean and sanitized, otherwise bacteria creates a worse problem than freshness and lack of refrigeration,” he warns.

Peter Hill, director of food safety and grower relations and food safety for Miami, FL-based Alpine Fresh, Inc., adds, “Any fluctuation of temperature and/or humidity will affect both shelf-life and quality. Drying of the butt-end of the spears is a sign that the asparagus wasn’t handled properly, and will lead to early dehydration.”

“A slight increase in temperature can easily accelerate the decaying process of the asparagus, and hinder its shelf-life and quality,” adds Nelly Yunta, vice president of Customized Brokers, a subsidiary of Crowley Maritime Corp., headquartered in Miami, FL. “Integrity on temperature is a main priority for us in our cold storage facility.”

“You need to make sure you’re rotating it,” agrees Dahl’s Rissman. “Displays must be of top quality to attract customers.”

Ample Display

Size matters when looking for increased sales. “Size and prominence of the display is very important for driving asparagus sales,” states Gourmet Trading’s Varennes. “It makes the product easier to spot throughout the produce aisle.”

“Large displays give the impression that the harvest is just in with good quality and availability,” says Durkin of Crystal Valley. “It is important to keep the display well stocked and merchandised.”

Southern Specialties’ Colescott agrees, adding, “If space is not available, we suggest drawing attention to the category by including white asparagus, purple asparagus and asparagus tips in the display area. The combination of colors and sizes will catch shopper’s eyes and attract them to the area.”

Location and pricing also affect movement. “When displaying asparagus, location and signage are key factors in driving sales,” says Mission’s Carrera. “Asparagus does not typically enjoy large displays but a 2-ft. display near the front of the produce section will always outsell a 2-ft. display hidden among the salads.”

King’s Kneeland adds, “Locations should include a main display in produce and satellite displays in meat and seafood.”

“Price and promotion have to match the display size,” says Mission’s Hallows. “If it’s priced too high, you will have way too much product out to sell and shrink could kill profits.”

Varied Promotions

Cross-merchandising and usage ideas are effective sales-building tools. “Innovative usage ideas will increase sales,” says Hallows. “Remind customers of fun ways to prepare it with recipes and pictures on the display. Grilling, frying, steaming, and salads are fun ways to change it up.”

“We encourage cross-merchandising based on popular recipe uses,” says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties. “For example, grilled or broiled asparagus bundles wrapped in prosciutto allow for displays with packaged prosciutto and balsamic glaze. Other good ‘knee-kicker’ items include hollandaise sauce, lemons, and olive oil.”

“Try overwrapping tips on a tray with baby carrots and slices of yellow squash and colored pepper to show off a striking side dish,” suggests Hallows. “Even a few overwraps will serve as examples and cross-sell everything in the wrap.”

Highlighting seasonal items will also give sales a lift. “Our 1-lb. tri-color bagged asparagus is only available from September through December,” says Varennes of Gourmet Trading. “It gives consumers the chance to try all three colors of asparagus while they are all in season. We provide the cooking directions for all three varieties on our website. Another opportunity for promotion during the holidays is our seasonal purple asparagus, which is only available in winter.”

An often overlooked promotional piece is nutrition. “In today’s world of health-conscious consumers, asparagus is replete with healthy advantages,” explains Hallows. “It is a good source of vitamin B6, calcium, magnesium and zinc, and a very good source of dietary fiber, protein, vitamin A, C, E, and K, thiamin, riboflavin, rutin, niacin, folic acid, iron, phosphorus, potassium, copper, manganese and selenium, as well as chromium, a trace mineral that enhances the ability of insulin to transport glucose from the bloodstream into cells. The health message is another way to build and enhance sales.”

POS and ads may be used to achieve different results. “POS is more for the impulse purchase while someone is in the store,” explains Gourmet Trading’s Inestroza. “Ads are very effective for bringing people to the stores, especially during the winter/holiday months. POS during the holidays can help increase consumption of other colors of asparagus such as white and purple. Recipe suggestions and simple cooking instructions can help. The most effective promotions are ads but POS promotions with serving suggestions help drive sales when the price of asparagus is higher.”

Offering Variety

Expanding the asparagus category is a great way to lift sales. Varennes suggests, “Offer different sizes of asparagus like small, standard, and jumbo. Each consumer has a different size

preference. Promote different sizes of asparagus by pairing with the best cooking method for that size — for example, grilling large, extra-large and jumbo size asparagus makes a flavorful side dish.”

“New presentations bring new opportunities and the industry continues to evolve with value-added presentations,” says PAIA’s Lleras. “Peruvian importers working with suppliers provide the U.S. market with a variety of new presentations guaranteed to open new doors.”

Multiple sizes and presentations will encourage sales to all types of consumers. “We encourage retailers to stock both bulk and value-added product,” says Southern Specialties’ Colescott. “This includes various size offerings for the grab-and-go shopper, as well as those preparing meals for larger groups. We also encourage stocking small asparagus for salads and larger size for grilling.”

Many customers are familiar with green asparagus but hesitate to try colored varieties. “The best way to gain exposure is to have the colored grass displayed and merchandised alongside the green for higher visibility,” recommends Hallows. “Overwrapped trays with mixed color is another way to get customers to try the colored.”

Retailers are advised to consider bagged asparagus. “The bag technology lowers shrink and increases shelf-life of asparagus,” explains Varennes. “Different pack sizes give retailers the opportunity to target different types of consumers.”

Packaging provides multiple benefits in flexibility and communicating with the end-user.

Packaging is about more than just convenience. “Alpine packs in bags with Modified Atmosphere Packaging that extends shelf-life an additional 40 to 50 percent compared to regular bunched asparagus,” says the company’s Hill.

“The ESL [extended shelf-life] bags with appropriate oxygen transmission rate for fresh asparagus can more than double the effective

shelf-life of asparagus held at the proper temperature,” adds Durkin of Crystal Valley. “This reduces retailers’ shrink in the category and provides consumers with a superior quality product.”

Packaging provides multiple benefits in flexibility and communicating with the end-user. “Southern Specialties has worked with several packaging technologists to develop ideal packaging,” Colescott reports. “These include packaging for club store formats, asparagus tips in various sizes and steam technology bags. The packaging provides the best environment for freshness and shelf-life and affords consumers easy access to important information.”

“Packaging acts as a billboard of information for the consumer,” states Colescott. “Today’s consumers are not only interested in knowing where the product is coming from but knowing what values our company represents and how we treat our people and environment.”

“Overall, retailers should be looking into bagging programs of all sorts because they offer greater food safety, more accurate traceability and more marketing options,” says Carrera. “Each Mission bag is equipped with a QR code linking directly to the Mission asparagus mobile website.” **pb**


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EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION: L.A. Style

Produce wholesalers in Los Angeles successfully deal with a stretched economy by offering flexibility and added services to their clientele.

BY AMY SAWELSON



ANYONE WHO HAS TAKEN A HIGH SCHOOL BIOLOGY CLASS has learned that the key to a species' survival is adaptation. Despite the challenging economy, those in the produce business in the Los Angeles marketplace are still able to do business, evolve and turn on a dime when necessary.

Today's Biggest Challenges

Ask 20 professionals in the produce industry what the toughest challenges are in the business today, you'll get 20 answers. "Getting paid," laughs Alan Pollack, secretary of Coosemans L.A., Inc., in Los Angeles, CA. "You've got big companies going bankrupt. These days, we have to pay more attention to the administrative part of our business. We're salespeople — we like to source new, exciting items and sell them. We'd prefer

not to concern ourselves with collections, but we have had to train customers to pay within a more timely fashion." Robert Stauffer, executive vice president and vegetable department manager at Vision Produce Co., in Los Angeles, CA, agrees, admitting that watching credit while conveying value and getting premium prices are challenging these days.

"Margins are so slim that we have to rely on volume," states Bruce Hoffman, general manager of Los Angeles, CA-based California Specialty Farms. "Distributors want lower prices."

Richard Flamminio, president of Umina Bros. at the Los Angeles Produce Market, says his challenge is simply survival. "The customer base in the wholesale market is getting smaller," he admits. "You have Costco, who now delivers to commercial accounts. Plus, the demographics are changing. There are club stores, ethnic and boutique chain stores. In a lot



Alan Pollack, Bob Pollack, Nick Pollack, and Dale Firman of Coosemans L.A. and Coosemans L.A. Shipping



Front to back: Evelyn Beltran, Paula McFarland, Trish Duron, Tony Padilla, Luis Prado and Jim Krouse of Eureka Specialties



Sitting: Dan Lawton, Nancy Betancourt. Standing: Robert Stauffer, William H. Vogel of Vision Produce Co.

of ways, the customer base is more fragmented.”

A number of those in the produce business expressed that customers are less concerned with quality than they are seeking the most competitive prices. “Fifteen years ago, service was of paramount importance; now everyone is highly sensitive to price,” explains Wes Liefer, CEO of Pura Vida Farms, located in Brea, CA.

“Now they are looking for more frequent deliveries,” he says. “Retailers are selling on thinner margins and have to work harder to take advantage of deals. The good news is that retailers are willing to work with suppliers and are open to new ideas to save money. For example, we sell by guaranteed weight, which is more profitable for the retailer. With a consistent number of melons, grapefruits or pineapples to the box, retailers sell more volume.”

Jim Krouse, president of Eureka Specialties, Inc., headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, which markets fresh herbs and specialty produce, echoes a similar observation with regard to price versus quality. “Our challenge is to maintain our standard of quality at an acceptable price point,” he acknowledges. “In one instance, a national restaurant chain left us because they wanted our high quality at a cheaper price. A few months later, they came back on our terms. We just won’t compromise the product to satisfy price demands.”

Less Is The New More

A common observation made by many in the Los Angeles market is that customers are requiring smaller, but more frequent deliveries. While this may be less costly in the short term, the practice is actually more expensive in the long run. In the case of produce wholesalers and shippers, not only is the cost higher to their customers, but higher in terms of paperwork, labor and fuel costs, all of which make it more difficult to profit. Coosemans’ Pollack points out, “The pattern actually changed years ago. We’ve been inventorying for customers as a value-added service. They’ll purchase more frequently, but less. The smaller customers still walk the market, but not the large chains like Vons, Albertsons and Ralphs.”

Jimmy Matiasevich, president of JBJ Distributing, Inc., located in Fullerton, CA, comments, “At the consumer level, shoppers are making more trips to their local supermarkets and eating more at home.”

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Los Angeles, CA-based Melissa’s/World Variety Inc., observes, “We are seeing more small format stores such as Fresh & Easy. And along the line of ‘small is the new big,’ we find that



Debbi Allen (sitting), Wes Liefer, Jeff Liefer, Kristina Friend and Bobby Ligten of Pura Vida Farms

stores are catering to smaller households. This translates into new packaging concepts such as our 8-oz., vacuum-packed lentils, beets and black-eyed peas, which are convenient and just the right amount for a family of two or three.”

In this age of global markets, many retail customers are looking for more local sources. ‘Local’ has a rather elastic definition. In California, it’s generally described as produce from within California and possibly from Mexico and nearby Western states, as opposed to Florida, South America or Israel. Hoffman of California Specialty Farms says, “Local distributors are supporting local growers, but they are also buying less volume more frequently.”

Umina’s Flamminio explains, on the other hand, that there are fewer peaks and valleys in

terms of availability of items such as berries and asparagus due to trade with growers in the Southern hemisphere. Taking advantage of these variables used to be a way to make money by being the supplier who could offer year-round supply of seasonal produce.

David Weinstein, sales and procurement of Heath & Lejeune, Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, sees that there is increased interest in vegetables, as vegetables are nutrient-dense, low in calories and high in fiber, even more so than fruit. “We see fruit as the profit, and vegetables as the service,” he says.

Mergers And Renovation

Despite the challenging business climate, produce industry owners and executives in Los Angeles are generally upbeat. Part of that is the almost universal love of the business, but the other is their drive and creative approach to finding solutions. The companies that continue to thrive take a long-term view and are not squeamish about investing in the future.

One of the most dynamic examples is the evolution of Tavilla Sales Co. into Vision Produce Co. this past August. Thirty-two years ago, current president Bill Vogel teamed up with Tavilla brokerage firm in San Francisco along with partners in Los Angeles. The company

KEEPING UP WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

What’s the perfect business for the up-and-coming generation raised on computer games, social media and a global economy? If you ask Nick Pollack, 27-year-old son of Alan Pollack, secretary of Coosemans L.A. Inc., he’ll tell you right away it’s the specialty produce business. “It’s a cool business,” he says. “I like the people and the fast pace. The fact that we’re working with a product that can spoil means we have to move quickly. At the same time, you really have to build relationships and juggle a lot of aspects all at once.”

A graduate of California State University, Long Beach, Nick started his produce career at Northern Produce where, as he says, he “learned what and what not to do. It’s been fantastic training to be involved in all aspects of the business. I’ve learned first-hand how a shipper works, as well as wholesalers and brokers. I’ve worked in repack, foodservice and driven the trucks. It’s been invaluable in terms of understanding the whole picture,” says Nick.

One of the most important changes the younger generation has brought to produce

industry practices is their comfort with technology and social media. While Nick says that Coosemans L.A. is not utilizing social media yet, Alan says that the buyers and salespeople rely heavily on e-mail and texting. Father and son agree that e-mail and texting are great ways to back up what people say, contributing to accuracy and better customer service.

Since coming on board at Coosemans, Nick has been covering the buyer’s desks, where he has come to appreciate the way each buyer deals with the different farms and suppliers. As is the way in today’s produce industry, Nick has found himself not only manning the buying desks, but becoming involved in sales as well. “The two positions are intertwined. Whether buying or selling, you have to listen to the customer, evaluate the products, and determine if it meets their needs. It’s our job to make our customers’ jobs as easy as possible. That means sourcing the right products, inspecting them before delivery and having it ready to be delivered on time. The customers are beginning to trust me, and when they come down to the office, they’ll stop by and chat. For me, earning their trust and their friendship is the pay-off.”

pb

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"Big Jim" Matiasovich of JBJ Distributing/Veg-Land



Laurent Gabrielli of Heath & Lejeune



Richard Flamminio and Matthew Beltran of Umina Bros., Inc.

operated mostly as a broker, marketing opposite-season vegetables, specialties and citrus inbound to the southwestern United States. Over the next 20 years, the company grew by adding new distribution channels and product lines. It moved to a facility close to the L.A. market, which offered the capability to grow and expand the business importing mangos from Central and South America. In 2008, Vogel partnered with Ron Cohen and Raul Millan, New Jersey-based entrepreneurs, in order to provide Tavilla with a presence on the East Coast. Reflecting the expanding enterprise, the name of the new organization became Vision Import Group, headquartered in River Edge, NJ. "The new name represents our focus on the future, recog-

nition of our partnerships and better expresses our direction and identity," states Vogel.

Meanwhile, 2011 saw the opening of the new sales office in Nogales, AZ, and a move into a new facility in Phoenix, AZ. Around that time, Vogel formed another partnership with Ben Brittain in Pharr, TX, which became Vision Produce Partners of Texas. That division now has a full time employee in Mexico to oversee the Van Gogh mango business, ensure quality and build the brand. The payoff is that a retailer in Phoenix insists on the Van Gogh brand, even though it is more costly.

But mergers and improved infrastructure are not the only ways Vision Produce Co. is positioning itself for the future. The company grows

avocados and citrus on a local ranch where it tests varieties that it sells at farmer's markets.

This past summer, organic wholesaler Heath & Lejeune took the big step of renovating a 1950s-era industrial building that is certain to become an asset for the company's growth. Of the new building, CEO Rick Lejeune comments, "It's the adaptive re-use of an old, industrial building that we have made suitable for a 21st century business. It enables our entire workforce to do more with less."

In Any Business, The Most Valuable Asset Is People

In the L.A. Market, companies bring on new staff, combine duties or switch things up to maximize people's talents. Eureka Specialties, Inc., recently hired Paula McFarland as new business director for the herb and specialty produce company, who will be providing onsite sales support primarily to foodservice customers and educating them on Eureka's products and services. In her new capacity, Paula will be contacting existing customers, scouting potential new accounts as well as executing special projects such as a private label herb program with Melissa's on behalf of Eureka. "What I like about fresh herbs is that they can be branded and you can control quality," she says. "We've been educating chefs and foodservice operators on new ways to use herbs. An interesting project we are working on now is herb blends to infuse in tea, water and lemonade."

Melissa's is also aligned with the foodservice and the culinary community. Schueller points out, "Melissa's has always been able to supply unique variety, even though commodities companies are getting into specialties and becoming competitors practically overnight. New products are the lifeblood of our company; we have people on our staff whose job it is to travel the world seeking out new items," he reveals. "They'll even work with the FDA to assist the overseas suppliers to bring products up to their standards in order to bring them into the United States."

Pollack of Coosemans observes, "The line

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Flamminio at Umina says that when it comes to adapting in the marketplace, "Sometimes, circumstances change faster than you can. Beefing up food safety and traceability so problems can be resolved quickly; partnering with shippers, rather than just buying and selling; the constant relationship means both sides have to be more collaborative. Distributors and shippers need to support one another. It's like a long marriage."

Hoffman of California Specialty Produce proudly claims to have the best staff. "We cross-train everyone in everyone else's job, so coverage and customer service are seamless," he boasts. "We try to make it a pleasant environment to work in."



Jimmy Matiasovich and Jimmy Matiasovich III of JBJ Distributing/Veg-Land



Rick Lejeune and David Weinstein of Heath & Lejeune

Innovations For Survival And Thriving

Doing business in the Los Angeles market

has many advantages. It's a large urban center with a diverse population of citizens who have settled here from all over the United States and the world. Los Angeles is lucky to be located within just a few hours of some of the Earth's prime agricultural regions with long growing seasons. It would seem that nothing could stand in the way of success in the produce industry here. Yet, businesses that are not prepared to adapt to new situations or are slow to innovate, do so at their peril.

The companies that grow and thrive decade after decade are the ones that embrace new ideas and change, while staying focused on how best to service customers. For example, Eureka Specialties has developed staple-less packaging to better move their produce through airports and TSA checkpoints. Another innovation Eureka offers its consolidation customers is online access to live, high-resolution video feeds of their product via a "EurekaVision" secure website. "Upon request, we can provide our customers with secure access to view their product during the unloading and loading process," describes Krouse.

Matiasovich of JBJ says that the biggest challenge for his company is staying ahead of customers' ever changing needs. According to Matiasovich, organics are becoming more mainstream with major retailer chains looking to expand their offerings of organic fruits and vegetables. Large chains are also looking for new ways to reduce labor costs, and JBJ is positioned to help them achieve that goal. "We're selling more and more cut produce as a value-added service," he says. "The diversity of the products we handle allows us to easily switch to whatever customers need. We've been very fortunate even during the tough economy. We've been extremely busy and always have trucks lined up."

Some of the fresh-cut products JBJ has been packing include fresh papaya, combinations of cut cucumbers and peppers, which are popular with the Hispanic trade, and kabob kits. JBJ/Veg-Land has been able to grow and thrive over the years in large part because the company is able to react quickly and provide volume on short notice.

There are some things JBJ is very old fashioned about, however. They make good use of the telephone. "Relationships are what we do best, and picking up the phone is the best way for us to maintain those relationships," adds Matiasovich.

Liefer at Pura Vida Farms echoes that sentiment. "We talk to the customer; physically take samples to them; listen to what they are saying and give them the best advice." **pb**

WHY THE WHOLESALE MARKET STILL MATTERS

With all the new technology and innovations that have sped up the pace of business, and with the sprawl of Los Angeles, the wholesale market is still a vital part of the produce industry. Says Richard Flamminio, president of Umina Bros., located at the Los Angeles Produce Market, "The wholesale produce market is important because it gives customers a way to get product even if they can't get down to the market. It gives shippers a place to sell their merchandise."

If changes to the business mean that large retail chains are not making the trek to downtown L.A., there are still plenty of small ethnic and specialty markets that make the trip to inspect the produce they are considering. After all, today's Latino mom-and-pop store may become tomorrow's González Northgate Market chain, with 36 units and more on the way.

Bruce Hoffman, general manager of Los Angeles, CA-based California Specialty Farms, feels relationships in the L.A. wholesale market are very important. "We do a lot of consolidation and that's due to our ties to the market."

Alan Pollack, secretary of Coosemans L.A., Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, adds, "People

should shop the L.A. market because we're closest to the grower. As a result, the produce is the freshest and the pricing reasonable because proximity to growers lowers transportation costs."

The Los Angeles wholesale produce industry, on and off the market, is an excellent model of survival because the players are able to adjust, adapt and innovate while maintaining the characteristics that really count long-term — personal relationships, integrity, looking out for the customer and supporting colleagues in the business.

Nancy Betancourt, director of national sales for Vision Produce Co., sums it up for her company, and the entire Los Angeles produce industry at once, "We challenge each other all the time. We're a team, we're tough on each other, but we enjoy it."

The future players naturally have an eye for innovation as a way to survive in the business. Jimmy Matiasovich III, the twelve-year-old son of Jimmy Matiasovich of JBJ Distributing/Veg-Land states confidently, "What I'm going to do is have more candy involved, like chocolate-covered apples and strawberries." Young Jimmy has hit on the formula for success: Unique, seasonal, value-added products with high margins and profitability. **pb**

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Fresh Produce Drives Salsa Grill's Menu

Chef Marco Zapien of Salsa Grill brings produce-heavy Latin specialties to the masses.

BY AMY SAWELSON



IT'S NOT FAR IN MILES FROM ANGELS STADIUM in Anaheim, CA, to the Salsa Grill in the working class community of Pico Rivera, but the neighborhood taqueria is about as different from the slick corporate dining experience at the legendary baseball stadium as you can get. Or is it? The common thread between these two classically Southern California dining experiences is Chef Marco Zapien, a native of Pico Rivera and a highly skilled foodservice professional who has spent portions of the past 15 years in various positions in the rarified world of sports and entertainment, as well as building his family's business and expanding its success.

Education And Opportunity Build A Solid Base

Marco Zapien began his work life as an accountant. Though he probably didn't think about it at the time, this was an excellent career foundation for a future executive chef and foodservice operator. The lure of the food industry and Marco's love of his grandparents' cuisine inspired him to attend culinary school. After graduating with honors from the Los Angeles Culinary Institute in 1997, Chef Marco began his culinary career at Del Ray Restaurant in his neighborhood of Pico Rivera. There, he honed his skills until 1999 when he went to work at the Levy organiza-

tion, which operates restaurants and foodservice in arenas, stadiums, entertainment and sports venues. Over the next four years, Chef Zapien worked his way up from sous-chef at Edison International Field in nearby Anaheim through a series of enviable positions at stadium homes to the Portland Trailblazers, the Chicago Cubs and White Sox, the St. Louis Rams, the Oakland Raiders, the Oakland A's, the Los Angeles Lakers, the L.A. Dodgers, the L.A. Clippers, the Kings and the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim, where he was Executive Chef.

All the while, he had worked for his family's restaurant in an advisory capacity and pitching in when he was needed. By 2003, he made the decision to work for his parents' business full time. Zapien's Salsa Grill had been a popular local restaurant for a number of years, and Marco saw an opportunity to expand the menu and the business by opening Black Tie & Blue Jeans Catering.

Utilizing Experience To Move Forward

It's at Zapien's Salsa Grill that Chef Marco has drawn on all his professional experience. Established by his parents in 1994, Salsa Grill began as a local breakfast and lunch eatery that served dinner on weekends. With

several churches within a mile radius, the restaurant developed a thriving business, with up to 600 covers on a Sunday. “We serve primarily Latin specialties I learned from my mother and grandmother,” says Zapien.

“We make our own *chorizo*, *menudo* and *pozole* from scratch. We feature seasonal Mexican items and typical American favorites. On our breakfast menu, you’ll see buttermilk pancakes along with scrambled eggs with onions, tomatoes and fresh *nopales*. During the week, we do mostly a lunch business with many of our customers coming from the business community, Pico Rivera City Hall and the local school district,” says Zapien. In keeping with the homey atmosphere of the restaurant, many of its popular menu items are named after regular customers.

Produce Is Essential To Latin Cuisine

Chef Zapien is emphatic about the importance of fresh produce on the restaurant and catering menus. “Produce is the base for many of our sauces — tomatoes, dried and fresh chiles and onions,” he says. “For our distinctively Mexican menu items, we rely on fresh cilantro, oregano, tomatillos, avocados, jalapeños and *pasillas* for our popular *chiles rellenos*. We use



Chef Marco Zapien

grilled vegetables in the restaurant and in our catering business. We are fortunate to have extensive resources that supply fresh produce at our fingertips. This allows me and my staff to develop creative signature specials and highlight what’s in season.”

Marco Zapien is clearly passionate about what he does. “What differentiates us from other operators is that we create everything from scratch,” he points out. “We want our customers to feel from the way our food is prepared that they’re sitting at Grandma’s table. The restaurant

was not only founded by my family, but our employees and customers are like family, too.” He cites that 70 percent of his staff have been at the restaurant seven years or longer.

“Serving authentic, home style Mexican food is how we started and what we do day-to-day,” say Zapien, “but I am always looking forward, adapting and adjusting for the future. My accounting background, culinary training and years at the Levy organization have prepared me for the next chapters. Right now, it’s expanding our Black Tie and Blue Jeans catering business. My next goal is to open another restaurant with another concept — something by the beach.” Chef Zapien is sure to succeed. All of Pico Rivera is rooting for him. **pb**

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NORTHGATE GONZALEZ: A Growing Ethnic Chain Enjoys Mainstream Success

A family business finds great success by focusing on local consumers' needs and desires.

BY AMY SAWELSON

THE EVOLUTION OF NORTHGATE MARKETS reads like a Hollywood rags-to-riches American success story. Don Miguel González, the patriarch of a large Mexican family and his two eldest sons left their homeland and the rest of their kin in Jalisco, Mexico, after a fire destroyed the family shoe business. Seeking opportunity in Southern California, they persevered in the new country despite the challenges associated with a failed business and having to learn a new language and culture. After a couple of false starts, the Gonzálezes purchased a 2,000 square-foot grocery store in Anaheim, CA. The single store ultimately grew to a chain of 36 stores today, each up to 50,000 square feet with more than 4,500 employees overall.

Northgate's focus on a large and varied produce department with the company's culture of innovation and ability to change to meet customers' needs has directly contributed to its growth in the past 30 years. With 35 percent of the store devoted to produce, it accounts for an average of 20 percent of sales.

The original goal of Miguel Jr., Don Miguel's third son, was to open a store for each of the 13 siblings to own and run. That goal has been exceeded almost three times over. Northgate Markets became a corporation, and the González family has become hugely successful by any standard. Still owned and run by the family, which now includes the next generation of 55 cousins, Northgate Markets is a growing chain that has stayed true to its Mexican roots, while nimbly evolving with changing times. And why the name Northgate Market? That was the name of that first store in Anaheim 33 years ago. At the time, the González family couldn't afford a new sign, so the Northgate Market name stuck.

González Northgate Markets are located in Los Angeles, Orange and

San Diego counties in communities that serve a primarily Latino clientele. Part of Northgate's expansion plan has been to open stores in underserved neighborhoods and in neighborhoods other stores have left. As such, the company recently opened a market in Inglewood, CA, a working-class African American community. One of the most common complaints of residents of Inglewood and other inner-city communities in Southern California is that good quality, affordable food, particularly fresh produce, is very difficult to find. Northgate's commitment to opening stores in such neighborhoods is not only good business, but good corporate citizenship. It's the way this supermarket company has responded to the challenges of today's economy, adapted and thrived.

Adding organics is just one way the company has been adapting to changes in the marketplace. Ali Moezzi, Northgate Markets' produce director for the past six years, admits, "Adding organic produce to the mix is a bit unusual for an independent chain such as ours. We work very hard to set prices as close as we possibly can to non-organic produce. At the same time, we continually strive to bring in more and different varieties of organic produce to broaden the category."

Today's Challenge: Holding Onto The Second And Third Generations

While Northgate Markets has always catered to its Latino and recent immigrant customers by carrying traditional and authentic items, the biggest challenge to the business today is holding onto the second and third generations, whose eating and shopping habits have become more "Americanized." According to Moezzi, the younger generations, who tend to be better educated, are more accepting of packaged produce and





Luis Eulloqui, produce supervisor, Ali Moezzi, produce director, and Jorge Flores, produce manager, of Northgate Markets.

prepared foods. Not only do they look for variety and convenience, but they want healthier options as well.

In the past five years, Northgate has been offering more and more packaged fresh-cut produce items, despite many Latinos' initial resistance. "We do a lot of educating," says Moezzi. "The older generations need information about new options and how they can simplify their lives and help them eat more nutritiously. At the same time, the younger generations need to learn about traditional foods and how to prepare them and preserve recipes and techniques handed down from their elders."

Walk into a Northgate Market today and you'll be confronted by a dizzying variety of items in the produce department, from the standard citrus, bananas and salad greens to more exotic items such as tomatillos, chayote squash and nopales. To keep American-born Latinos shopping at the store, Northgate creates excitement and promotes produce with samples of seasonal and high-margin items such as dried fruits, freshly squeezed fruit juices and nuts on a weekly basis.

"We also emphasize health and wellness throughout the store, but particularly in the produce department," notes Moezzi. "We are really the first independent chain to take this approach." As part of promoting wellness, González Northgate Markets has created a portion of its website titled to "Viva La Salud" or "Long Live Health," which contains links to tips on staying healthy, and an entire page with health-themed store events scheduled for each day of the week.

A Culture Of Customer Service

The Northgate approach to business is that the customer is like family. "We take care of you and you'll take care of us," says Moezzi. For example, to support its emphasis on quality, Northgate guarantees its produce for five days from date of purchase. In that timeframe, if a customer doesn't like the fruit or vegetable purchased, Northgate will replace it with no

questions asked.

The company operates on the practice of giving more to loyal customers in the form of promotions and programs such as \$5 coupons redeemable on a minimum purchase. The Northgate concept is, "If we make a deal on an item, we'll pass along the savings to the customer, not increase our margin," explains Moezzi. "If the price drops for us, we'll drop the price at the store level." The formula must be working, because sales are up 10 percent over the past year. "To remain on an upward growth curve, we have to expand our offerings. Even when the price goes down, consumption will not go up that much. We make money on the specialty items that are not as price-sensitive, and where customers recognize the value such as large habanero peppers, which can easily command \$2.99 per pound," he details.

Not only does Northgate treat customers like family, but employees become extended members of the González family as well. The company always tries to promote from within and many managers have been on the job 20 years or more. The late Don Miguel Sr. did his best to remain humble, and his belief was that happy employees make happy customers.

Partnerships That Provide Customers With The Best

To maintain this ratio of quality, value and price, Northgate works closely with suppliers in a partnership capacity. Moezzi details the formula for success: "We supply the store environment and a steady stream of customers; you provide top-quality products. If we sell more, you'll sell more." Northgate category buyers walk the L.A. market on a daily basis and have cultivated relationships with wholesalers and distributors to ensure consistent, high-quality supplies of a huge variety of produce. Taking advantage of today's technology, once the buyers receive a price quote, the supplier emails a photo to Northgate's Anaheim headquarters for inspection and final approval.

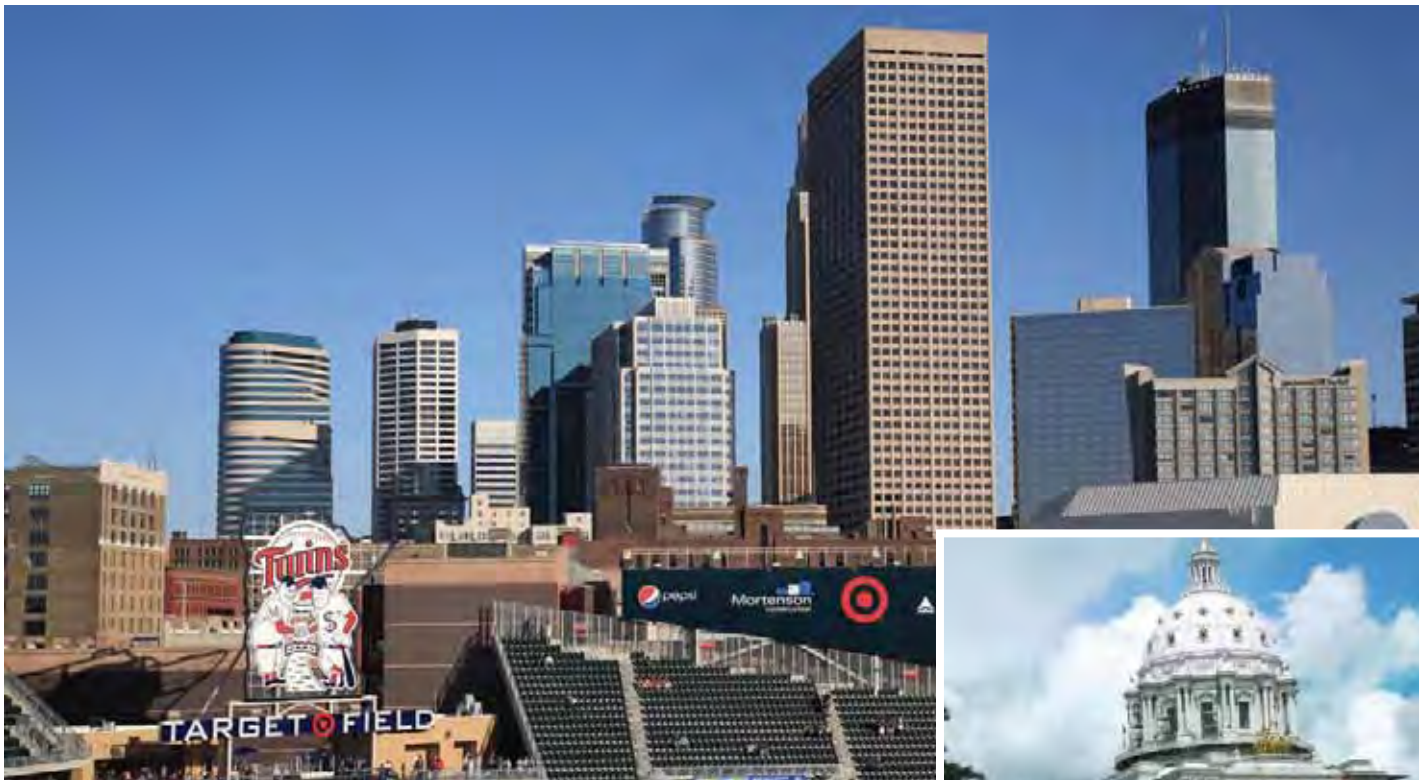
Every department has its own director and they are committed to developing fresh products. "Fresh-cut and prepared products are currently 3 percent of sales and these areas have huge potential for growth," explains Moezzi. "Four years ago, we added a floral department, which had sales of about \$75,000 for the whole year. This year during Mother's Day week, sales in the floral department were \$400,000."

Northgate publishes an extensive *Weekly Specials* insert that appears in local newspapers and on the company website. Among the ads for grocery, deli, prepared, bakery and non-food items are ads for deals and recipes featuring produce. Moezzi says that suppliers will contact him with suggestions of deals to offer Northgate customers. During recent peak strawberry season, Northgate was able to offer giant California strawberries at \$4.99 for a 4-lb. pack. Deals such as these build traffic and lead to sales of related items such as melons, stone fruits and citrus for fruit salads as well as profitable tie-ins like whipped cream, glazes, dipping chocolate and ingredients for deserts such as strawberry shortcake. During the week between Christmas and New Year's, there is a big demand for grapes, as it is a Mexican tradition to consume them at that time of year. Northgate produce buyers will negotiate deals with Chilean brokers and growers in order to offer the best quality and prices to their customers with the knowledge that attractive prices on popular grapes will bring people in to purchase other celebratory specialties for the holiday season. **pb**

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Produce In The Twin Cities



Minneapolis/St.Paul has long-standing history of great produce offerings, with an emphasis on optimum food safety adherences. **BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE**



Produce wholesalers and distributors in the Twin Cities are providing a wider scope of services and expanding their product lines through efforts to maintain and expand their customer bases in retail and foodservice climates that appear to be holding their own and bouncing back from the economic downturn. While adapting to evolving trends at buyer and consumer levels of the distribution chain, wholesalers emphasize that their centralized location in the Upper Midwest provides the added benefits of transportation cost savings to their customers. While keeping their focus on food safety in the forefront, produce distributors are continuing to develop products, packaging and services that makes them stand apart from the competition.

The Twin Cities are home bases for some key national chains, such as Target Corp. and Supervalu, Inc., which maintain the market's retail strength. At the same time, Cub Foods, a division of Minneapolis-based Supervalu Inc., reportedly holds onto the largest retail market share, according to industry reports. The region also has well-established independent retailers who design each store to fit the demographics and ambiance of the surrounding neighborhoods. In foodservice, Twin Cities produce wholesalers are seeking out new opportunities, including the potential to address the highly publicized increasing childhood

obesity problem through selling more fresh produce to schools.

Marketing To Diverse Population Segments

While the Twin Cities' strong Scandinavian influence is still highly recognizable, the region's diverse demographic profile provides a unique blend of cultures and ethnicity. According to a demographics overview of Minnesota in the *Minnesota Compass*, Minnesota is still not nearly as racially diverse as the nation, but its profile continues to change. About 17 percent of the state's residents are now persons of color. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2000 and 2010, the state's population of color grew by 55 percent. Immigrants from 160 countries came to Minnesota during the past decade, according to a report from the University of Minnesota College of Education & Human Development. Immigrants born in Somalia outnumbered all others, followed by those born in India, Ethiopia, and Mexico.

More than half of Minnesota's residents live in the seven-county Twin Cities region. It is one of the fastest growing regions in the Midwest and is predicted to continue its rapid growth, adding a half-million more residents by 2030. More data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that age trends are also transforming the state. By 2030, the number of Minnesotans over age 65 is expected to more than double, and older adults will comprise

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Art Quiggle, left, head of tomato buying, and Brian Hauge, president of Wholesale Produce Supply Co.



Phillip Brooks, president of H. Brooks & Co



Dean Schladweiler, produce manager at Wedge Co-op.

about one-fifth of the state's population.

Like much of the country, Minnesota is experiencing mixed results as it attempts to emerge from the economic downturn. The *Minnesota Compass* reported in 2010 that Minnesota's economy grew by 3.2 percent, outpacing the nation and 39 other states. However, Minnesota's growth rate ranks 28th among states, and average household incomes are down more than \$6,000 over the past decade. The median income of Minnesota households was less in 2011 than in 1999 (inflation-adjusted). In 2011, half of Minnesota households made under \$55,000 per year, according to the Census Bureau's intercensal estimates. Savvy Twin Cities wholesalers are aware of the importance of answering to the needs in these various demographic segments.

Surprisingly, while the economy remains far from a full recovery, several in the produce distribution business report increasing demand for fresh-cut, value-added produce selections.

Fresh Cut, Value-Added And Food Safety Are Priorities

Minneapolis, MN-based G.O. Fresh, a premier processor of fresh pre-cut fruits and vegetables, creates proprietary and customized blends of specialty salads, salsas, vegetable medleys, and fruit combinations. "We are offering some new products that are directed at the University students [University of Minnesota is a major institution of higher learning based in Minneapolis]," announces Marylou Owen, chief operating officer. These higher-educated consumers are aware of the health benefits of maintaining a diet heavy in fruit and vegetable options.

Among its range of foodservice

customers G.O. Fresh supplies both low- and high-end restaurants. Owen notes demand for these value-added produce options is on the upswing — and patrons appear to be returning to restaurants. She states, "Business has come back up and seems to be continuing to go in the right direction."

Phillip Brooks, president of H. Brooks & Co., headquartered in New Brighton, MN, agrees, noting that Brooks' fresh-cut company, Cut Fruit Express, is expanding its options for customers. In addition to offering fruits, vegetables, onions and potatoes, Cut Fruit Express creates customized salads and specialty mixes, ranging from coleslaw to pot roast mix. Special attentions to detail regarding food safety measures are always critical in the process. "Cut Fruit Express puts every fresh fruit and vegetable it receives through a stringent visual inspection for appearance and color," he states. "Fruits are further analyzed for texture and sweetness, and are packed in rigid containers after being cut, ensuring they are not vulnerable to mechanical injury." Other Cut Fruit packaging options include vacuum packs, shrink wrap, and bulk packs, as well as commercial ready-to-use trays.

Owen also emphasizes added measures to ensure customers the company adheres to the highest food safety standards. Tamper-evident packaging that carries a best-by date, third-party auditing completions, and production equipment made of stainless steel to allow for effective cleaning and sanitation are examples of the company's commitment to food safety.

J & J Distributing Co., headquartered in St. Paul, MN, also has been offering its customers a full line of fresh-cut produce

for several years and has its fresh-cut operation in a separate area inside the massive company headquarters. According to owner, president and CEO, Jim Hannigan, the company recently put in an addition to its fresh-cut operation in response to growing demand.

Outside of the fresh-cut realm, produce providers in the Twin Cities region agree that food safety is critical in every aspect of the distribution chain with which they are involved. Minneapolis, MN-based Wholesale Produce Supply Co. maintains a food safety program "which is leaps and bounds above our competitors," stresses Brian Hauge, president. "We have full traceability on our produce; we send our food safety employees to special audit courses; and we remain active on industry committees relating to food safety. We have outside audits done by USDA, Silliker, Primus, ASI, DRS, and MCIA for organics," Hauge adds.

"We think it's important to remain active in the decision-making efforts to provide the safest and freshest produce," notes Art Quiggle, vice present and head of tomato-buying at Wholesale Produce. "We closely monitor our produce 'from womb to tomb.' We are making more and more efforts to support growers and shippers that have the same philosophies that we do about food safety."

H. Brooks & Co.'s Brooks also points out the emphasis on food safety. "We've had our HACCP plan in place for years, which we constantly update. We had top ratings from ASI and all the other major food safety and security auditors, and we have additional measures in place that far exceed any governmental mandates."

Hannigan stresses the importance of the



Summer barbecue kabobs are featured in the produce department at Festival Foods.

company's trace-back system, and he points out that J & J's attention to food safety and sanitation "is second to none," and that the company goes beyond government mandates. "It assures our customers we are training our employees to the highest level of awareness. Some of it has been a real battle, with continually refining our hardware and software, along with audits and certifications. But is a critical and essential part of our business, and our customers know we have all the essentials in place."

Locally Grown Stays Strong

Locally grown fruits and vegetables remain among the hottest categories on the shelves of produce departments in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region, with various independent retailers and larger chains displaying signage in produce departments featuring photos and stories about their local growers. Products from Minnesota and nearby Wisconsin and Michigan have consistently flourished in popularity when they peak during the summer and fall.

"We continue to support our local growers as much as possible — as we have in the past — including home-grown produce in season out of the Midwest growing regions," stresses Wholesale Produce's Hauge. "We have exclusive contracts with local growers for peppers, tomatoes, and other Minnesota-grown products."

"Our local program has a lot broader base, with better access to more areas we can reach quicker with our wide transportation network," emphasizes Hauge. "Our ability to source product is better since we have delivery trucks throughout

the Midwest, and we can haul local product back in a more efficient manner. We have the luxury of bringing back product from smaller growing regions, and it's easier and more cost-effective for us to procure the products and supply our customers." Hauge hastens to add that food safety must be the utmost priority when dealing with locally grown products. "We will not jeopardize our food safety program," he says. "We only deal with certified growers."

Added shelf-life of locally grown is also a benefit from Wholesale Produce. "We can literally get the products from field to market in 24 hours or less," claims Hauge.

Festival Foods, in Vadnais Heights, MN, and operating nine outlets dispersed throughout the Twin Cities region, offers a vast array of locally grown produce, while innovatively maintaining its small neighborhood atmosphere. Festival has earned a following through designing each store to fit the demographics and ambiance of the



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surrounding neighborhood. Rod Borden, director of produce and floral operations for Festival Foods, emphasizes that the gravita-

tion toward produce that's been grown close to home makes locally grown a critical component of the retail operation.

Adding even more personal attention to detail, the company assures its customers that their locally grown fruits and vegeta-

What's New In The Twin Cities?

Wholesale Produce Supply LLC, Minneapolis, MN: Adding a new dimension to its products and services, the company recently acquired Big Lake, MN-based Hull Potato Co. According to president Brian Hauge, this division has officially changed its name to Wholesale Produce Supply Co. as well. In addition to its potato repacking capabilities, the Big Lake facility has ample storage to allow for additional procurement of potato supplies from all regional growing areas. "It's a very efficient facility," stresses Hauge, "with 20,000 square feet of production area all under refrigeration." Prior owner, John Alstrup, will stay on as sales and operations manager and will be based in the Big Lake packing facility

Also this season, Wholesale Produce Supply is introducing another value-added item among its many offerings: the sweet corn tray-pack. Wrapped under Wholesale's well-known "Harvest Crisp" label, the new item includes four ears of freshly husked sweet corn. "The corn tray pack is another example of our continued growth in options for our customers in the value-added fruit and vegetable categories for both retail and foodservice," Hauge continues.

Wholesale Produce has recently added Mike Eilers and Steve Foster to its team. Eilers brings over 20 years of experience with him. Foster is Wholesale's food safety director and has food safety background in agricultural business. "He's added depth to our already superior food safety division," stresses Jason Hendrickson, director of purchasing and business development.

Hauge also reports a continued growth spiral in Wholesale's onion repacking operation, a facet the company added in 2010. New packing lines have the capabilities to custom-pack all consumer-sized options in red, white and yellow onions. Hauge details, "Our onions can be fresh-packed to order by as late as 5 p.m. and can be delivered to customers by the next day. We have the ability to do a larger local program because we're more competitive."

H. Brooks & Co., New Brighton, MN: The company, which celebrates 107 years of continual operation, is enjoying phenomenal growth in its several divisions, which provide expanded variety and convenience to its customers.

Brooks' caramel apple division is celebrating its recent victory in a consumer taste test. "Our Carnival brand won over several others," president Phillip Brooks notes, explaining that a panel of 50 consumers sampled several different caramel apple

varieties. Also in the caramel apple division, the company has new items in its gourmet line. "We now have toppings including our Heath Bar, Decadent, and M & M selections," Brooks announces. "Last year was our biggest year for our caramel apple division since 1988. We predict that this year will be even bigger."

In another value-added division, Cut Fruit Express continues to increase its customer base and expand its product line. "We have an active research and development team working at all times to develop new products for our customers," Brooks emphasizes.

Cut Fruit Express president, Lawford Baxter, who holds a Ph. D. in post-harvest physiology from the University of Minnesota, Baxter recently won an international award for incorporating an innovative benefit for employees at the company headquarters in Inver Grove Heights, MN. "He has put in a community garden right on the property," notes Brooks. Over 50 individual gardens were planted on the plot of land. "We provide the tilled soil and the water, and the employees do the rest." The employees have filled the plots with their favorite fresh produce, many of which reflect their heritage and are hard to find in U.S. supermarkets. Over half of the 60 workers are participating in the garden.

Encompassing all H. Brooks & Co. divisions, "We've expanded our food safety department to include additional staff," Brooks continues. "Food safety considerations are critical elements for our company."

In other news, H. Brooks & Co. has become the first in the region to be named by two different states as Vendor of the Year. The Minnesota Grocers Association presented Brooks the award in August. It was named Wisconsin Grocers Association Vendor of the Year earlier this year.

G.O. Fresh, Minneapolis, MN: The fresh-cut produce specialist has improved its romaine processing line and added new packaging equipment that should result in safer, high-quality product with longer shelf-life for its tomatoes, watermelons, and other fresh-cut products, according to Brent Beckman, director of sales and marketing.

G.O. Fresh is also introducing a variety of new tray packs and grab-and-go packaging solutions, Beckman says. An example of the new product line is the popular Sante Fe Salsa. "Sold primarily to foodservice distributors, the 5-lb. package size has proven the most popular."

G.O. Fresh's product line extends to more than 700 SKU offerings from its centrally located 45,000-square-foot facility in the heart of Minneapolis. In addition to fruits and vegetables available on a year-round basis, the company also creates proprietary and customized blends of specialty salads, vegetable medleys, and fruit combinations.

J & J Distributing Co., St. Paul, MN: Ground-breaking for a 38,000 square-foot greenhouse being built on a back lot at J & J Distributing headquarters was held in June. Jim Hannigan, president of J & J, and Paul Lightfoot of Brightfarms, New York, NY, announce that the partnership will eventually produce at least 350,000 pounds of tomatoes, lettuce, and herbs for sale to local markets. Bright Farms finances, builds, and operates greenhouses, partnering with supermarkets and distribution centers to sell locally grown, sustainable produce. J & J has received a \$500,000 Saint Paul Community Development Block Grant Recovery Act to help build the greenhouse. "Partnering with Bright Farms supports our commitment to source the freshest and most flavorful produce while creating jobs and promoting sustainability," notes Hannigan. "I am grateful for the support J & J has received from the city of St. Paul, which has helped make the partnership possible."

The Kunkel Co., Eden Prairie, MN: This spring, the company consolidated its operations with long-time produce wholesale Minnesota Produce, formerly based in Minneapolis. Minnesota Produce surpassed 50 years of continuous operation last year and one of the founders was the father of current owner and president, Paul Piazza. "It was an exceptionally healthy, profitable and successful company," notes Piazza. He explains that for years, Piazza had a standing invitation to consolidate his firm with The Kunkel Co., and he felt the timing was finally right when veteran salesmen from each company announced their retirements earlier this year.

Kunkel owner/president, Ted Morimoto, was looking for better procurement coverage out of California, which had long been strength of Minneapolis Produce. Most of the business Minnesota Produce conducted was in California citrus and vegetables and in transportation services out of California, Piazza notes, while the Southeast, Texas and Mexico have been the strengths of The Kunkel Co. "I feel I have honored my father best by bringing Minnesota Produce to a successful conclusion," he adds. **pb**



A number of wholesalers are housed in the Kasota Fruit Terminal.

bles are as safe as the produce that is sourced from giant, corporate farms. This is due in part of the diligence of Festival's produce wholesaler H. Brooks & Co., notes Borden. "Brooks is helping many of these farmers get third-party certified through the Food Alliance," he says. The Midwest Food Alliance (MFA) is based in

Minneapolis and is a division of the Portland, OR-based National Food Alliance.

"Americans are buying locally grown like never before," stresses H. Brooks' Brooks. "Consumers want to know where their food was grown, who grew it, and how. People want to know about the heritage and track record of what they are eating."

Sources already in place for locally grown product for J & J Distributing include a wide base of local organic growers, since the company has specialized in organics for several years. "We have a strong local program as well as a good local organic program; it's the best of both worlds for our customers," stresses Hannigan.

Long-operating Minneapolis-based cooperative, The Wedge Community Co-op, features locally grown whenever possible. "We have many local growers that we have worked with who have supplied us for many years on an in-season basis," says Dean Schladweiler, head of produce. "At least two times a year, we sit down with our growers and talk with each other. The feedback we get from each other works to improve the end product for our customers continually."

Latino Produce Still On The Upswing

Latino products are one of several growing segments in the fresh produce industry that have necessitated expanded produce facilities for some wholesalers, including J & J Distributing and H. Brooks & Co. Among the wide variety of lesser-

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Festival Foods features local growers in its displays.



A local grower's story is displayed inside Wedge Co-op with the product grown.



Wedge Co-op features one of the larger organic displays in the Twin Cities region.

known items, avocados and mangos enjoy much higher movement, probably due to the popularity of Hispanic food.

Wholesale Produce's Hauge reports, "Avocados moved to the No. 3 spot in our sales last year, and they are consistently in the Top 10." Wholesale Produce also offers an avocado conditioning program to its customers, and Hauge adds, "We are ripening an average of over two loads of avocados per week."

"Our Hispanic business continues to grow," reports H. Brooks' Brooks. "We have more customers joining us each week." With the addition of its onion-packing services two years ago through the acquisition of onion and rutabaga distributor The Brings Co., formerly based in St. Paul, MN, H. Brooks now offers more selections of consumer-sized onion packs for both food-service and retail. White onions are

especially popular with the Latino population, but reds and yellows are becoming more in demand from that segment.

Brooks claims that the list of Mexican and Latin American grocery and produce items the company carries is "the most comprehensive found under one roof. We now feature 300-plus items with our range of produce including soda beverages, specialized quesos and other different cheeses, homemade tortillas, and fresh produce specifically obtained for the Hispanic preferences," he details. "We offer customized help with merchandising and setup for independent retailers who need help expanding that category."

At Wholesale Produce, customized assistance to the Latino population also includes its expertise through a long-time specialization in tomatoes. Since salsa surpassed ketchup as the most popular

condiment of American consumers, the company's tomato supply chain and availability provides important benefits. Quiggle notes, "Because of our vast supply base, we have the ability to react quicker to procure and deliver the freshest — and the widest selection — of tomato varieties available from local, national, and international sources."

Maintaining A Stronghold In The Future

Whatever the specific trends and customer demands, wholesalers made sure to stress that relentless attention to detail in all areas of business operations is key. "The business today is flowing to those who have the best food safety monitoring capabilities and have operational excellence," stresses Brooks.

"Quality control is so imperative," emphasizes G.O. Fresh's Owen. "When it comes in the door, it is inspected by our receivers. If it doesn't meet our quality, we have to refuse it."

Wholesale Produce's Hauge looks toward the continuation of ongoing growth, while adhering to the strict policies the company has kept in place. He points out the company's leadership role in the region regarding critical facets for optimum food safety maintenance. "Wholesale Produce started its HACCP program back in 1997, before most people in our industry even knew what that was," he states. "Our program has evolved and grown to cover all aspects of HACCP," he explains. "We are not stopping at where the government says we should be; we go beyond that. Our lot traceability system was developed five years before the government mandate was issued in December of 2005."

pb

pb

Foodservice Sector Stronger

The majority of the produce wholesalers agree that the foodservice segment of the industry is strengthening. Although the white tablecloth restaurants seem to be holding steady, the mid-priced, family-oriented restaurants seem to be keeping their market share. It seems that on-the-go consumers are still eating away from home as much as ever, surmises Phillip Brooks, president of H. Brooks & Co., headquartered in New Brighton, MN. "We are a great logistics expert for foodservice providers, and we provide assistance as expeditors in packing and distribution for our foodservice customers," notes Brooks. "Ultimately, whether they are foodservice or retail customers, companies that sell

though us get better bottom-line results," Brooks stresses.

"Twin Cities' consumers are becoming more educated and are looking for different varieties of produce," says Art Quiggle, vice present and head of tomato-buying at Wholesale Produce, in Minneapolis, MN. "The first place they may see something new is at a restaurant that features unique types and cuts of produce through an artistic presentation on the plate."

"Although our customers are mostly retail, we are diversifying as we look toward the future, and we are moving more into foodservice," says Jim Hannigan, owner, president and CEO of St. Paul, MN-based J & J Distributing Co.

Beyond Fruitcakes And Cookies: New Usages Inspire Holiday Sales Of Dried Fruit And Nuts

Marketing support from suppliers, well executed retail merchandising and promotional programs can strengthen sales of dried fruit and nut items throughout this year's holiday season.

BY MICHAEL FEMIA



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNSWEET GROWERS INC.

Placing dried fruit in the produce department helps bring home the health message, which can help drive sales.

With Thanksgiving fast approaching, suppliers of dried fruits and nuts are gearing up for a surge in demand that is annually buoyed by a wide assortment of popular seasonal uses. Traditionally recognized as mainstays of holiday stuffings and baked goods, items in these categories can serve the needs of home cooks looking to accent festive dishes, as well as consumers searching for guiltless snacks or ready-to-eat items to entertain guests. Along with marketing support from suppliers, well executed retail merchandising and promotional programs can help consumers discover new uses for dried fruit and nut items, and strengthen sales throughout this year's holiday season.

In recent years, some items in the dried fruit category have surged in popularity. Linda Cain, vice president of marketing and retail sales for Fresno, CA-based Valley Fig

Growers, remarks, "Our product was once considered obscure, but we've slipped into the mainstream. About five years ago when I searched 'dried figs' on FoodNetwork.com, there were maybe 15 recipes. Today, you'll see hundreds. We're definitely gaining acceptance as people familiarize themselves with our product and see it used by chefs on the Food Network, PBS, and other shows."

Sales of Medjool dates are also climbing considerably. "Since last year, our volume has risen over 40 percent," reports Dave Anderson, marketing director for the Bard Valley, CA-based Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association (BVMDGA). "We have expanded distribution, but we're also doing more business where we already sell."

In addition to continually strong Medjool sales, Anderson anticipates considerable lift for date rolls throughout this holiday season, explaining, "They're an entertaining item, easy for anybody to set out. They're holiday-

themed, wrapped in coconut, pistachios, or almonds. Retailers can definitely benefit from the category this season by stocking date rolls," he asserts. "Certainly that'd help broaden our footprint, but more importantly, it's about giving customers an appropriate item for this time of year."

"Our No. 1 selling item at retail during the holiday baking season is our 20-oz. canister of raisins," shares Joe Tamble, vice president of sales for Kingsburg, CA-based Sun-Maid Growers. "It's an item that retailers really jump on. In addition to our core baking items — the 20 oz. canister as well as our golden raisins — we've seen an increase in the yogurt segment, which is used on holiday occasions not just for baking, but also snacking."

Citing elevated market prices, Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco, Inc., a Bronx, NY-based importer and distributor, expects some difficulty promoting certain items in the dried fruit and nut categories at retail this



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holiday season. “Walnuts, almonds, and imported figs are all running at higher prices this year,” he points out.

New Recipes Help Consumers Explore Category Versatility

Jen Driscoll, associate product manager at Yuba City, CA-based SunSweet Growers, Inc., highlights the versatility of items in the dried fruit category. “Amazins are one of our newer products. They are diced prunes, about the size of a raisin or dried cranberry, and can be used as a substitute for any number of ingredients.” Additionally, some recipes featured in SunSweet’s holiday brochure remind consumers that a number of items in the company’s product line can be used interchangeably.

“Retailers can put multiple shippers together to create a baking center in the produce department where consumers can grab multiple items all at once. Some retailers also put headers up with brochures that offer holiday recipe suggestions.”

— Jen Driscoll, SunSweet Growers

Sun-Maid’s Tamble remarks, “One of our key initiatives is encouraging consumers to try new recipes.” Nonetheless, according to Tamble, the time-honored oatmeal cookie remains the most popular recipe on SunMaid.com. He notes that the online collection reaches far beyond baked goods. “On our website we have literally thousands

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of recipes available in a format that's easy for our consumers to use."

For some items, promoting less conventional recipes can also help lend vitality and counter outdated generalizations. As BVMDGA's Anderson explains, "Some consumers still associate dates with fruitcakes and cookies, but our usage extends far beyond that." To promote a full array of uses, BVMDGA, like many other suppliers, features dozens of recipes to help consumers discover holiday uses. "We have lots of ideas for people to enjoy our product in a festive holiday atmosphere," he adds. "QR codes on our displays direct consumers to a mobile version of the Natural Delights website, which has about 40 different recipes, 15 of which include videos. This mobile URL accounts for well over 50 percent of our web traffic."

Health Messaging Increasingly Important To Consumers

In addition to brightening the flavor profile of festive salads, stuffings, and other seasonal dishes, dried fruits and nuts can serve to elevate the nutrient density of traditionally decadent holiday baked goods, an important message for health-conscious



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNMAID GROWERS

consumers. Many suppliers emphasize that promoting the health benefits of items in these categories can help drive sales. "In addition to our taste and flavor, we have a strong nutritional story," remarks Valley Fig's

Cain, adding that dried figs are a notable source of fiber, calcium, and potassium.

Anderson advises broadening relationships with retailers to help communicate the health benefits of dates. "This year, we're beginning to



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALLEY FIG GROWERS

“We build a display that ties all of our dried fruits and nuts together, also incorporating fruit baskets. Especially in the final days before the holidays, we really ramp it up and build massive displays. During the holidays we see good success with figs and glazed apricots.”

— Mark Luchak, Rice Epicurean Markets

work with supermarket Registered Dieticians, actually linking our content with their advocacy and outreach,” he reveals. “The messaging on our shipper isn’t just about the brand. It talks about the attributes of the product; we’re a really healthy option for consumers.”

Sunsweet’s Driscoll points out that pushing

health-related messaging throughout the holiday period can help extend some category lift beyond December, since this is when many consumers begin contemplating wellness-related New Year’s resolutions and searching for more healthy alternatives. “This time of year is great for us,” she exclaims. “Consumers start

thinking, ‘New year. New me. How can I incorporate more fruit into my diet?’”

Displays showcasing nuts and dried fruit draw holiday cooks. “Once department space

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DATES
WITH RAISINS, ALMONDS, APRICOTS, FIGS, AND DATES

“Once department space is freed up after Halloween, we build a large holiday-themed display, tying in dates, figs, canister raisins, and almonds. We also bring in some general merchandise and grocery items — flour for example — to create a baking destination. We’ve seen a lot of success with this. Consumer-friendly, ready-to-use items are especially popular.”

— Jeff Cady, Tops Markets

is freed up after Halloween, we build a large holiday-themed display, tying in dates, figs, canister raisins, and almonds,” shares Jeff Cady, produce and floral category manager for Williamsville, NY-based Tops Markets, a retailer with 131 units. “We also bring in some general merchandise and grocery items — flour for example — to create a baking destination. We’ve seen a lot of success with this. Consumer-friendly, ready-to-use items are especially popular.”

Mark Luchak, vice president of produce and floral at the Houston, TX-based 7-unit retailer, Rice Epicurean Markets, reaffirms the importance of attractive and timely holiday displays. “We build a display that ties all of our dried fruits and nuts together, also incorporating fruit baskets,” he says. “Especially in the final days before the holidays, we really ramp it up and build massive displays. During the holidays we see good success with figs and glazed apricots.”

“Thanksgiving is still the prime time to sell chestnuts,” notes Trucco’s Vacca. He notes that wherever possible, bulk bags of chestnuts can make for more appealing holiday merchandising in the produce department. “We do supply 1-lb. clam of chestnuts, but if possible, nuts should be put out in 25- or 50-lb. bags. Bulk really gives customers a sense of freshness. To help promote, some retailers buy two or three kinds of nuts and sell them at one price to give consumers variety.”

Supplier Marketing Initiatives And Smart Merchandising Boost Sales

Throughout the holiday period, suppliers will continue promoting through a number of media platforms to help boost sales at retail. Driscoll explains that a variety of in-store and digital strategies will be used to reach consumers this holiday season. “We’ll have national TV for Amazins that will be geared for the holidays,” she reports. “We’ll also dress up our Facebook page and promote menu ideas for the holiday season using the recipe tab. We try to hit consumers at all touch points to promote use of our items and create loyalty.”

BVMDGA’s Anderson adds, “For the first time, we’re pushing print magazine advertisements in *Fitness Magazine*, *Health Magazine*, *Everyday with Rachel Ray*, and *Cooking Light*. The headline is “Liven Up Recipes.” We do offer usage suggestions, but the ad is more intended to be informative, and includes a \$1-off coupon. The program is designed to drive awareness and trial, and we’re finding it effective.”

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Cross-merchandising figs with soft cheese inspires consumers to create unique holiday dishes, such as Honeyed Figs & Cheese.

In-store, shippers help improve visibility and drive sales of nut and dried fruit items within the produce department. “Mariani has a date program we got into last year and we have seen pretty good success with it,” reports Tops’ Cady.

Driscoll suggests, “Retailers can put multiple shippers together to create a baking center in the produce department where consumers can grab multiple items all at once. Some retailers also put headers up with brochures that offer holiday recipe suggestions.”

Anderson reveals, “Shipper placement adjacent to banana tables is a winner for us, without a doubt. Traffic is certainly a part of that, but I think the item really lends itself to that area of the department.” On NaturalDelights.com, BVMDGA provides a wealth of promotional and educational resources geared specifically toward retailers.

“We suggest that if a retailer has a free table or end-cap, put us there, merchandised with something else to add excitement to the department; figs pair really well with any number of products,” explains Valley Fig’s Cain. Citing the success of a cross-promotion program with Jarlsberg cheese and dried figs, Cain urges for more collaboration between the produce and cheese departments, reminding that there are numerous pairing opportunities. She recommends several simple yet elegant combinations to promote a variety of uses and bolster consumer confidence in the kitchen. “Pairing with bleu cheese, brie, or prosciutto can also make great

for appetizer trays,” she details “Figs and chocolate are another strong suit. Or just simply cut a fig in half, put some bleu cheese on it, and roast it under the broiler. Your friends will think you’re a genius.”

Trends on popular recipe websites may also help identify effective cross-merchandising opportunities. Google Recipes now provides one-click browsing of nearly every major online recipe publisher, helping to highlight trending consumer uses. For instance, a query for “pecans” returns scores

of recipe results from well-known cooking websites, but of particular interest is a sidebar that identifies many of the most popular accompanying ingredients. In the case of pecans, Google Recipes indicates that sweet potato is the most common secondary ingredient for cooking with pecans among the search results. Having recently enjoyed sweet potato pecan cookies topped with honey-maple glaze, candied bacon, and fresh rosemary, this reporter enthusiastically supports such a pairing. **pb**

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ACCOUNTANTS VERSUS MERCHANTS



To be successful in our world today, we all recognize the importance of education. In the retail industry, education is becoming more important in terms of determining the potential of personnel for advancement. However, even with education, the old proverb that “too much of a good thing can be bad” rings true. A case in point in retail is the present makeup of leadership in the management

ranks of supermarket companies. With a few notable exceptions, this leadership is dominated by accountants, financial analysts, CPAs, and personnel with Masters degrees. While every company certainly needs personnel with these areas of expertise, in the world of supermarket retail, this type of leadership can be a hindrance to success. The expertise and motivation of this group tends to be very black-and-white and numbers-oriented. While this is good for other industries, in the retail grocery business and especially in produce, it lacks flexibility.

In my years in the industry, my experiences have been that dealing with retail management made up of these educational and business backgrounds is exceedingly difficult, as “they just don’t get it” when it comes to retail operations. Their world exists in the stark, black-and-white context of numbers, ratios, and return. It was always my challenge to try to enlighten them as to what it is like to be a merchant. This is an area that is totally foreign to these management groups because they lack any kind of reference or knowledge of what makes a merchant. All of the great pioneers in the retail food industry had one thing in common, and that was that they were true merchants and understood what it was like to operate a business on the front lines and how to serve the customer.

It is this knowledge and understanding of the hands-on aspects of running a retail operation that is sorely missing in the management of many supermarkets today. Perhaps this is a product of the corporate world, where results are measured in four-week periods and the primary goal is to meet the expectations of Wall Street, as opposed to those of the customer. The drive to meet the market’s expectations tends to stifle innovation, risk-taking, and other activities designed to meet the consumers’ needs and drive all-important, top line retail of sales. While this situation seems to be more of the norm today, there are companies that do not have this problem. The majority of

them are middle to smaller size family-owned operations that are not subject to the whims of the market. But there are some supermarket companies that had the foresight to promote true merchants to the higher ranks of management. Whether they are family-owned or large corporations, these successful companies share the common characteristic of being directed by merchants.

The impact of merchants directing the company goes far beyond philosophy. It permeates every aspect of the operation, encouraging intelligent risk-taking, innovation, and desire to serve the customer needs. In my experience, working for companies with merchants in charge was far more satisfying and a very pleasant place to work. There seems to be an environment and sense of moving forward, as well as an encouragement to all employees to do whatever they can to service the customer, and thereby improve the store image and results. While there are certainly pressures to succeed, the overriding focus is not on

producing short-term goals to meet Wall Street expectations, but to continue to improve offering a better shopping experience for the customer.

The difference between these two types of management style cannot be overstated. We can only hope that the management groups of many of the supermarket companies see the benefit in having merchants in their leadership teams before the

present trends and events progress too far to be checked. In the produce management team, our strategy should be to continue to present our programs and initiatives in such a manner as to represent a “merchant’s” view, even if presenting to a management group without merchants involved. This action will hopefully start to open eyes in the management group that financial measures and numbers are not the only way to grow a business.

While it is apparent that there is a shortage of true merchants in the management ranks of the industry today, they still exist in the company’s own personnel. The cultivation and development of the best merchants at store level into the kind of leaders that can inspire an entire organization should be one of the key priorities for any and all supermarket companies. The ultimate management team would be one that incorporates the two sides of the equation with a merchant leading a strong team of financial, analytical, and operational personnel toward a common vision and direction utilizing the talents of all the people in the organization. This type of dynamic organization has proven to be successful in the past and the present, and will certainly be successful in the future.

pb

It is this knowledge and understanding of the hands-on aspects of running a retail operation that is sorely missing in the management of many supermarkets today.

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a 38-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com

MACFRUT 2012: INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION ON THE RISE

Roughly 800 exhibitors from around the world attended the 29th edition of Macfrut, the international exhibition of the fruit and vegetable sector held at the Cesena Fiera exhibition hall in Cesena, Italy, from September 26-28. The participation of foreign buyers and authorities is growing, and the large number of conference attendees proves the importance and popularity of this event. The President of Macfrut, Domenico Scarpellini, remarked, "This year the international participation grew thanks to the presence of institutional authorities as well as buyers and leaders of the GDO (large-scale retail distribution). The 29th edition of Macfrut gave positive results both in regards to the presence of exhibitors and visitors, and in terms of the strategic solutions proposed."

Of note this year, Macfrut took yet another step toward the development of commercial relationships between European produce enterprises and countries within Africa and the Middle East. Among the key moments that characterized this strategic approach were the workshops on Senegal and Jordan, where qualified participants highlighted the growing role of these countries, both in the offering of fresh and processed products and the demand for technologies for post-harvest, packaging and logistics operations.

The presentation of the Enterprise Europe Network, which gathers organizations from more than 50 countries to support small businesses in the European Union, was also successful. One popular round-table discussion focused on melon production, during which delegations of producers from Spain, France and Italy talked about the difficult trade season, especially in France and Italy. The delegates stressed the need for more cooperation in the promotion and exchange of information concerning crop management.

The last day of the conference was reserved for the annual Macfrut Oscars, which are awarded to the most innovative fresh products within the fruit and vegetable industry currently on the market. A commission, made up of authority representatives, experts and professionals, assessed the proposals presented by the exhibitors for the four technical categories: 1) Sorting and Packaging Machines and Technologies; 2) Packaging and Materials; 3) Seeds, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Products; and 4) Logistics and Services.

In addition to the four aforementioned categories, the main prize was awarded by convention visitors to the Falstaff Pear, a new variety of fall-winter red pear, similar in shape to the Abate Fetel, but with a spicier taste, along with vanilla and cinnamon flavors. From an organoleptic point of view, the pear eats best following two months of cold storage. The low temperatures allow the sugar concentration and the expansions of aromas. Walther Faedi, from the Fruit Research



Matteo Marchi (left) and Walther Faedi (center) receive the Macfrut Oscar for the Falstaff Pear from Domenico Scarpellini.



The Falstaff Pear won the main prize.

Unit of the CRA (Agricultural Research and Investigation Centre) of Forlì, received the award.

The rest of the awards were as follows:

1. Sorting and Packaging Machines and Technologies: The winner was WD4-125, a high-precision weighing system particularly suitable for citrus fruits, able to weigh up to 100 1-kg. packages in one minute, manufactured by the Sorma Group.

2. Packaging and Materials: The winner was the new package, "Agita & Gusta" (Shake & Taste) by Bonduelle. Thanks to its shape, the octagonal packaging for fresh-cut vegetables, and cereals ensures low environmental impact and easier use.

3. Seeds, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Products: Green Line's fresh milkshake, "Dimmi di sì," (Say yes) received the award thanks to its unique combination of fresh produce juice and milk. It stood out to the judges for its absolute freshness and innovation.

4. Logistics and Services: Tipper Cm165 Flap Fpr, a relatively small machine manufactured by Cm Srl, won the award. Its adaptability to different formats allows an easy emptying of bins of different sizes, even those much larger than the machine itself, impressed the judges.

The international dimension of Macfrut will keep on growing also after this edition. Cesena Fiera is already working on the 2013 edition, which will focus on the following topics: system, innovation, internationalization and consumption.

pb

Compiled by Jennifer Kramer

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DO THEY WATCH THE FOOD CHANNEL IN THE TRAILER PARK (AND OTHER QUESTIONS)?



I'm a do-it-yourselfer when it comes to market research. Yeah, I read other people's take on where, how and why consumers do what they do, but I prefer to make my own additional observations. I trust, but I verify. Too many times, fads are represented as trends or the importance of certain products or product attributes are exaggerated. Driving thousands of miles to see hundreds of stores in dozens of states

has one huge advantage; it gives one time to reflect on the observations. I occasionally come to a conclusion. More often, I ask more questions. Allow me to share a few.

When Did The Farmers Market Become A Municipal Badge Of Honor?

I thought having restaurants, supermarkets and other food outlets open many hours, six or seven days a week offering a wide arrangement of items from all over the world, all delivered by an invisible supply chain, was a good thing? I thought the dot-com types wanted to push an app and have the merchandise magically appear at their doorstep? Why would consumers want to shop for a limited amount of items for three hours a day, once or twice a week, from some guy in a pickup who blows into town, sells non-refrigerated perishables, and disappears? Why would cities allow, let alone encourage and subsidize, this type of circus carnage merchant?

What Is Our Fascination With The Channels Of The Informal Economy?

Listen to the foodies talk: street carts, food trucks, taco stands and underground dining are all the rage. When did we turn into an economy serviced by huckster trucks, swap meets, garage sales and consignment stores? Some of these are legit businesses; some are not. I come from an area where there are many of these, like the lady who makes tamales and sells them after church out of pots in her trunk. Lots of business activity, but not much tax base to show for it.

Should We Look To The Third World For Our Business Model?

Immigrants seem to do well in America's overregulated society. How do they beat the natives at their own game? One sees in the third-world

governments layers and layers of conflicting regulations, making it nearly impossible to legally operate a business. So follow no regulations, start up, see what happens, and pay as you go. Look at the vendors of hot dogs and Mexican-style popsicles in Los Angeles. No business license; no health permit; no bank account; no tax return; no green card; yet there they are and people buy their food. If you're a farmer, a city will give you an absolute pass — wave every licensing and permitting procedure and let you peddle your stuff. Is this what we've become?

Are HFCS Products Considered Local In Iowa?

I drove around the upper Midwest in August. Think amber waves of grain. Ripening fields of federally subsidized GMO soya beans and corn as far as the eye could see, mile after mile, state after state. The soya will be made into all kinds of things. Soya is the silly putty of the food world. You can process it into anything — imitation chicken that tastes like chicken; non-dairy cheese that tastes like cheese; green eggs and ham that taste like watermelon. Soya can do it. The corn would be fed to animals, turned into ethanol and refined into High Fructose Corn Syrup. Lots of it. So why aren't products made with soya-

textured vegetable protein and high fructose corn syrup marketed as "local" in the grain belt?

What Happened To The Truck Stop Diner?

I stop at truck stops: big ones, small ones, chains and independents. Regrettably, many of the greasy spoon diners have been replaced by national QSRs. I confess, I'm a sucker for a good chicken fried steak, and I was looking for one. After all, I was in the American heartland, the home of home cooking. Surely, a large truck stop in Middle America must have good chicken fried steak with tasty home-style sides. I ordered my chicken fried steak. "Would you like hash browns or freedom potatoes?" asked the waitress, who was probably the ex-wife of someone named Billy Bob. Freedom Potatoes? What regional surprise would some local cook put on my plate? A 300-seat restaurant with a 50-ft. salad bar must have some unique or regional offerings? Nope. Same skin-on cubed potatoes I've eaten at 1,000 other places. Pulled from the freezer and poured out of a bag, these were as plain and processed and non-local as the no-name ketchup and imitation maple-flavored HFCS 'pancake' syrup gracing my table. Haven't they heard about fresh, heritage, artisanal and local in rural America? Don't they watch the Food Channel in the trailer park? **pb**

Too many times, fads are represented as trends or the importance of certain products or product attributes are exaggerated.

By John Pandol

John Pandol is director of special projects for Pandol Bros, in Delano, CA.

UNITY SALAD

E Pluribus Unum is the motto.
From Many, One
It did not describe a melting pot.

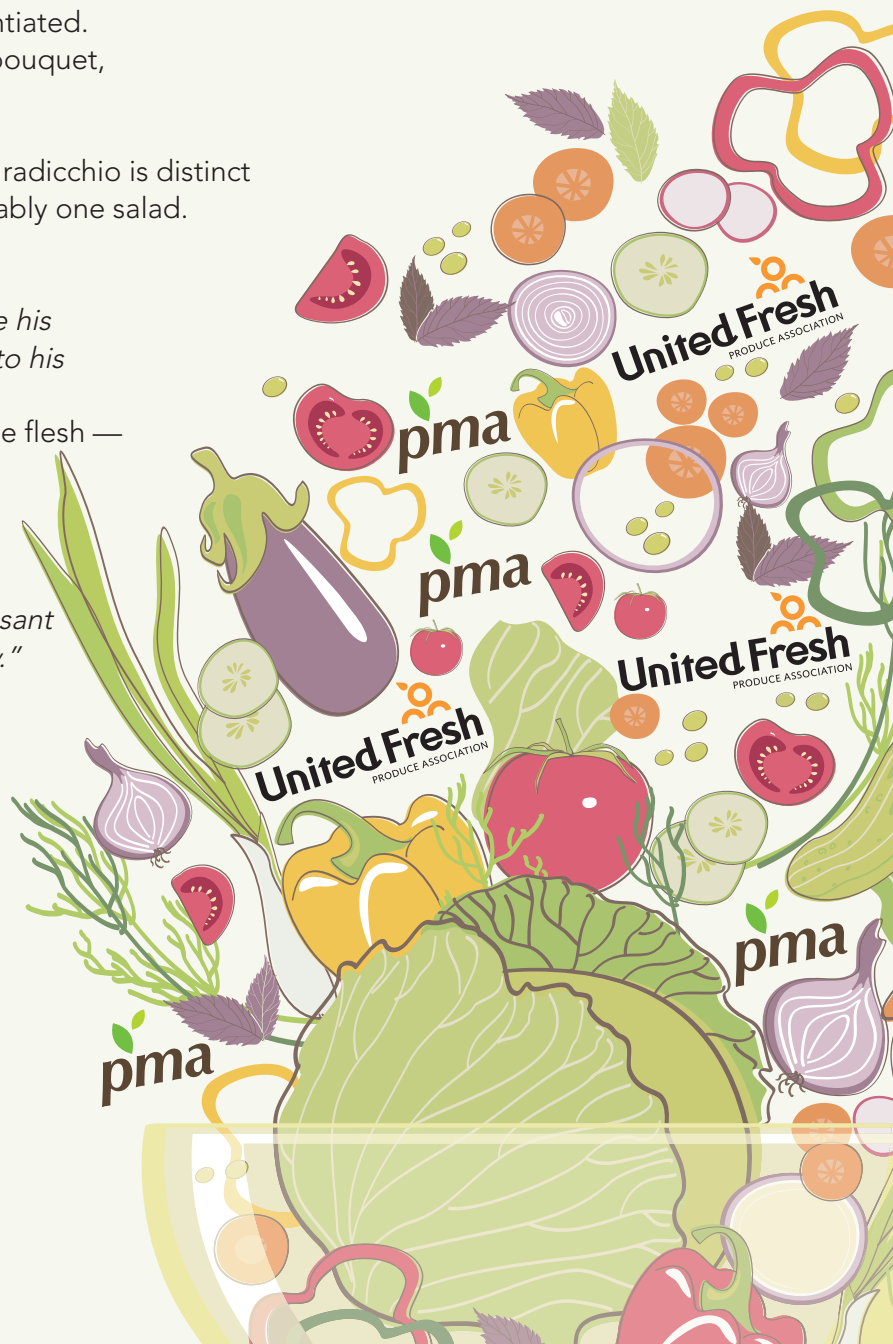
There was a bouquet of flowers.
From a magazine: the *Gentleman's Magazine*
And the idea was not that we would melt into
an undifferentiated mass.
Instead, we could be united and yet differentiated.
That the rose and daffodil could be in one bouquet,
Yet be separate flowers.

Maybe like a salad bowl, where the tinge of radicchio is distinct
From the mellow mushroom, yet it is inarguably one salad.

We spent this year trying to become ONE.
As it is written: *"Therefore shall a man leave his
father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his
wife: and they shall be one flesh."*
So we thought we could cleave, become one flesh —
But, maybe, those whose choice it was
Could not leave the father or the mother.

Or maybe, just not yet.
One day: *"Behold, how good and how pleasant
it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."*

by Jim Prevor



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WHAT'S OLD IS NEW

John Pandol, director of special projects at Delano, CA-based Pandol Bros., sent in the produce memorabilia photographed above, a recent eBay find of a grocery truck operating in Vermont in the 1930s or early 1940s, making it contemporary with the first self-service supermarkets. “I have been collecting supermarket and produce business memorabilia off eBay for about four years, adding more clutter to my cluttered workspace,” Pandol says. “This is from the top part of a calendar.”

“I can’t help but laugh a bit at the expense of the Food Desert crowd,” Pandol says, in reference to the photo. “Some people can’t drive to the supermarket...’ they lament. Well, what did people do before we had supermarkets and cars were rare?” There you have it! The grocery truck.

Pandol jokes, “I’m waiting for some foodie-guru blog to announce this merger of the food truck and the grocery store as a cutting edge innovation, and then I will mock this ‘ultra-modern’ supply chain observation by pulling out the photograph. I’m sure I will eventually find a picture of a horse-drawn grocery wagon that sold ‘stuff from town’ to rural America,” he says.

PRODUCE BUSINESS thanks Pandol for his contribution, and his humor. This photograph is his second eBay contribution to *Blast from the Past*.



40 UNDER 40

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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Ninth Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1 (People born after January 1, 1973).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by March 1, 2013, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Approximate Age _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
 Country _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
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Nominator information is for internal use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.
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