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Southern Vegetables • *Sweet Onions* • **Tomatoes** • *Mushrooms On The Menu* • Fresh-Cut Industry Report • **Walnuts** • **CUT FLOWERS**

produce**business**

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MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

Produce Trends In Chain Restaurants

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United Booth Review



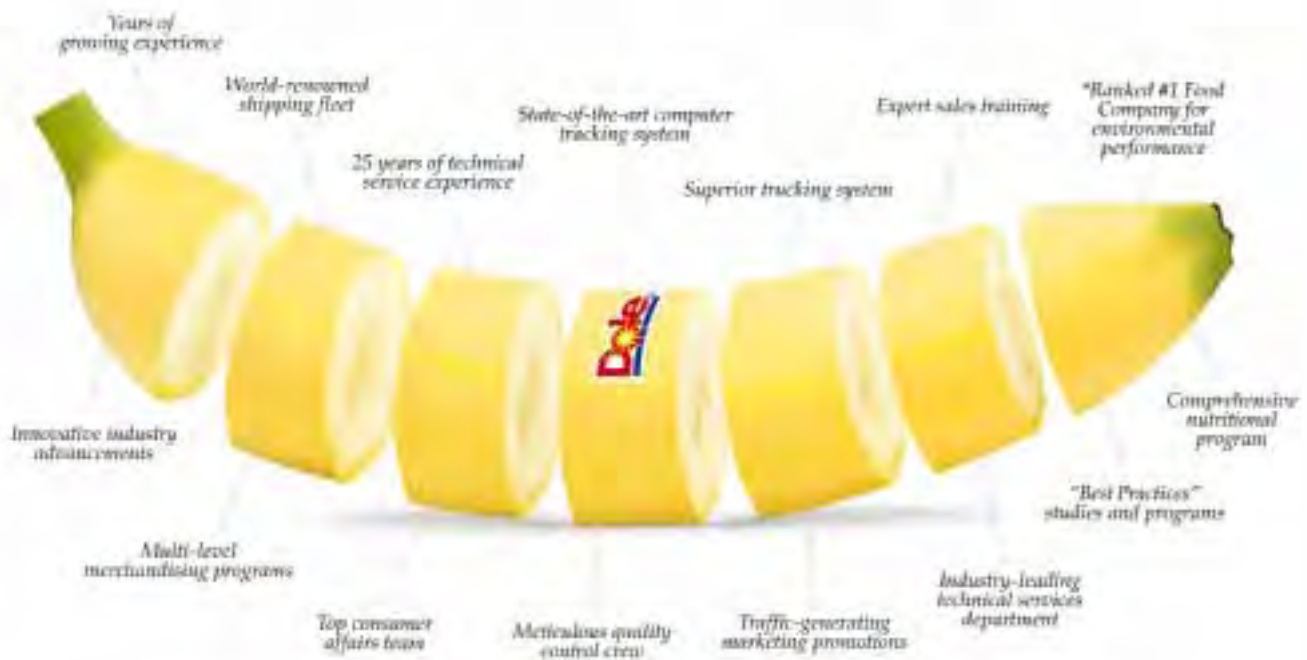
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CPMA Booth Review



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America's #1 Banana



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PRODUCE QUIZ



THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Kaan Gwee

Sr. Manager — International R&D
Papa John's International, Inc.
Louisville, KY

Kaan Gwee, a 25-plus-year veteran of the food industry, immigrated to the United States from Malaysia. After helping Pizza Hut make the switch from canned to fresh mushrooms and from yellow to red onions, he was lured away by Papa John's and has since helped it make those same changes.

Papa John's has pizza restaurants in 32 countries, including Egypt, Ecuador, Peru and India. In China, Kaan says, Papa John's is a full-service dine-in restaurant that serves desserts and appetizers as well as pizza.

"I used to do a lot of produce buying domestically. I still buy a lot of produce but we source locally for the international business," he explains.

"PRODUCE BUSINESS is a great publication and I truly enjoy it. It is very interesting and I always learn something I can use to help all my subordinates," he continues.

As the winner of the February quiz, Kaan wins an iPod Nano.

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

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- 2) What is the fax number for Bland Farms Georgia office? _____

- 3) What is the Web address for Crunch Pak? _____

- 4) What is the phone number for the California Table Grape Commission? _____

- 5) What is the toll-free number for Flavour Pict? _____
- 6) What is the street address for California Tomato Farmers? _____

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The Federal Food Stamp Program

The origin of Federal Food Stamp benefits trace back to the Great Depression, but the program in its present form was expanded nationwide in the early 1970s.

Today, the Food Stamp Program is the primary federal nutrition entitlement program designed to alleviate hunger and malnutrition among low-income children and adults. The program accounts for around 57 percent of USDA's food assistance expenditures. The Food Stamp Program is widely recognized as having raised the food intake of millions of low-income families, and progress is being made towards addressing malnutrition among benefit recipients.

Public food assistance programs have traditionally sought to protect public health by sustaining food availability and consumption by target groups, including children and the needy, in a way that achieves fiscal savings, reduces market distortions and supports U.S. agriculture. However, differences in health due to, among other things, nutritional discrepancies persist among certain sectors of the population. Recent studies show poor diet and lack of exercise as the second leading cause of death in the United States. Public food assistance programs are exploring ways to sustain and increase food consumption by promoting a healthful diet. The public health and nutrition communities are looking for new ways to make more healthful foods like fruits and vegetables more accessible to this at-risk population.

As Congress and national health leaders look for ways to address the growing obesity epidemic, particularly among some of the country's most vulnerable constituencies, focus has turned to the Food Stamp Program. Can changes be made to food stamps that would result in recipients having access to a more healthful diet?

As part of the 2007 Farm Bill, Congress, the fruit and vegetable industry and health

and nutrition organizations are supporting a proposal to fund state-initiated pilot programs to provide food stamp recipients with financial incentives to purchase more pro-

Can changes be made to food stamps that would result in recipients having access to a more healthful diet?

duce. The proposal calls for \$10 million in funding of USDA grants for states to "develop and pilot test innovative programs that encourage food stamp recipients to increase their purchases of fruits and vegetables by providing a financial incentive directly to their EBT [electronic benefit transfer] card."

In fact, the California Department of Health Services, in conjunction with three *5-A-Day* partnered grocery chains, have proposed a pilot project to USDA/Food Nutrition Services (FNS) to see how food stamp recipients respond to three different approaches for providing incentives to buy fruit and vegetables. These include coupons at checkout for free or discounted items, buy-one-get-one-free promotions and store discount cards that can be used with EBT cards.

Yet because the Food Stamp Program is the primary federal nutrition entitlement program for alleviating hunger among low-income children and adults, any potential changes to the program raise the debate among stakeholders. The anti-hunger organizations are asking Congress to increase funding for food stamps to increase the overall benefit level. Their position is that if the overall value of food stamps increases,

then recipients will have more money to purchase a more healthful diet without needing special incentives. The broad food industry questions why food stamp recipients should be encouraged to choose one product over another — i.e., recipients should have the freedom to choose which foods they consume. And finally, the retail community, where the vast majority of food stamp funding is utilized, is concerned about the technical application of providing an "extra" benefit through EBT cards. All of these stakeholders have an important interest in the Food Stamp Program and these concerns will have to be addressed to see this new innovative idea become a reality.

There's little argument the Program plays a vital function as the primary nutrition safety net for millions of low-income families and children; it is widely recognized as having reduced hunger and malnutrition in this country. However, while in the 1970s undernutrition or the inadequate intake of food energy was considered a serious public health danger, nutritionists have now recognized dietary excess and malnourishment as coexisting threats to current public health.

Malnutrition and obesity can and do coexist in this country. The obesity epidemic among all Americans, including food stamp recipients, makes it critical to explore ways to promote a more healthful diet. Mounting scientific evidence links physical activity and a balanced diet rich in micronutrients with reductions in obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease and certain types of cancer. Hence, there is a pressing need for the Food Stamp Program to continue to address nutritional problems such as hunger and undernourishment while also assuming a greater role in addressing obesity and malnourishment. Increasing food stamp recipients' access to more fruits and vegetables should be top priority in helping all Americans eat a more healthful diet.



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Industry At Crossroads

The produce industry is fighting desperately to be the kind of industry it was before the spinach outbreak. Yet, we can never really be that way again.

At PMA's recent Produce Solutions Conference, Tim York of Markon Cooperative used the phrase "painless produce" to describe what buyers were seeking, and it strikes us that both the Buyer-led Food Safety Initiative and the regulatory approach initiated by United Fresh Produce Association are designed to produce that "painless produce" industry. In terms of food safety, "painless produce" means buyers should be able to buy from any legal producer or vendor and not worry about safety.

Although big buyers have begun doing some auditing, this basic assumption of safety is what has underpinned business practices in produce forever. If you are short a product, you can pick up a fill-in at a terminal market. If you need some Mexican product, you can call a broker in Nogales who either has or will get the product. If you need an item, you can put it out for bid and buy from the lowest bidder.

There have been exceptions: Wal-Mart led the way with dedicated distribution center assignments, though even there, the restriction was on who could sell to Wal-Mart, not where the product came from.

This highly flexible industry of interchangeable product has been the produce industry. It is the way virtually everyone now in the business grew up and there are thousands of jobs — whole companies — that revolve around this model.

Yet it is increasingly clear that just as the model of buying most things at auction has long since faded, this freewheeling environment of buying from anyone, anywhere shall fade in turn.

Perhaps the saddest part of Tim's presentation was the acknowledgement that only six of the select group of buyers that had urged the set-up of the California Marketing Agreement were willing to commit to constrain their supply chains to only those who signed the California Marketing Agreement.

In effect, the other buyers are saying that as much as they want food safety, they don't want it so badly they are willing to risk paying more for it.

This leaves the industry at a crossroads. The regulatory approach may be desirable, notably because it may make regulators more sympathetic to the trade, but it is unlikely to bring about food safety.

The problem is part politics in setting the standards — typically when you regulate hotels you don't turn everyone into a Four Seasons, you try and get rid of some roach motels. Equally, you usually don't have the political constituency to regulate in such a tough manner that the problem gets solved.

Last year, if we had mandatory federal regulations in place, the

odds that the standards would have been higher than those followed by Natural Selection Foods and Ready Pac are near zero. It is only post-outbreak that the political constituency for tougher standards began to congeal.

Even if the standards are strong, enforcement is often another matter. Just look at what happened with the 7th Street wholesale produce market in Los Angeles or watch the video of rats scampering at the Taco Bell/KFC in New York. Both were heavily regulated, but the regulations weren't enforced — even though the facilities were being inspected. So mandatory regulation doesn't absolve buyers of the need to confirm things on their own.

Even if standards are strong and enforcement rigorous, both can always be improved. There is no level of standard or frequency of enforcement that provides a 100 percent guarantee of food safety — so regulation can't guarantee safety, and it can't excuse people from the obligation to look at their supply chain.

As much as we can endorse the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and other initiatives as a way to raise the floor on food safety, buyers have to take responsibility for what they sell.

Foodservice has been aware of this for some time, which is why foodservice, especially leaders such as Darden, Disney and Jack in the Box, have dedicated supply chains, going this route because they have enormous reputational risk if they make someone sick and because

the law views a restaurant as a manufacturer and holds it strictly liable if someone gets sick or dies. Retailers get a free pass and the liability is typically passed on to the supplier.

The California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement has won almost universal acceptance by the trade in California. Product will be safer than it would have been and the industry is better positioned to plan for the future.

Yet it would be a horrible mistake if buyers took the success of this initiative and read it as producing "painless produce." Those days are gone and every buying organization now has a responsibility it did not have before. Take a look at the video of the people urinating in the middle of the 7th Street Market, of the rats gnawing and the generally unsanitary conditions. And remember that absolutely nothing in the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement stops this now very well-grown product from being exposed to conditions like that.

Food safety is not just a grower's responsibility. How many buyers really know their product isn't passing through a facility like the 7th Street Market on the way to their own receiving dock? If you don't know, how can you really feel proud of your food safety system?

Every buying organization now has a responsibility that it did not have before.

How Does \$45 Billion Sound?



That's the value of the U.S. spend for sweet snacks in 2005. Between 2000 and 2005 the market grew by 15 percent, yet growth for the next five years is forecast at just over 4 percent.*

"The fact consumers no longer define 'snack' with such strong reference to chocolate, sweets and crisps is one factor shaping the future of the snacking industry. Traditional impulse categories such as confectionary and savory snacks are under increasing threat from new product formats—especially those consumers consider to be more nutritious."

Daniel Bone, consumer market analyst, Datamonitor

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Reader Service # 51

Filling Up Our Glasses

PMA's latest consumer survey calls out at least two significant glass-half-full opportunities for our industry to grow consumers' fruit and vegetable consumption in the future.

Glass-half-empty types might pessimistically analyze some of the new consumer responses collected by Opinion Dynamics Corporation for PMA. Consumers report they know they should eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. However, they clearly need more education.

Forty-six percent of responders to PMA's telephone survey of 1,000 adults thought the federal government still recommends eating four to six servings of fruits and vegetables a day; 10 percent said seven to nine servings, only 1 percent said 10 to 12 servings. Worse, 26 percent report they don't know how many servings the government now recommends. (The guidelines recommend nine to 13 ½-cup servings a day for adults, five to seven ½-cup servings a day for children aged six to 11.)

Knowledge is one thing. Behavior, as any marketer knows all too well, is something else. We asked consumers how many servings they were actually eating; 70 percent said one to three servings, and only 21 percent are getting the minimum four to six servings.

While we have had good success educating consumers about what they should do, we have not succeeded at motivating them to change their behavior. So the time is ripe for a different approach: *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters*. Whereas *5-A-Day* helped consumers know they need to eat more fruits and vegetables, the new brand's motivational messaging and how-to tools are designed to encourage consumers to, in fact, do it.

If you aren't already a licensee of the new brand, I urge you to get licensed today. It presents a powerful motivational platform. The more voices that join together to take the new message to consumers, the more impactful the program can be for all companies supporting it. PMA is putting its money where its mouth is, as I'll outline in a moment.

Our latest survey also showed another

interesting dichotomy, this one in consumers' attitudes about their own health versus children's health, offering something for the pessimist and the optimist.

About two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, yet only 17 percent of our respondents reported trying to curb their weight. They may be unconcerned about their own widening waistlines but they are very concerned about their children's. Sixty-five percent rated childhood obesity as extremely serious, 29 percent as somewhat serious and only 1 percent as not serious at all.

Those consumers gave our products high marks for their ability to help solve childhood obesity. Seventy-three percent said increasing fresh fruit and vegetable consumption can have "a lot" of impact to help reduce childhood obesity. My takeaway from this: while many adults find it difficult to change their own ingrained eating behaviors, most want to raise their kids to believe in and behave on a higher, more healthful standard.

Fruits & Veggies — More Matters offers a platform to tap into public concern about childhood obesity. It targets moms because she is the household nutrition gatekeeper, feels tremendous responsibility for her kids' health and is looking for all the help she can get.

The new brand now appears in influential venues, including retail stores, produce packaging, the mainstream media, via the Internet including mom-focused *fruitsandveggies-morematters.org*, and many other communications. The new brand's rollout will gather steam in coming months, as more efforts by industry, retail, government and non-governmental partners come online and media outreach activities bear fruit.

PMA plans to do our part to create visibility and awareness of fruits' and vegetables' newly elevated role in the diet, and for the new brand, by focusing our efforts on a key gateway to children and moms: schools. By the time you read this, you'll likely have heard about PMA's \$500,000 commitment to the Produce for Better Health's Campaign for Children's Health to develop a new partnership.

While we have had good success educating consumers about what they should do, we have not succeeded at motivating them to change their behavior.

Working with Scholastic Inc., the trusted children's publishing, education and media company, we will reach millions of schoolchildren and their parents over the next four years.

The program will promote the sheer fun and joyfulness of eating fresh fruits and vegetables to third and fourth graders — key ages when food preferences are still being established. It will also include some basic, safe food-handling messages taken straight from the Partnership for Food Safety Education's consumer outreach, so kids and their moms understand the importance of messages like Clean and Separate when it comes to food.

This classroom outreach program will get to 10,000 teachers, 300,000 students and 450,000 parents the first year and nearly double that in each successive year. I am optimistic about the opportunities for our industry if we can move consumers from knowing they need to eat more fruits and vegetables to actually doing it, with motivational news tools like *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* for moms and our Scholastic partnership to reach kids.

Ten years from now, I look forward to reading about PMA research showing the gap between what consumers know and do about consuming more produce has narrowed. That not only matters more, it matters most. Let's all raise our glasses and drink a toast to that.



Effectiveness Needs Testing

It is, of course, fantastic news that PMA is investing half a million dollars to help the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) get a new partnership with Scholastic, Inc. off the ground. To assist mothers in feeding their families better, to assist children, as Bryan says, in "... understanding the sheer fun and joyfulness of eating fresh fruits and vegetables..." Well, who could be opposed?

Nobody — and that just may be a problem. The goal — increasing produce consumption — is so universally shared and the general means — focusing on young children still forming their eating habits — so universally lauded that it is hard for anyone to raise his or her hand and ask if this concept has actually been tested.

The exchange Bryan and I do in these pages every month is mostly about research; it is about ways to find the truth, and one of the big lessons is that, sometimes, what seems to make perfect sense, in fact, doesn't achieve the goals that we seek to achieve.

Bryan tips his hat to this truth when he so correctly points out, "Knowledge is one thing. Behavior, as any marketer knows all too well, is, of course, something else."

And just as knowledge does not automatically equal behavioral change, so does design not always equal effectiveness. So when Bryan speaks of the new *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* campaign and explains, "Whereas *5-A-Day* helped consumers know they need to eat more fruits and vegetables, the new brand's motivational messaging and how-to tools are designed to encourage consumers to, in fact, do it."

We have to praise the organizers and designers of the new program. After all, to get consumers to eat more produce — to "do it" — is precisely the challenge. Yet the fact a program has been designed with this goal in mind tells us nothing about its effectiveness.

Maybe communicating "joyfulness" results in higher consumption. Maybe not. Maybe it does for a little while and then the message, and its effectiveness, fade.

Maybe the message doesn't resonate at all with consumers who find consuming more fresh produce not "fun and joyful" but a burden when compared to throwing a box of Oreos in the car. Or maybe the problem is not messaging but something substantive, such as being unfamiliar with the taste of many produce items.

Fortunately, the program Bryan mentions will reach 300,000 students the first year and double each successive year. That means there are plenty of students who will not be exposed to the Scholastic materials, which sets up a perfect control group for a test.

PBH should hire an objective researcher to evaluate produce consumption in students exposed to the Scholastic program and students who are not. This study must go beyond surveys to include food diaries, register tape receipts, weigh-ins and other indicators of health. By doing this in a double blind way, in which the students and the researchers do not know we are studying produce consumption, we could actually have a test to see if the program is being effective.

It is very important that students for the control group be selected from areas where the program is not expected to roll out, so the students will remain an uninfluenced sample. It is also important, if the study shows some effectiveness, that the study continue after students have left the target-age group of third and fourth graders. After all, we want to know if we are changing eating patterns for life or just while the program is ongoing.

Like Bryan, this author tries to be an optimist as well, so, hopefully, we will find the program is working splendidly, and five years from now we will be able to report that children exposed to the Scholastic materials both eat better and are healthier, and especially that they are less likely to be obese than the control group, which was given just standard advice by school and health-care providers.

This writer will remain optimistic even if the results don't show that. Optimism would be justified because through research we would be learning what approaches didn't

Just as knowledge does not automatically equal behavioral change, so does design not always equal effectiveness.

work, and then we could look at changing the message or trying a different approach.

On page 13 of this issue, you can see some material selected from PRODUCE BUSINESS' sister Web site *PerishablePundit.com*. On this page, we highlight some of what we've written about a program, now rolling out nationally in Ireland, called *Food Dudes*.

The *Food Dudes* program is geared toward changing behavior, and 18-month-long follow-up research indicates it succeeds in getting children to eat more fruits and vegetables. Experience and research have revealed specific techniques that help increase consumption. For example, it happens that many children start out saying they "don't like" certain items — even after they have tried them. Continuous sampling over time, however, changes that perception, and many children acquire a taste for items they previously avoided. This opening up of more variety, more options for consumption, seems to lead to more consumption.

The point is there are many experiments that can be tried to increase consumption. A salute to PMA and PBH for trying this effort with Scholastic and a plea to make sure adequate research is done so we can know if we have a success or need to try another way.

THE GIUMARRA COMPANIES, LOS ANGELES, CA

John Schapp Jr. has joined the company to assist the growth of its newly created East Coast avocado sales team in Buffalo, NY. Experienced in the avocado industry, Schapp previously was the executive general manager for Sweetwater Technologies and worked for 11 years with Index Fresh in Riverside County, CA.



THE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT, WATSONVILLE, CA

Ken Melban has joined as senior account manager. He spent 10 years with Monfort Management, serving as manager or assistant manager for the several California Boards and was also director of crop protection services for the California Pepper Commission.



SHUMAN PRODUCE, REIDSVILLE, GA

Rick Estess is the new sales and business development director. Prior experience includes Apio and Linsey Foods. He has also been involved with the Southeast Produce Council, serving on the Boards of Directors from 2001-2006 and as president from 2004-2006. He currently sits on the committee as a lifetime trustee.



GLOBAL ORGANIC SPECIALTY SOURCE, INC., SARASOTA, FL

Wes Jones was promoted from merchandiser to director of sales. His experience includes building connections with every kind of customer, from the small store to the large retail chains. He moved from Pennsylvania and is working from the Sarasota office.



CALIFORNIA TREE FRUIT AGREEMENT, REEDLEY, CA

Colleen DuHart is the new vice president of marketing. She previously held senior marketing positions at Pitney Bowes and SMW Advertising in Toronto. She is leading the CTFA marketing team in the development and execution of marketing programs.



GIORGIO FOODS, TEMPLE, PA

David A. Sensenig was promoted to corporate manager. His responsibilities for marketing both retail and foodservice products include developing printed materials, managing new product launches and creating new material for the company Web site.



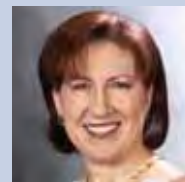
L.A. SPECIALTY PRODUCE COMPANY, SANTA FE SPRINGS, CA

Tom Wason was hired as vice president, purchasing. He will manage the wholesale produce distributor's supply chain and directs all activities of the purchasing, planning and contracting functions. He spent the past 17 years with Sysco and is a 35-year industry veteran.



OCEAN MIST FARMS, CASTROVILLE, CA

Roberta Cook, PhD, has been elected to serve on the board of directors, the first time in the company's 83-year history an outside director was named. Since 1985 she has been the extension marketing economist in the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics at University California, Davis.



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRENTON, NJ

Alfred W. Murray, a 23-year veteran of NJDA and the director of marketing and development for six years, has been named assistant secretary of agriculture for New Jersey. He will reach out to the state's 9,000-plus farmers on issues from farm viability to food safety.



NORTH SHORE GREENHOUSES, INC., THERMAL, CA

Donald Souther, the new sales manager, brings more than 10 years of sales experience in the grocery industry. He was sales manager at Plant Source, working closely with growers and managing distribution and marketing to supermarket retailers.



NEW PRODUCTS

TART CHERRY JUICES

CHERRish Corp., Bellevue, WA, has introduced three 100 percent Montmorency tart cherry juices. High in antioxidants, the juices may help fight cancer. They claim to be 10 times stronger than aspirin for pain relief and contain melatonin. Available in Cherry Cherry, Tart Cherry and Cherry Blueberry flavors. The 10.5-ounce bottles retail for less than \$3.



Reader Service No. 300

GRAB N GO HEADER BAG

Temkin International, Inc., Payson, UT, introduces the lightweight cartable Grab N Go Header Bag, a 1.2mil or 1.6mil BOPP with a handle. Self-sealing Lip-N-Tape closures are available with permanent or resealable tape. Bags can be clear or custom printed in up to eight colors; capabilities include the printing of UPC codes and logos.



Reader Service No. 301

SORTERS FOR FRESH-CUT

Key Technology, Inc., Walla Walla, WA, introduces Tegra sorters to improve product quality and food safety. Featuring gentle product handling, Tegra sorters view product, top and bottom, while in air to maximize the removal of defects and foreign material. Foreign material removal accuracy rates of up to 100 percent. Ideal for tender leaf products.



Reader Service No. 302

PETITE ON-THE-VINE ROMAS

Eli & Ali's, Brooklyn, NY, announces continuous distribution of its featured variety of new petite Romas on the vine. The new variety is available in 8-ounce clamshells packed 12 to the box.



Reader Service No. 303

SUNSWET FRESH JOINT VENTURE

Brandt Farms, Inc., Reedley, CA and Delicious Foods, LLC, Fresno, CA, have formed Brandt - DF, LLC, a Delicious Foods joint venture to market and sell California stone fruit under the Sunswet Fresh brand. Brandt Farms will take the lead in approving farms for the Sunswet Fresh program. Photo (l-r): Chris Coffman, Delicious Foods, and Wayne Brandt, Brandt Farms.



Reader Service No. 304

NEW GROWER-OWNED COMPANY

FreshSense, Sanger, CA, is a new grower-owned marketing organization comprised of California growers of stone fruit, citrus and table grapes, including Ballantine Produce, Corrin Produce, Fowler Packing, George Brothers, HMC Marketing, Kingsburg Orchards and Sunwest Fruit Company. Blair Richardson, former CTFA president, will serve as president and CEO.



Reader Service No. 305

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Produce Watch is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

Food Dudes Beat Junk Punks — And Kids Eat More Produce



Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, March 7, 2007

This might just turn out to be the most important piece we've ever run. Certainly every member of the board of the Produce for Better Health Foundation should take a look. In fact, anyone concerned with increasing produce consumption and enhancing the health of children should pay careful attention.

As the Produce for Better Health Foundation prepares for the grand kickoff of its new *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* campaign, an interesting and important program from across the pond is now rolling out in every school in Ireland with the goal of increasing produce consumption and developing produce-rich eating habits in children. The program is called *Food Dudes* and it is not your conventional promotional program. Here is how the program's sponsors explain it:

How can children be influenced to change their eating habits for the better?

The traditional approach has been to inform people through health education campaigns about what they should and should not eat in the hope that they will alter their eating habits accordingly. Unfortunately, the research evidence shows that this approach has very limited success.

In spite of the enormous quantity of information about the health-giving properties of fruit and vegetables that has been issued over recent years, children's eating habits have remained largely unaltered. Clearly, children's knowing what they should do does not mean that that is what they will do. What they need is not simply to be given information, but help to change their actual eating behaviour.

This program is unusual because it was developed by psychologists not marketers. They've researched interesting questions such as whether children will change their minds when continuously exposed to produce items they think they don't like. The answer is that they do.

Unlike many programs aimed at children that only focus on sweet fruits, this one also covers vegetables such as celery, carrots and green beans.

Unlike many programs that focus on only the most popular items, this program includes items such as prunes, kiwi and apricots.

It covers boys and girls, it covers the whole spectrum of family income and it has all been subjected to academic study.

And it has gotten results:

At this point we had conducted 14 separate studies, involving more than 450 children. In all of the studies the effects of the programme were:

- *highly reliable — results were consistently positive, regardless of particular food, children or context.*

- *very large — the least achieved was usually a doubling of consumption, but increases were often much greater, up to several hundred percent.*

- *extended to a wide range of fruit and vegetables — the effects were not confined to the particular foods featured in the intervention, but extended to all items the children were able to identify as fruit and vegetables. It is an important part of the programme that children are helped to learn what foods are included in the concepts of "fruit" and "vegetables".*

- *general across contexts — in the school studies, the consumption of fruit and vegetables of a sub-set of children was also recorded at home and reflected the same changes as took place at school; in the nursery study the effects of the snack-time intervention carried over to lunch. This generalising effect across contexts was also supported in the responses to a questionnaire issued to parents of children participating in one of the school studies: 100% of them said their children benefited from taking part in the study at school; 88% noticed that their children had increased their intake at home of either fruit, vegetables or both; and 77% of children asked their parents to buy fruit/vegetables not previously on the family shopping list. Parents and teachers alike have consistently expressed considerable enthusiasm for the programme.*

- *very long lasting — when the children were followed up, as long as 15 months after the intervention, the changes in consumption still persisted.*

You can learn a lot on www.fooddudes.co.uk, the Food Dudes' Web site, and especially with research reports on the program.

Obviously we don't have lifetime studies that tell us what the effect of this program will be on the kids when they are 90, but, from all we have, it seems like a remarkably effective program.

In fact the Irish government decided to stop a three-year pilot that the Irish produce industry was contributing to — mid-way — and roll it out nationally because the research was so convincing that this program was working. **pb**



Mary Coughlan, Ireland's Minister for Agriculture and Food, with the Food Dudes kids

Produce Trends In Chain Restaurants

Quick-serve and casual dining restaurants see more potential for produce than ever before.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

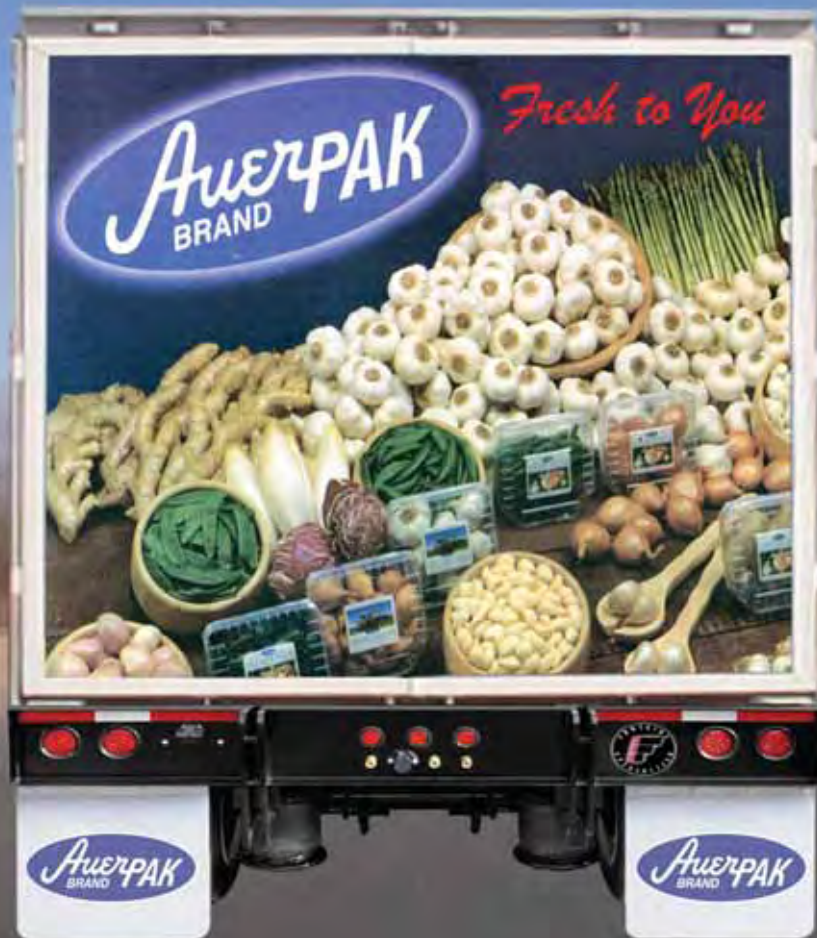


Restaurant operators say customers are looking for more flavor in all of their food, so it should be of no surprise that flavor is more important in produce — and not just from sauces and salad dressings.

“Lately, we’ve really seen an interest from restaurants in varieties and how we can get the produce to taste better,” says Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce, San Diego, CA, growers and shippers of fresh fruit and vegetables from Baja California and Mexico. For instance, he says, “Grape tomatoes are replacing some of the other tomatoes because of convenience, versatility and flavor.”

“Every time we as an industry have delivered flavor to the consumer, we’ve been rewarded with being able to quickly grow a category,” Munger notes. Restaurants are starting to discover that what sells well in supermarkets will also gain customer loyalty in restaurants. “Last year I began to get contacted by fast-food chains that were looking at shifting from a mature green tomato to a vine-ripened tomato.”

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Photo courtesy of California Strawberry Commission



Photo courtesy of Del Taco

But, says Munger, "Flavor comes with a price." After all, vine-ripened tomatoes are more expensive than mature greens. In order to keep customers happy, more and more restaurant chains are willing to pay the price.

"Flavor is, of course, what we're all after," says Mary DeGroat, director of marketing communication, California Strawberry Commission (CSC), Watsonville, CA. "The texture and flavor are going to vary from variety to variety."

"We're getting some feedback from customers that they want more flavor. In our case, they want more spiciness," reports Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance, Del Taco, LLC, based in Lake Forest, CA. In the future, this could mean the use of more chile peppers in items such as salsas.

Mark Lepine, senior director of menu vision design, McDonald's Corporation, headquartered in Oak Brook, IL, says there may be a call for more habaneros and jalapeños at McDonald's. And because more Asian flavors are also becoming more mainstream, McDonald's uses edamame and mandarin oranges in its Asian Chicken Salad.

Lepine is always on the lookout for ways to improve the flavor of produce without adding fat, salt or sugar, such as roasting tomatoes. McDonald's is also experimenting with many varieties of produce, such as the 17 varieties of lettuce used in its salads. "From the salad side, we have more permission from the consumers to put more varieties in there," says Lepine. "People are really looking to try new things."

DeGroat says the top ethnic cuisines in America are Mexican, Asian and Italian.

Andrew & Williamson's Munger sees Mediterranean-style foods as an upcoming trend because their fresh, flavorful spins on produce make it possible to eat healthfully and deliciously at the same time. "When you're going to a restaurant, there's a certain convenience, but for the most part what we're buying is the experience," he observes. "Our expectations are higher than they are at home. We want to be rewarded with a good flavor experience."

HEALTHFUL CHOICES

"Overall, the trend is toward healthful," believes Mark Givens, director of sales, HMC Group Marketing, Kingsburg, CA, growers and shippers of Lunch Bunch red seedless grapes for foodservice. "People are trying to determine how to get 'healthful' into their menus."

Having more healthful items on the menu does not necessarily mean more money for a restaurant. In fact, they often cost more to offer (french fries are much cheaper than grapes) and have less appeal to customers. (When was the last time you walked into a diner and smelled the enticing aroma of carrots instead of sizzling bacon?)

Munger is not convinced people will gobble up salads simply because they are told lettuce is healthful for them. "Sometimes we think that the health message is going to motivate people to eat more produce," he says, but he does not believe it is as effective



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FOOD SAFETY: Raising the Bar

What topic is universally talked about between restaurant operators and produce suppliers? “The biggest trend has been conversations on food safety,” says Mark Munger, vice president of marketing at Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce in San Diego, CA. “We work with several chains that are very intensive on food safety. Everybody’s really beginning to take a much closer look at their suppliers.”

In turn, suppliers feel the pressure to ensure each shipment of produce is safe. “Food safety has always been a priority, but now it’s the No. 1 priority,” says Mary DeGroat, director of marketing communication for the California Strawberry Commission (CSC) in Watsonville, CA.

“I feel like everyone was doing a good job before,” says George Wooten, president of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company in Chadbourn, NC, “but you have a bump in the road, and it makes everybody more aware.”

“The consumers today are more educated than they ever have been in the past,” notes Mike Starnes, vice president of food safety, quality assurance and brand standards for Denny’s, Inc., headquartered in Spartanburg, SC. “In the past, they might have thought they just had a 24-hour virus.” Now, he says, more people are looking up their symptoms on the Internet and realizing they may have a foodborne illness. When this happens, more people go to the doctor for treatment and more cases are reported.

As a result of the growing awareness of the importance of food safety, “We have tightened up,” says Starnes. For example, company policy used to be that Denny’s made a surprise audit of each of its suppliers’ facilities twice a year. Now it may be as often as twice a month.

Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance for Del Taco, LLC, based in Lake Forest, CA, says the company has been having more conversations with suppliers about food safety than before “so that we have a higher degree of confidence.”

Munger especially praises Darden Restaurants, Orlando, FL, for its food-safety

politics. “Bar none, I really feel Darden has got the best food-safety program,” says Munger. “There’s a lot of conversations going on about who should be responsible for food safety. Darden’s approach is that we are all responsible.”

Although Darden takes advantage of access to suppliers’ fields and facilities to make inspections, “They’re not so much police as partners in food safety,” says Munger. “They really set an example for the industry.”

“Food safety is the foundation of our program,” notes Todd Silberg, Darden director of produce purchasing. “We want full traceability back to the field.”

The ability to trace a product from the fork back to the field is vital for an effective recall. Denny’s issues mock recalls to ensure the traceability of its produce. “We’re looking for under two hours,” says Starnes. Although it sounds like a huge undertaking, “The good companies, the good vendors, they can do this.”

Mark Givens, director of sales at HMC Group Marketing, headquartered in Kingsburg, CA, believes that fresh-cut, value-added produce can help chains cut back on food-safety concerns. “It gives you more consistency,” he explains. Instead of having to monitor every kitchen in every restaurant to make sure produce is washed and cut properly, a company needs only to watch the few facilities from which its produce is distributed.

Starnes agrees, stating that with the exception of a few restaurants, Denny’s uses value-added produce across the system in order to more easily control the process. When it comes to safety, sharing ideas and information between companies is more than a courtesy. “If there’s a foodborne illness anywhere, it affects all of us,” says Starnes.

Mark Lepine, senior director of menu vision design at McDonald’s Corporation, based in Oak Brook, IL, agrees. “I don’t see people stopping eating things because there’s a risk, but they could if it keeps going on.”

With emphasis Starnes says, at Denny’s, “We feel that we do not have the right to make one person sick.” **pb**



Photo courtesy of McDonald’s

as offering foods that look and taste delicious.

To sell more healthful foods, it may be up to the produce industry as well as restaurants to make them more appealing. Once that is done, believes Givens, the price of produce items may be offset by the positive change in a chain’s image, which can result in more customers. “No doubt, the challenge is to deliver taste. If you do that, people will pay for it.”

“If you’re looking at the whole industry — in the quick-service section of the industry — we haven’t been known for fruits and vegetables. I’m trying to be a pioneer for changing that,” says Lepine of McDonald’s. And not just for altruistic reasons. Lepine believes most people want “better-for-you foods.” Beyond low-fat and high-nutrition foods, Lepine notices a larger trend of using organic, natural and very fresh locally sourced foods. In other words, “foods that make people feel good about themselves.”

That does not mean McDonald’s will go organic any time soon. “I would say that’s a little further out, right now,” says Lepine. But he believes words such as “all-natural” and “fresh” are important to everyone.

Most customers are happier to buy produce when they are eating out if they see it has some value added to it, Lepine explains. “Typically, if they’re going to have hand fruit, they’re going to bring it from home.” Items such as sliced apples with caramel, flavorful salads and mini peeled carrots with dip seem worth the extra money to customers.

Perhaps because they are both healthful and flavorful — as well as attractive on the plate — sweet potatoes have been popping up on more and more restaurant menus, in every form from fries and chips to mashes, purées and bisques. “They’re high in fiber and high in beta carotene,” explains George Wooten, president of Chadbourn, NC-based Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company, suppliers of sweet potatoes to such restaurant chains as Outback Steakhouse and Roadhouse Grill. Sweet potatoes are also low on the glycemic index, a plus for followers of certain low-carbohydrate diets.

According to Wooten, many steakhouses have added baked sweet potatoes as an alternative to

baked white potatoes on their menus. Most find that this is an easy switch to make — sweet potatoes bake the same way white potatoes do, so no additional training or equipment is needed to offer them.

In addition to more healthful choices for adults, more and more healthful options are now offered on children's menus. "I love that we've started to see more fresh fruit and vegetables done in a more fun way on kids' menus. It's a really positive trend," notes Andrew & Williamson's Munger. "The apple dippers at McDonald's have been terrific. There's nothing more frustrating, as a parent, than to take kids out and see that all that's offered is a hamburger or hot dog and french fries."

Much research went into deciding what produce should appear on McDonald's children's menu. "It's challenging to get kids to eat salads, so we had to be more creative," says Lepine, who discovered that sliced apples with caramel and mini peeled carrots are more appealing to youngsters.

Not every restaurant chain is ready to offer healthful alternatives to its regular menu items. "We're starting to do some research. We're looking at it," says Erickson of Del Taco. "It's not really at the top of what our core customers are asking for."

OTHER INFLUENCES

Many restaurants add a produce item to their



Photo courtesy of HMC Group Marketing

menu after it becomes popular in the media. "New items to the American public — like mangos — in that case, media can be very effective," says Munger, especially if a celebrity such as Oprah recommends it.

Bailey's Wooten agrees. "Oprah has a big influence on people," he says. And celebrity chefs such as Paula Deen and Emeril Lagasse affect what consumers want and how other chefs are inspired, through their television shows, cookbooks and restaurants. Other white tablecloth restaurants have an effect, as well.

"I tend to look at the white tablecloths as a little bit on the cutting edge," explains Munger. "A lot of the trends begin there. They're a lot like the fashion runways — you see a lot of things that don't necessarily make sense for the general public, but they do set a trend."

DeGroat of the CSC hopes the strawberry and Georgia peach salad offered at Emeril's Atlanta, part of Lagasse's burgeoning restaurant empire, will inspire casual restaurants to use strawberries in a similar way.

"For the top chains, the competitive stress is huge. They're all looking for the next big idea," says DeGroat. She also hopes to influence restaurants with recipes the Commission developed with chefs at the Culinary Institute of America. "There are so many other ways to use strawberries — in a chutney as a topping on meat, in salsas, in sevice. The salad idea is really starting to take off. Just chopping up strawberries in a salad with a vinaigrette is really great."

While trendy dishes can help a restaurant set itself apart, chains are careful not to offer something no one is willing to try. "We've got to have approachable food for consumers," notes Todd Silberg, director of produce purchasing, Darden Restaurants, Orlando, FL, the parent company of Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Smokey Bones, Bahama Breeze and Seasons 52.

New menu items must work well within the restaurant's overall concept, however. Before adding a menu item, says Erickson, Del Taco asks, "Does it fit into our operation?" More than anything, this is the key question when adding a new dish to any menu. **pb**

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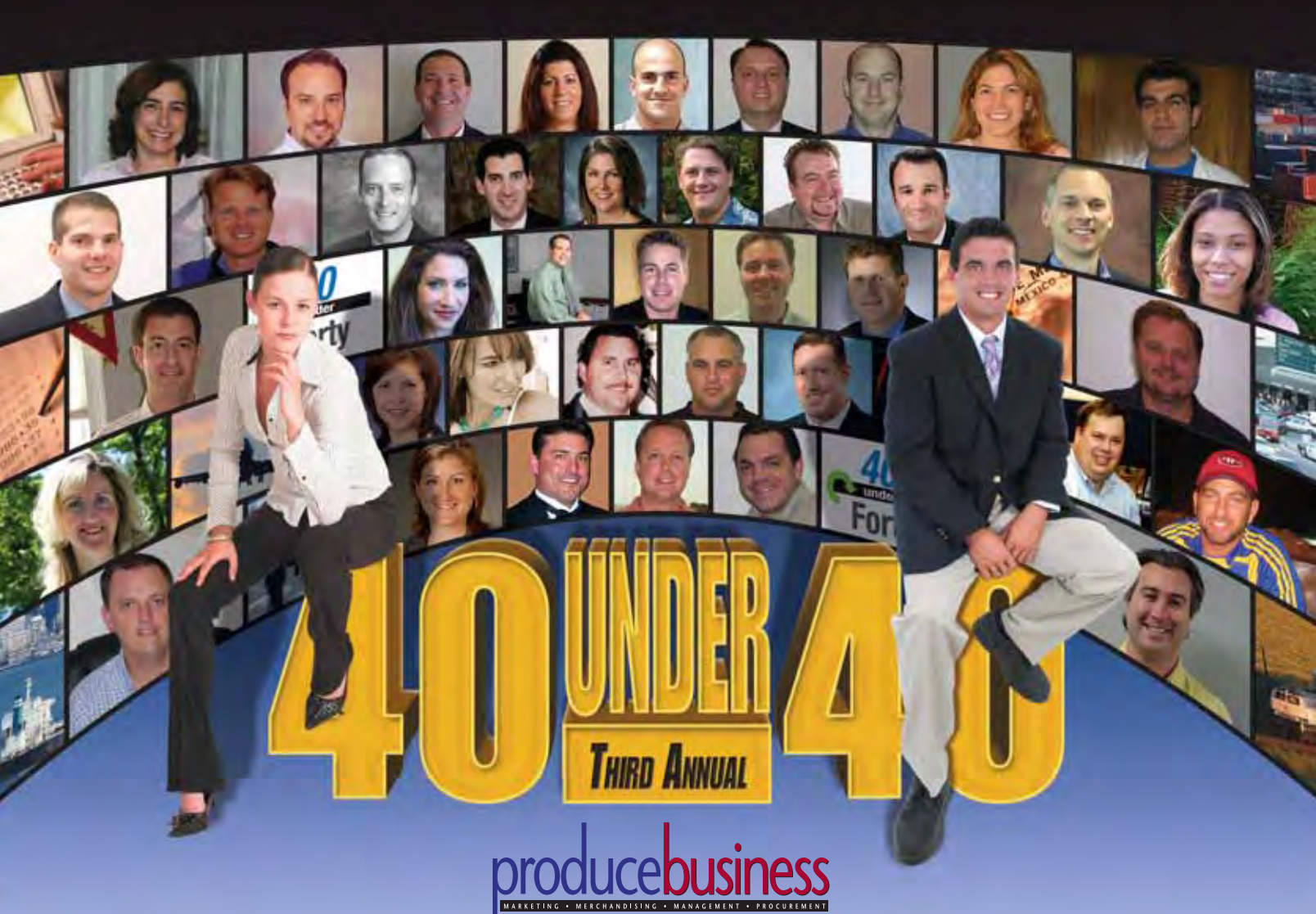
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 Position _____
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 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
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In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

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Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: producebusiness@phoenixmedianet.com



Snack-food companies are beginning to see some competition from the produce department.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

The produce industry has always had a reason to market to children, if only because they make up a portion of overall consumers.

But more recently, in the fight against an alarming rise in childhood obesity, the need to encourage produce consumption among children has become more apparent. The latest call to action from the Produce For Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE, *Fruits and Veggies — More Matters*, aims to increase produce consumption among all consumers, and many retailers and suppliers are taking that message straight to children.

Last fall, Cissna Park, IL-based Hinkle Produce, suppliers of watermelons and pumpkins, began to use the *Peanuts* characters, including Charlie Brown and Snoopy, to make produce more appealing to children. “The whole idea is to target kids, the future shoppers of tomorrow, and to help prevent obesity,” says Dan Hinkle, owner. “There’s a big push to fight obesity.”

“I think the whole issue of childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes is something that we, as an industry, have a responsibility to focus on,” says Mark DeMichaelis, president, Olivia’s Organics, Chelsea, MA, suppliers of organic greens. Through the Olivia’s Organics Charitable Foundation, DeMichaelis has worked with the Joslin Diabetes Foundation in Boston, MA. “It opened my eyes to what’s happening with diabetes in this country.”

“We’ve got to do something to better educate our children on better eating,” notes Hinkle. “There’s so much competition out there to draw them away.”

Retailers, too, are marketing produce more aggressively to youngsters. “One of our priorities is teaching customers to eat more healthfully and live better lives, and children are not excluded from that,” says Nella Neeck, manager of fresh meal solutions, Wegmans Food Markets, based in Rochester, NY. “We realize how important it is to get the message out to them so they can establish healthful

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Photos courtesy of Sternit

Using popular characters, a proven success for grocery items, has been extended to produce department items.

habits for life.”

“There’s so much competition out there with candy companies and soda companies,” notes Mike O’Brien, vice president of produce and floral, Schnucks Markets, Inc., St. Louis, MO. “We’ve really got to start them at a young age.”

“We believe that healthful eating habits begin in childhood. It’s an important way to combat the rise in childhood obesity,” agrees Andrea Astrachan, consumer advisor, Stop & Shop and Giant Food, Quincy, MA, the chain that won the PBH’s National Excellence Award this year. The chains are divisions of Dutch food giant Ahold.

Large corporations that may have been associated with sodas and processed snack foods previously have also gotten in on the act. For example, this winter, Disney characters began popping up on packages of produce. “It is really a change in the company’s policy,” says Andy Tudor, director of sales, L&M Companies, based in Raleigh, NC, one of the suppliers to Disney’s Imagination Farms. Tudor says Disney executives realized they had the power to influence a lot of children and decided to do something about it. “This is something they really believe in.”

That is not to say produce is now marketed to children as heavily as candy or cereal. “We don’t quite have the budget of the big snack companies,” says Tudor. However, when companies like L&M and Disney combine their efforts, “Together, we have the ability to really impact consumption for children.”

But why target the children when parents are the ones wielding the carts and the credit cards? “The parents are making decisions when they’re shopping, but a child’s input can really sway a parent’s decision to buy something or not to buy it,” explains Wegmans’ Neeck.

Lorelei DiSogra, vice president for nutrition and health, United Fresh Produce Asso-

ciation (UFPA), Washington, D.C., points out that children may just be the most important consumers of all — they eat produce, they influence what their parents buy, and they are the future shoppers. “When you reach kids, the ramifications are immense,” says DiSogra. “The cereal companies know exactly what to do. I’m not so sure that we, as an industry, have seen the huge potential that kids provide.”

With all of the kid-friendly, attention-grabbing packaging being added to the produce department, you may wonder if it is beginning to look like the cereal or snack aisles. “Maybe it should,” says Tudor. “You take the whole nagging thing from the cereal aisle and move it to produce, and that’s a real win right there.”

This is one case where no one seems to mind seeing food marketed toward children because, while eating less is the healthful message for most foods throughout the store, “We’re the only department where you can say, ‘Eat more,’” says O’Brien.

RETAILERS REACH OUT

Many retailers are finding ways to reach children through hands-on activities, from special in-store events to take-home activity sheets. Four years ago Shuman Produce, the Reidsville, GA-based suppliers of Realsweet brand Vidalia onions, started Produce For Kids (PFK), based Orlando, FL. The program works with retailers to create customized programs that encourage the consumption of produce. Money raised by the programs is given back to local children’s hospitals. “I think the reason people have gotten so excited about Produce For Kids is because as we’re helping sick children get well, we’re also helping well children stay healthy,” according to Kevin Dunleavy, PFK national sales director.

Dunleavy recommends retailers offer as many hands-on experiences to children as

possible. “Kids’ recipe contests, ‘Iron Chef for children’ cooking competitions — it takes time to do these things, it takes commitment, but I think it will pay off.”

One of the retailers PFK works with is Publix Supermarkets, based in Winter Haven, FL. The stores offer children’s cooking classes as part of their larger Apron’s cooking class program. Here, youngsters can learn simple, healthful recipes they can make at home.

“As with any type of learning, when you get children touching and tasting, like with the Apron’s program, that’s so powerful,” notes Dunleavy.

“You can’t really teach kids about how good something tastes through commercials or curriculums. Experience, to me, is what it’s all about,” says DiSogra of UFPA. While sampling works well, she says cooking classes can be an especially great way to encourage children to try new produce items. “Anything that you can get the kid personally involved in, they’re going to eat their own creations.”

Wegmans offers “Veggie Patch” cooking classes for children ages six through eight. The class was designed for Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, who can earn badges for taking the class. Other children of the same age are welcome, as well.

“The goal is to teach our message of ‘Eat Well, Live Well’ to children of that age,” explains Neeck. “All of our recipes are produce based. We’re really focusing on how to get kids to try fruits and vegetables they may have never tried.” During the 90-minute class, students learn about nutrition, food safety and cooking. Each class makes seasonal recipes focused on produce. For example, during the winter months, students learned how to prepare several types of squash — spaghetti squash with sauce and cheese, acorn squash purée and roasted butternut squash.

“It’s very interesting how many kids become advocates of that item and request it for dinner every night,” note Neeck. For dessert, students learn how to make a rainbow fruit parfait, which is designed to teach them not only that fruit can be a delicious dessert but also that eating a rainbow of colors leads to optimum nutrition. Participants leave with an activity booklet that reinforces what they have learned, as well as the recipes they made that day.

If facilities for cooking classes are not available, there are several other ways to teach kids about produce. During previous back-to-school seasons, Schnucks held an event linked to PBH’s 5-A-Day program. This year, it will be linked to PBH’s new *Fruits and Veggies — More Matters* program.



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Apples with Caramel Dip Are Available for Shipping in March



Photos courtesy of Leafy Greens Council

Getting kids involved with new foods is a great way to gain converts.

better able to put these items on the table. While many children are happy to eat fruit, vegetables can be trickier. “We really have to help the parents there,” says O’Brien.

POPULAR CHARACTERS ADD PIZZAZZ

Several suppliers are following in the footsteps of snack foods, sodas and cereals by developing packaging they hope will appeal to children.

Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, has been using Sesame Street characters for several years. According to Brian Vertrees, promotions manager, Elmo, the No.1 ranked Sesame Street character, will appear on cherry packaging and promotions again this summer. This fall’s apple promotions will once again utilize Big Bird, Cookie Monster and Elmo.

Vertrees recently received a phone call from a consumer in Atlanta who loved the the Sesame Street fruit tote bags and wanted to get them for her children. “Our goal is to tie fruit to something that a positive emotional appeal to the consumers,” he adds. “It’s a win-win for everybody.”

Two years ago, LGS Specialty Sales, Bronx, NY, started a program featuring the popular Nickelodeon characters, SpongeBob SquarePants and Dora the Explorer. Characters from *Blues Clues* and *Backyardigans* were added in 2006. President Luke Sears notes the bags of clementines that feature the characters have more retail success in summer than at other times of the year. The company’s Web site also promotes children’s programs that LGS supports.

Selah, WA-based Rainier Fruit Company, producers of Yo Bites sliced apples, also markets products to kids. The name Yo Bites was designed to catch the attention of kids, and “The labeling is very colorful and splashy and created to appeal to children,” says Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing.

So far, Hinkle Produce has used *Peanuts* characters — including Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and Woodstock — to sell pumpkins. This summer, the characters will appear on graphic bins and on the stickers of watermelons. Hinkle got the idea to use the characters while looking at other grocery items with packaging aimed at children.

Others in the produce business are also beginning to add popular characters to their packaging. The United States Potato Board (USPB), Denver, CO, has a deal with Hasbro allowing approved potato suppliers to print the smiling face of Healthy Mr. Potato Head on bags of fresh potatoes. “I think it gives it a little bit of ‘pop’ on the shelves,” says Tracy Fowler, L&M senior sales specialist, potatoes and onions. L&M uses the character on 8-

gra. “He’s going to bond with you, and your store, and your brand. And he’s not going to forget it.”

Stop & Shop and Giant stores also give class tours that highlight the produce department to children in kindergarten through third grade. “We make it fun for elementary school-age children to learn about healthful eating,” explains Astrachan. “Kids can see, feel and even taste the produce items in our supermarkets. They learn how to make healthful choices in each food group.”

The Leafy Greens Council, based in St. Paul, MN, works with supermarkets such as Lowes Food Stores, Inc., based in Winston-Salem, NC, to give students store tours. Children on the tours get a chance to taste foods made with leafy greens, such as coleslaw and spinach dip, and the council provides take-home items, such as stickers and coloring sheets with dinosaur-based mascots including Cabbagesaurus and Broccadactyl. “The stores like them a lot,” Ray Clark, executive director, Leafy Greens Council, says of the handouts.

Last summer, the Council sent people in Cabbagesaurus costumes to New York state farmers markets to hand out coleslaw and coloring sheets. “We were quite pleased,” Clark says of the successful promotion.

Some handouts are aimed at parents. Stop & Shop and Giant offer a free booklet based on the PBH *More Matters* program that includes a section called *Get Kids Started Early*, with tips on how to get children excited about eating fruits and vegetables. The stores’ circulars regularly feature produce items along with serving tips for that item.

Recipes in Wegmans’ magazine, *Menu*, must meet the company’s minimum requirement for produce. “We’re hoping parents are making these for their children,” says Neeck.

Schnucks regularly includes recipes in its ads for quick, simple, healthful meal solutions that include vegetables, so parents are



Olympic track-and-field athlete Jackie Joyner-Kersey annually acts as spokesperson to encourage kids to eat healthfully and stay fit. “Our goal is to increase produce consumption. We need to start when they’re children,” says O’Brien.

As part of the event, Schnucks also produces a new activity book each year — teachers can use it to teach children in kindergarten through fourth grade about produce — as well as coloring sheets for younger children.

Field trips to tour Schnucks stores are available to teachers at any time of the year. “We’ve always given tours,” says O’Brien. “All our stores give tours, and the produce department is the highlight of that.” During the tour, kids get a “backstage” view of the produce department. They find out where their fruits and vegetables come from and get to try samples of items such as apples and raisins. “It’s good PR for Schnucks, too, when schools take the tour,” he says, because it brings the message of healthful eating to children. “Parents appreciate that.”

“Whatever retailers do for kids, you’re bonding with that kid,” notes USDA’s DiSo-

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pound bags of russet potatoes. He believes it has helped boost sales of this larger bag, as 3- and 5-pound bags usually sell better.

Imagination Farms and Disney Gardens use popular Disney characters, including those from the latest hit movies, on packages of kid-friendly produce. Beginning in April, tote bags of "My Minis," smaller-sized apples, will be available with a variety of characters from *Monsters Inc.*, *The Incredibles* and *Toy Story*. In the fall, pears will be added to the lineup. Each tote has a different character, so "They have more than one character for kids to collect," says Tudor.

"A lot of this is to pull the 'nag' factor out of the cereal department," he explains. "Hopefully, we can help shoppers to encourage kids to eat more fruits and vegetables."

Many retailers are making deals to have popular characters exclusively on the produce in their stores. Wal-Mart has teamed up with PBH to create take-home produce-related activity books with movie tie-ins, such as *Shrek* and *Over the Hedge*.

Last September, Stop & Shop and Giant teamed with Nickelodeon and PBH to create a "Kids' Corner" program. Each month, the stores give away free produce-related activity sheets aimed at children from preschool through kindergarten and featuring Nickelodeon characters from such television

programs as *Blues Clues*, *Dora the Explorer* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. The activity sheets feature a different fruit or vegetable each month, as well as a kid-friendly recipe for parents and tips about healthy eating.

"Our experience has shown us that reaching out to children with fun activities that feature their favorite characters is great way to reach children," says Astrachan.

"Tying recognizable characters to produce is helpful," says PFK's Dunleavy, but he warns, it can be a kind of me-too promotion that does not set your store apart from others as well as other promotions may.

UFPA's DiSogra points out that even their favorites characters will not convince children to try something new. For that, sampling works better. "If it's something that they are already familiar with and have had a positive experience with then characters are going to be a strong marketing tool. It's a cue to a kid to ask the mom to buy it."

Whether they set a store apart or not, popular characters have the ability to make produce more appealing. "When the consumer walks into a grocery store, she's got a budget. The idea is to draw her more towards fresh fruits and vegetables, so she'll spend more there," says Hinkle. He believes the Snoopy watermelon bins will bring big profits this summer. Hinkle Produce tested

high-graphic bins like these three years ago in stores with good results. "They sold over twice as many melons from the graphic bins over plain bins," he says. "If kids were attracted to the graphics, parents assumed it had to be a better product." In fact, the melons were the same.

Hinkle also spoke directly to kids about the bins. "When we developed the watermelon bins, I actually went to a local third-grade class and got their opinions."

The company chose the *Peanuts* characters because of their broad appeal, not only to children of all ages but also to adults who remember the comic strip and television specials. "The *Peanuts* characters have been around forever and they'll go on forever," he predicts. And because people do not outgrow *Peanuts* — as they might some other cartoon characters — as children get older, they will be less likely to feel they have outgrown a brand associated with them.

The same idea often applies to Disney characters. "That's the nice thing about Disney — everybody can associate with Disney, from a child to grandparents," says Tudor. "Every year they come out with a home-run movie. This year there was *Cars*."

While some suppliers and retailers invent their own characters, Hinkle wanted to use a well-known set of characters. "Doesn't it

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make sense to use something well known rather than something new?" he asks. Plus, there are numerous occasions for product tie-ins. "They're always doing their TV specials. They have the Christmas special, the Halloween special — even Thanksgiving. It seemed like a natural to me. Plus, it works. That's the bottom line."

MEDIA

While most produce companies do not have the budget for major television advertising campaigns, some do find ways to get their message onto television while children are watching. This spring, Olivia's Organics, suppliers of organic greens in the Northeast, is sponsoring local Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations in New Jersey, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Western Massachusetts.

DeMichaelis says Olivia's had a specific reason for choosing public television, beyond the fact that children are bound to be watching. "Our goal here, as we market our company, is to use funds that serve a dual purpose. This is a great way to market our company as well as support public programming." The ads, which say, "Eat healthy, have fun, and give back," will run during episodes of *Curious George*.

In keeping with the Internet savvy of today's children, several retailers, suppliers and organizations, have developed websites for kids in addition to sites for parents and teachers. At the children's Web site developed by the H-E-B chain of supermarkets based in San Antonio, TX, children can play online games such as Whack-A-Snack, a game similar to Whack A Mole, where the object is to hit the healthful snacks such as carrots, apples and milk and ignore sugary treats like candy bars and cola. A produce-based memory game on the site lets children match cards with objects including broccoli, bananas and potatoes. Parents and teachers can also find helpful information, such as recipes for frozen banana pops, on the site and there is a section on how to set up a school field trip to a local store.

At the The Leafy Greens Council Web site, teachers can print out lesson plans designed for second through fourth grades, which incorporate leafy green vegetables into ordinary subjects, including math and language, as well as fun activities, such as coloring sheets and trading cards featuring the council's dinosaur-based characters. They can also print out colorful posters for the classroom. "They're teaching about the nutritional value in a fun way," explains



Publix offers kids' cooking classes.

Photo courtesy of Produce For Kids

Clark.

Packages of produce from Imagination Farms and Disney Gardens include a Web address where consumers can find fun activities for kids, child-friendly recipes and nutrition information presented by popular Disney characters, as well as tips for parents who want to raise healthy children.

No matter how the message is sent to children, "The main thing is to reach them often," says Bryant Wynes, PBH senior executive of retail marketing. "Kids need frequent repetition to get them to try something new. It may take eight, nine, 10, 12 times. But reality is, given the choice, kids do like fruits and vegetables." **pb**

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Reader Service # 74

Spring Grapes Promise A Taste Of Freshness

Managing this quick "deal" calls for flexibility.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Grapes grown in Mexico and the southeastern part of California enjoy enough warm weather early in the year to produce a bounty of freshness beginning in May.

While grapes from the Sonora region of Mexico generally kick off the spring grape season, the Coachella Valley is the home to the bulk of the early domestic grapes.

Variably referred to as the "desert grape deal" or the "spring grape deal," these juicy orbs arrive just when people may be feeling tired of grapes that have been held in storage.

"On the front end, there is always storage overlap," says John Pandol, Mexican sourcing manager for Pandol Brothers, Inc. in Delano, CA. "Some

years it's planned a little better than others. A late season Chilean deal tends to be more about speculation on the late end than about planning. So more often than not, at March 15th we don't know what our May 1st situation is going to be, especially if there's a weather event. How much is in cold storage in Chile is close to a state secret."

Fresh grapes from Mexico also arrive in significant amounts at this time of the year, adding to the spring deal volume. In 2005, grapes imported from Mexico through the crossings at Nogales, AZ, and Calexico, CA,

amounted to a little more than 18 million boxes, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service.

"Mexico is in the exact time period so obviously the overlap is 100 percent," says Mike Aiton, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Sun World International in Coachella, CA.

According to Veronica Kraushaar, president of Nogales, AZ-based Viva Marketing Strategies, which represents the Sonora Grape Growers Association, "The size of the this year's crop is looking more and more like the 2005 size crop — plus or minus 10 percent. There should be a normal start around May 5 and then it will take two to three weeks to pick up full steam. Eighty percent of the deal will come off in 40 days, supplying the ad periods covered by the last few days of May through mid July. The Sonora season is 60 to 80 days long now, and this year I'd guess 70 days."

What makes the desert grape deal different has a lot to do with freshness and the pressure to pick and distribute a large volume in a short time.

Gary Blank, president, Spectrum Produce in Tucson, AZ, believes what makes the spring grapes unique is they represent the beginning of a brand new grape deal. "It's the freshest, newest crop at the time."

"In that 60- to 80-day period we have two transitions — one from the southern hemisphere and one back to the Central Valley. Plus we are pretty much shipping fresh harvest everyday and we're not shipping out of inventory," explains Pandol.

"It's a lot of grapes compacted into a very short time period," adds Aiton. "It's really a race against the clock. We have two things working against us — one is the extreme heat that hits us in July, and the second is the rest of the California grape crop. That accounts for 80 million boxes and about 7 million of that is in Coachella. So we need to get rid of that 7 million because that other 73 million is breathing down our necks. We try to get out by the 4th of July so it's fairly frantic."

For retailers, this fast-moving deal means watch-



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Reader Service # 59



ing reliable numbers and being ready to seize the opportunity.

"The most important thing to do is not blindly look at last year's numbers," cautions Pandol. "The day is won by the most flexible."

"It's a great opportunity to kick off the summer sales season," adds Aiton. "I don't think there's another commodity in the department that responds as well as grapes do to promotion. There certainly is no reason not to have a different grape or a different pack style in every ad you write during that time period."

"Grapes from the Coachella Valley are the first California grapes to arrive for the

season," relates Cindy Plummer, vice president, domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC) in Fresno, CA. "Consumer research shows that 90 percent of consumers prefer grapes from California over imported grapes."

A POTENTIALLY VOLATILE MARKET STILL REQUIRES PROMOTION

The clamor for fresh grapes as the hemisphere is coming out of a period of stored grapes means prices can be volatile while promotable volumes build.

"The desert grape deal starts out very high and it starts out high because it's a sup-

"From income tax day to Memorial Day is probably the toughest ad period to plan and those who insist on trying to plan their calendar way out tend to be wrong."

**— John Pandol
Pandol Bros., Inc.**

ply and demand thing," says Spectrum's Blank. "For example, a heavy end of a red grape deal will affect the beginning of a new crop of red grapes. It typically takes about 10 days from the time they start before volumes begin happening. Once you start get-



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Fresno, CA



With proper promotion, the spring grape deal offers the opportunity to create momentum to carry the grape industry into the fall.

ting those promotable volumes, that's when the prices come down and they start rockin' and rollin'."

"The whole retail tone for April and May tends to be fairly volatile for all of your commodities," says Pandol's Pandol. "From income tax day to Memorial Day is probably the toughest ad period to plan and those who insist on trying to plan their calendar way out tend to be wrong. They force things. Last year the Sonora grape deal was shorter than even the pessimistic estimates, and the prior year it was bigger than even the optimistic estimates. So there's definitely some volatility in this time frame."

"The quality is very good but it's also promotion driven," says Sun World's Aiton. "I think to make this happen we have to stimulate a lot of ads. It's great for the industry because it gets the shelf space for the grapes when they first come out at good reasonable prices, and hopefully that momentum can carry the grape industry all the way into November."

Blank says a typical desert deal runs from May into early July.

"The historical start date is May 4th, plus or minus five days," says Pandol's Pandol. "But when we start looking at when the volume begins, that happens in late May. That's when it gets down to where there's the minimum critical mass to really start doing some produce planning." He also emphasizes that near the end of May there are multiple varieties available and the whole deal usually runs about 80 days. He says sometimes it can run 10 days beyond the 4th of July.

Aiton says peak volumes in June from

both Mexico and Coachella signal the historical time when the greatest amounts of grapes are sold from these early-producing regions.

According to the CTGC, there are more than 60 varieties of grapes grown in California. Some of the varieties that come in at this early time deliver high volumes. "In the United States, the highest volume varieties

**Varietal changes
continue to move
forward with
emphasis on
extending the
production season
while delivering new
tastes to consumers.**

are Autumn Royal, Crimson, Flame, Perlette, Princess, Red Globe, Ruby Seedless, Sugraone and Thompson," says Plummer.

Varietal changes continue to move forward with emphasis on extending the production season while delivering new tastes to consumers. Some see the potential for certain varieties to eventually disappear.

"There are always new varieties coming

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Packaging Evolution In A Mixed Bag

As with other produce items, packaging continues to be a source of newfound merchandising opportunities, albeit carrying some cautions from the growing world.

"From our latest shipment data available, we show that 37 percent of California grapes were shipped in bags, 8 percent in clamshells, 23 percent in slider bags and 18 percent in zip-lock bags," recounts Cindy Plummer, vice president, domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC) in Fresno, CA.

"Everybody has a different idea of how they want their grapes packed," adds Mike Aiton, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Sun World International in Coachella, CA. "It's basically an ala carte kind of a program, just depending on what people are looking for. The standard box size is 16x20 and it contains about nine or 10 plastic bags, so each box has 18 pounds of grapes. Clamshells are increasing in popularity as the club stores have really fueled that growth. We now offer 2-, 3- and 4-pound clamshells and we also do mixed colors. So you could get a 3-pound clamshell with red, black and green grapes. That's something that's taken off in the last few years. Every year, it just gets bigger and bigger. The benefits of clamshells for a retailer are fixed weight, it's tamper resistant, there's less shrink, they cool faster and the grapes are scannable."

"I see changes in packaging every year," relates Gary Blank, president, Spectrum Produce in Tucson, AZ. "There are companies now that do 18-pound bags and then there are 2-pound clamshells, 4-pound clamshells, so it's all driven basically by what the retailer is looking for."

"The concept of standardized packaging is getting almost obsolete," continues John Pandol, Mexican sourcing manager for Pandol Brothers, Inc. in Delano, CA. "The packaging deal is sometimes being



driven illogically. People want to package a certain way based upon a very narrow perspective of a benefit." He tells a story of slider bags being sought in order to prevent slips and falls. Since the grower could not ship the bags closed, this task fell to the buyer who did not follow through adequately. In the end, it was discovered the original bags that were causing the problem were just too small and that was leading to the issues with grapes falling from the bags and becoming a slip hazard. He also points out that because the desert deal is so short, it is difficult to accommodate package changes, and growers can end up losing money on leftover packaging.

"I think you're starting to see some backlash against the special packs because growers are saying all these special deals require more people and they tend to be slower. So they are taking a second look at this in the face of not getting the crop off in time or losing it to weather," he concludes. **pb**

out of these areas," says Spectrum's Blank. "I expect to see more Crimsons coming out of Mexico in the near future. Right now the white grape of preference out of Mexico seems to be the Sugraone."

"There has been growing interest in other grape varieties and they are about 5 percent of the deal," says Viva's Kraushaar. "Sonoran growers and agricultural researchers are out and about checking out what's available. Some growers have made arrangements with international companies to grow unique varieties. Understandably, they are not talking about these."

"In the desert we see quite an influx of black seedless varieties," says Sun World's Aiton, "and then also a lot of Perlette have come out in favor of Sugraone." Sugraone, which he describes as very crunchy and sweet, is a patented variety exclusive to Sun World up until a couple of years ago. This variety comes to harvest between Perlette and Thompson.

"There always seems to be interest in new varieties," continues Pandol. "I think

they're looking for ways to eliminate labor. A Perlette is a variety that has a tremendous amount of labor during the entire production process. People have a little bit so they can get their season going, but no one is planting huge amounts of Perlette and I would say there's a tendency for it to disappear." Because of the inputs necessary to bring grapes to full production, growers are looking for ways to extend their seasons and new varieties are looked at for their potential to do that, he explains.

"I think black seedless is the variety that's being most heavily planted and Sun World has been leading the charge on that with our Midnight Beauty, patented exclusively to us," Aiton adds. "We've been ramping up the acreage in production over the past few years based on the response and consumer acceptance of a black, seedless grape. We start with that one about the 25th of May and it goes clear into September. We started with 5,000 boxes six or seven years ago and now we're way up there. If you look at Mexico and Coachella combined, red is first [in pop-

ularity] followed by green [white] and then black. Black has been probably doubling every year for the past four or five years."

Grape harvests can vary based upon weather so growers are cautious about predicting times when varieties will begin to flow to market.

"The varieties that make up 85 to 90 percent of the deal are Perlette that start first out of both areas, and once they are done, the Sugraone starts," says Spectrum's Blank. "Red globes and black seedless don't start as early as the other varieties. They get started more toward the end of May or early June."

"Flame starts usually a few days after Perlette and they go into the third week of June," Pandol of Pandol Bros. notes. "There's an effort to spread them out more. Thompson is a minimal amount."

Aiton considers a typical start date for Perlette and Flame to be May 5th, Sugraone sometime between May 15 and 20 and Thompson around June 5th. If Chile ships stored Crimson into the United States, he says, they may arrive in April and May. **pb**

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Windows Of Opportunity

Importers of spring fruit commodities from New Zealand and Australia evaluate possibilities in the wake of California's January freeze.

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Even before the sun came out and the fields thawed after the freeze in California this past January, there were dire predictions of severe shortages and big price spikes for citrus, avocados and strawberries.

Looking around retail produce departments several months later, it appears that most of the early predictions have not materialized. PRODUCE BUSINESS wondered if the freeze opened the door for greater flows of fruit from Australia and New Zealand and contacted importers to get their sense of the upcoming seasons.

Their opinions reinforce the magnitude of the changes in the industry over the past decade. Fresh fruit truly is a global market; a shortage in one country invites product from a variety of other nations — as long as relationships are in place, the product is good, the price is right and the exchange rate works. Like oil, produce has become fungible,

with sources more easily replaced than in the past if the need to do so arises.

Any discussion of successful import seasons needs to go beyond fruit quality and crop size. Increasingly, importers and sales organizations point to factors such as exchange rates, labor supply and cost, fuel costs, market timing and preferences for specific varieties or sizing.

Andrew Southwood, vice president of business development, Fisher-Capespan, St. Laurent, QC, believes California's citrus losses will have no impact on citrus imports to the United States because the navels from the southern hemisphere do not arrive until the last week in June. "We import citrus from other southern hemisphere countries with about the same timing. A key factor is how much of a premium a product carries when it enters the United States. In a sense, the United States is a consignment market, and the value of the fruit is determined by the market and its competition."

International shippers have become very smart marketers and virtual experts in relative currency values; with worldwide networks of relationships they ship to where they can make the most money. Certainly customer loyalty is important and strong relationships are carefully protected, but there is always a proportion of product that can be moved to fill market openings. Increasing fuel costs can make markets closer to home more desirable because it affects the traditional U.S. premium carried by fruit from the southern hemisphere.

Still, U.S. importers are optimistic about the 2007 season for New Zealand and Australia.

APPLES AND PEARS

Because of timing, apples and pears could be the first fruit commodities to feel the impact of freeze-related gaps. Scott Marboe, director of marketing for Oneonta Trade Corporation/Starr Ranch, Yakima, WA, comments, "In the first three weeks after the freeze, we saw a definite increase in retail apple orders as stores needed to replace varieties of citrus suddenly too expensive or unavailable for



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Photo courtesy of Oppenheimer Companies, Inc.

promotion.

"Now it's back to an excellent but normal sales season. Last year's Washington crop was smaller [than average]. Demand has been strong and retailers have better pricing power. Imports of fresh New Zealand apples — varieties such as Gala, Fuji, Braeburn, New Zealand Rose, New Zealand Queen, Cripp's Pink (Pink Lady) and Granny Smith — drive the apple category starting in May and keep it strong and lively into summer. We've ramped up our plans for the year," he continues.

Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, is one of the largest importers of New Zealand fruit. According to Tom Richardson, general manager of the Wenatchee Division, "We expect Washington Galas to clear by the end of April, opening expanded opportunity for New Zealand apples. We import a full complement of apple varieties. The timing of varieties this year is good.

Amerifresh, headquartered in Seattle, WA, imports all New Zealand apple varieties. Greg Reinauer, senior vice president, plans to have the first Gala arrival from New Zealand during the last week in March. "We promote the concept of 'New Zealand, New Season' to communicate that these are fresh harvest apples. Our partners sequentially harvest and pack varieties so that fresh varieties appear as the season flows. We can then differentiate markets and customize plans for retailers. For our company, this has been successful and we have increased the volume of New Zealand apples annually since deregulation," he explains.

Taking advantage of imports, Washington apple shippers have become year-round suppliers to retailers and, thanks to imports, the apple category has extended its traditional strength year-round. According to Ed Kershaw, CEO of Domex Super Fresh Grow-

ers, Yakima, WA, "It's hard to identify any single cause but life in the apple industry is good. We have higher prices and amazing movement and it will carry over into the import season starting in May. As a nation, we are more dependent on outside supply. There's much more scrutiny of alternatives and there's lots of competing product.

"In the end, it's all about your ability to position fruit based on your customer and what their customers want. We've all become more expert at growing, sequencing varieties, technology for sorting and separating, storage, distribution and global sourcing and sales. It's a much different industry than just a few years ago," he adds.

Pears also command some of the retail spotlight. David Nelley, director of the apple and pear category, Oppenheimer Companies, Inc., Vancouver BC, points to Taylor's Gold, a Comice type pear as an early import with strong demand. "With a retail price range of \$2.49 to \$3.99, this is a premium pear and we sometimes struggle to meet demand for it. Our other New Zealand pears — Bosc, Comice and Concorde — start in April and run through July, filling the spring slot. We expect a good year with good returns for retailers, growers and ourselves."

NEW ZEALAND KIWIFRUIT

New Zealand is expecting one of the largest kiwifruit crops in years, with most of the increases in the green variety. Describing New Zealand as the market leader, Steve Woodyear-Smith, Oppenheimer's kiwifruit category director, notes, "As usual, Zespri is targeting North American markets with volume and we estimate about a 30 percent increase in flats over last year. It looks like the season will have a normal start date in May. That's about three weeks earlier than last year."

Planning for the crop includes ads and promotions as market support for retailers. Woodyear-Smith recommends retailers start New Zealand kiwifruit as soon as it is available, expand the shelf space and promote early and often. "The gold variety adds interest to the category. This year's crop is high quality with consistent flavor and texture and will provide an outstanding consumer eating experience," he adds.

Giumarra's Richardson reinforces expectations for a good New Zealand season in North America. "We also expect a very good season for both green and gold New Zealand kiwifruit with excellent quality — better than in 2006. The first arrivals will be in mid-April."

New Zealand kiwifruit tends to carry a premium that prices it a bit higher than fruit from other sources. Stressing the stabil-

ity of markets, importers maintain that focusing on trade segmentation of markets and needs determines the value and that there is little consumer resistance to better prices for high-quality fruit.

AUSTRALIAN CITRUS

When importers refer to citrus from Australia, they really mean navel oranges because navels constitute the bulk of the volume. DNE World Fruit Sales, Fort Pierce, FL, is the exclusive importer of Australian citrus into the United States. Stu Monaghan, national sales manager for DNE, projects 2007 navel imports to the United States at 1.85 million cartons, up from 1.45 million cartons in 2006. Last year's total was the result of a freeze in Australia's southeastern citrus growing region.

"Product should be available the last week in June. We will also ship about 500,000 cases combined of Minneolas, tangerines and tangelos. Quality for the 2007 crop is excellent," according to Monaghan.



Photo courtesy of Fisher-Capescan

"Our strong relationships with growers in Australia mean that we can offer retailers their preferred sizing on fruit, generally 56 to 72. We can help retailers offset hot ads to drive the volume.

"We've made good progress in moving consumer perception that quality citrus is a year-round quality retail offering. It takes a critical mass of supply to have well-stocked displays of good fruit to drive consumer demand. Our big competition is soft fruit from California and Clementines from South Africa and Spain that can have lower costs," he concludes. **pb**

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Reader Service # 58

INCREASING MANGO PENETRATION ONE HOLIDAY AT A TIME

Innovative "Cinco de Mango" promotion builds on holiday theme.



BY CHRIS MICHAELS

The National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, is introducing "Cinco de Mango," a promotion to spotlight mangos in the weeks leading up to Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican holiday commemorating Mexico's victory over the French in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. The mango, Mexico's favorite fruit, is a centerpiece of many celebrations, and the NMB can provide recipes, artwork and merchandising plans to enable retailers and wholesalers to take advantage of the holiday.

Creative promotions and in-store demos can help produce departments increase mango sales while highlighting the growing popularity of this ethnic holiday. Cinco de Mayo is becoming more mainstream, a selling occasion that fills in the gap between Easter and Memorial Day.

"We are excited by the fantastic opportunities to highlight mangos during Cinco de Mango promotions this year," says Wendy McManus, NMB marketing director. "We believe Cinco de Mango is a creative way to connect with consumers and bring them the fun and excitement of mangos with these two great recipes." The NMB has developed a new mango salsa recipe and a new drink it calls the Mango-rita.

Cinco de Mango is a new way for retailers to promote Cinco de Mayo and increase mango sales. The NMB is preparing a Cinco de Mango Mango-rita Kit, known as "Cinco de Mango in a Box," containing all the makings (except tequila) for a mango Margarita plus recipe cards for the Mango-rita and mango salsa. The kits will go primarily to consumer affairs personnel at targeted chains. The effort is designed to convince retailers to feature the promotion, plus other information about mangos, in their consumer communications and Web sites. Cinco de Mango in a Box will also be distributed to targeted consumer media. Prior to Cinco de Mayo last year, NMB's Chicken Mango Quesadilla recipe generated more than 10 million media impressions through a release on the Associated Press wire to newspapers across the country.

With America's booming Hispanic population, Cinco de Mayo is becoming a special occasion that rivals St. Patrick's Day. Many communities conduct food festivals to highlight the Mexican culture. In Mexico, children grow up eating mangos, and the mango's popularity is spreading. Import statistics show mangos from Mexico and other producing countries are becoming more popular with all consumers, not just Hispanics.

In 2006, the United States imported a record 424 million pounds of fresh mangos from Mexico and 669 million pounds of fresh mangos overall, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Market News. Mexico accounted for nearly two-thirds (63.4 percent) of U.S. total mango imports last year, making it the largest shipper of fresh mangos to the United States.

Mexico's U.S. mango exports increased from 356 million pounds in 2005 to 424 million pounds in 2006, up 19 percent. The 2006 import total topped the previous record for Mexico of 385 million pounds in 2003, according to Market News.

Per-capita U.S. consumption of fresh mangos has nearly tripled from 0.67 pounds per person in 1992 to 1.9 pounds in 2005. Official figures for 2006 have yet to be released, but last year's huge crop is expected to elevate per-capita figures above 2.0 pounds. According to Market News, the top five volume months for Mexican mango imports last year were June, July, May, August and April.

pb

United Booth Review



Fresh Marketplace was formerly the United Produce Show

May 5 to 8, 2007 — Chicago, IL

CPMA Booth Review



Starts on Page 46

82nd Annual Canadian Produce Marketing Association Convention and Trade Show

May 9 to 11, 2007 — Palais de congrès Montreal, QC

UNITED FRESH MARKETPLACE

aisle 9400

9439 DISCOVERY GARDEN'S LLC
Oakdale, CA
Come and strike Gold! Sierra Gold® is the potato everyone's talking about. It has the rich, creamy texture of a golden potato as well as the hearty skin of a Russet. Its sweet, buttery, toasted flavor will satisfy all potato lovers. Sierra Gold is the perfect potato for the everyday gourmet.



aisle 9500

9537 MELISSA'S/ WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE
Los Angeles, CA
The largest provider of specialty produce nationally will feature its extensive categories: organic, Latin, Asian, tropical fruits, value-added and exciting items like Dutch yellow potatoes. New products include: low-glycemic agave syrup, mixed baby heirloom tomatoes, Cool & Calm jalapeños, fragrant pears, Hawaiian apple bananas and assorted radishes.

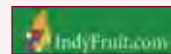


aisle 9600

9601 GREEN GIANT FRESH
Eden Prairie, MN
Come taste the best! Green Giant Fresh is a marketing organization comprised of leading produce companies and business managers. Our common objective is to provide the retail and foodservice trade with premium quality fresh fruits and vegetables, marketed under the Green Giant Fresh brand. Stop by and look at our new products!



9627 INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT CO., INC.
Indianapolis, IN
Your premier Midwest produce specialist. We offer over 100 quality produce categories, including Asian, Hispanic, floral, organic and Garden Cut® processed fruits and vegetables. Leader in innovation, customer service and partnership education. Over 150 refrigerated trucks monitored 365 days a year.



aisle 9700

9711 WELL-PICT INC.
Watsonville, CA
Well-Pict's premium strawberries, all from our own proprietary varieties and bred for superior flavor, are available year-round in 100 percent modular packaging for the common footprint. We also ship premium blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, with organic programs available for strawberries and raspberries. Drop by our booth to learn more!



9721 SUNLIGHT INTERNATIONAL SALES, INC.
Delano, CA
Sunlight International Sales, Inc. is situated in the heart of central California and exclusively markets premium table grapes grown by Jakov P. Dulcich & Sons. We offer the finest quality grapes July-December and ship all major varieties, including Thompson, Flame, Ruby, Crimson, Black Seedless, Autumn Royal, and Red Globe.



aisle 9800

9801 DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE, N.A.
Miami, FL
Fresh Del Monte offers retailers and foodservice operators an array of innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers. Our extensive distribution network allows just-in-time deliveries of our premium quality fresh products to your doorstep.



9827 PROCACCI BROTHERS SALES CORP./SANTA SWEETS, INC.
Philadelphia, PA
Wholesale/retail distributors; private labelers; importers. Organics, tropicals, Mexican specialties, chestnuts, pre-made gift/fruit baskets. Santa Sweets is the exclusive grower/shipper of: Santa Sweet Grape Tomatoes®, UglyRipe Heirloom Type Tomatoes®, CAN-A-DEW™ and CAN-A-SWEETS™ Melons; and Thir-rind SWEET Mini-Watermelons.



aisle 9900

9919 APIO, INC.
Guadalupe, CA
Founded in 1979, Apio, Inc., markets a full line of fresh-cut vegetable bags, salads, sides and party trays under the Eat Smart brand. To extend shelf life and preserve freshness naturally, Apio utilizes its exclusive Breatheway technology, which provides an optimal atmosphere within the package.



9928 ALLIANCE RUBBER COMPANY
Hot Springs, AR
Great produce packaging choices from Alliance — innovators in packaging solutions. American-made rubber bands and PLU bands: imprinted to meet PLU and COOL requirements. Available with custom imprints to brand your product. ProTape offers many PLU band benefits, plus bar coding and is easy to use.



9932 E.J. COX COMPANY
Clarkton, NC
In business since 1902, E.J. Cox's Sachs branded in-the-shell peanuts are quickly becoming the most recognized name when it comes to peanuts. High quality, competitively priced, guaranteed on-time delivery, innovative Tabasco Infused product, and customized promotions are just a few of the reasons you should consider Sachs. Come see Terry Williams & Sam Cox.

9934 MIXTEC GROUP
Pasadena, CA
Since 1984, MIXTEC Group has been providing exceptional executive recruitment, leadership consulting and human capital management services in the fresh produce industry. Our philosophy is simple: The best person in the produce industry is currently working for some company. Why not yours?



UNITED FRESH MARKETPLACE

9940 DAVE'S SPECIALTY IMPORTS, INC.

Miami, FL
"The Berries You Love to Eat" We are a grower, importer and shipper of fresh blueberries, raspberries and blackberries from Argentina, British Columbia, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, Michigan and Oregon. Distribution throughout the United States with year-round supplies of berries — let us help with your berry needs.



9941 HOLLANDIA PRODUCE

Carpinteria, CA
Hollandia Produce, home of the award winning family of Live Gourmet brand hydroponically grown vegetables, invites one and all visit us at booth 9941 at the United Fresh Marketplace in Chicago. Harvested with its roots intact to preserve freshness. Live Gourmet is "Absolutely fresh because it's still Alive."



10001 DRISCOLL'S

Watsonville, CA
Driscoll's mission is to continually delight berry consumers with year-round availability of fresh strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries, both organic and conventionally grown. Learn how to build excitement and profits with a year-round, destination berry patch featuring the trusted quality of Driscoll's premium berries —The Finest Berries in the World®.



10011 SENSITECH

Beverly, MA
Sensitech and Carrier Transicold transport refrigeration systems team up to provide end-to-end in-transit quality. Sensitech's time and temperature monitors collect data that can be analyzed to benchmark SOP compliance throughout the supply chain. Carrier's EverFresh is the only self-contained container refrigeration unit in the industry that maintains specific atmospheric conditions while holding temperature for international shipments.



10017 HINKLE PRODUCE

Cissna Park, IL
Hinkle Produce has secured the national right to the Peanuts characters for branding watermelons.



10132 BLUE BOOK SERVICES

Carol Stream, IL
Blue Book Services provides produce businesses worldwide with timely credit rating and marketing information available in the Electronic Blue Book (EBB) on CD-ROM, online and print Blue Book formats. Membership includes *Blueprints* — *The Produce Professionals' Quarterly Journal*, Credit Sheet updates, comprehensive business reports, and Trading and Collection Assistance.



10133 CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION

Watsonville, CA
Why are strawberries America's favorite fruit? Stop by and learn how this healthful indulgence can be a profitable star for you. The California Strawberry Commission provides valuable category data and useful consumer insights and is the ultimate resource to help you capitalize your strawberry sales. Eighty-seven percent of all U.S. strawberries are grown in California.



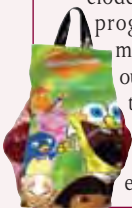
10138 PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO BOARD

Charlottetown, PEI
PEI Potatoes — Serving you ... the taste of distinction, the assurance of quality! The unique, rich red soil of beautiful PEI produces a distinct taste that has created a demand around the world. Our growers offer: russet, red, round white, yellow fleshed, blue potatoes, baby potatoes, fingerlings and organic.



10140 BORTON & SONS, INC.

Yakima, WA
Borton & Sons, grower/shipper of quality apples, pears and cherries, continues to introduce new and innovative marketing programs to drive sales at retail. Our Nickelodeon apple, pear and cherry program continues to build momentum. Come check out our exclusive Nickelodeon vertical soft-net bag featuring Dora, SpongeBob, Backyardigans and Avatar! Stop by and explore the possibilities.



10141 BALLANTINE PRODUCE CO., INC.

Sanger, CA
As a vertically integrated fresh produce company, Ballantine Produce Co. focuses on growing, packing and marketing premium quality peaches, plums, nectarines, pluots, table grapes and other seasonal and specialty fruits. Through innovative, customer-centric category management strategies, Ballantine ensures optimum results to all stakeholders in the value chain from farm to consumer.



10211 CRUNCH PAK, LLC

Cashmere, WA
Crunch Pak Sliced Apples is the recognized leader in sliced apples with new product, cutting edge technology and branding. The first with organic, the only with Disney Garden. Crunch Pak can meet all your sliced apple needs from two ounces to five pounds. Come see us for our latest updates.



10219 NATURIFE FARMS, LLC

Naples, FL
Perk up your berry category with vibrant color and variety from Naturipe Farms. Our new label is guaranteed to capture the attention of your shoppers, and the great tasting berries will keep them coming back for more. Naturipe Farms grows and markets a complete line of conventional and organic berries year-round.



10220 MISSION PRODUCE, INC.

Oxnard, CA
Mission Produce is a global packer, importer, processor and distributor of avocados and asparagus. Our ripening and distribution centers in California, Denver, Chicago, New Jersey, Atlanta, Dallas and Seattle enable just-in-time delivery to customers nationwide. New at Mission is our year-round asparagus program.



10233 CAVENDISH PRODUCE, LTD.

Charlottetown, PEI
Cavendish Produce is your one-stop supplier of top quality potatoes. Russets, whites, reds, yellows, blues, fingerlings, organics... we have what you're looking for. Retail or foodservice; orders are packed to bring you value through premium products and packaging. We are your Fresh Produce Specialists.



10240 NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Trenton, NJ
The NJ Department of Agriculture represents New Jersey's vast agricultural industry and uses the Jersey Fresh marketing and advertising program to showcase the 100 different varieties of Fruits and Vegetables grown in the "Garden State".



10311 MARIE'S SALAD DRESSING

Brea, CA
Since 1959, Marie's has been delivering the highest quality dressings and dips. Today, Marie's continues the tradition of creating delicious products with the homemade recipe and taste consumers love. Marie's offers a full complement of dressings and dips, in a variety of sizes, found chilled, only in the produce section.



AISLE 10000

AISLE 10100

AISLE 10200

AISLE 10300

10319 DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES

Ft. Pierce, FL
DNE World Fruit Sales offers year-round citrus of the highest quality. Our experience in growing, packing and marketing fruit from Florida, Texas and California, as well as sourcing fruit from around the world, can help grow your citrus profits all year.



AISLE 10400

10401 CALIFORNIA GIANT, INC.

Watsonville, CA
To provide premium products and service exceeding customer expectations every day, Cal Giant has promotional programs to fit every age and every lifestyle, whether customers are interested in featuring the Sesame Street "Healthy Habits for Life" Initiative, the American Heart Association certification mark or our top ranked amateur cycling team.



10411 GRIMMWAY FARMS

Bakersfield, CA
The nation's largest grower/packer/shipper of fresh, processed and frozen carrots, organic carrots and baby carrots. Grimmway is also the nation's leading grower/packer/shipper of organic vegetables with more than 18,000 organically certified acres. With juice, citrus and conventional potato divisions, Grimmway offers its customers the very best quality produce.



A family of Growing companies.

10442 NORTH BAY PRODUCE CO., INC

San Francisco, CA
North Bay Produce is a globally operated, grower-owned marketing and distribution cooperative. North Bay Produce grows and distributes a continuous range of fruits and vegetables throughout the year from the United States and Latin American farms.



10601 AG-PAK, INC.

Gasport, NY
Ag-Pak will showcase the NEWTEC Celox RV12 optic potato grader/sizer. The Celox RV12 makes automated defect grading a reality! The machine handles over 15 tons of potatoes per hour. Each potato's surface is fully revealed to the machine's patented camera section and photographed over 35 times to ensure accurate sizing and grading!



AISLE 10600

10631 FOOD SAFETY NET SERVICES

Food Safety Net Services is a comprehensive, integrated network of laboratory, consulting, auditing and educational services complemented by crisis management programs and regulatory support. We offer a wide scope of ISO/IEC 17025 and USDA accredited microbiological and chemical analytical testing services, and specialize in product shelf life assessment, validation and verification studies.



AISLE 10700

10701 MASTRONARDI PRODUCE, LTD.

Kingsville, ON
Mastronardi Produce, North America's leading grower/shipper of gourmet greenhouse vegetables, introduces the NEW Ancient Sweets! These long peppers have a naturally high brix level. Great for salads and stuffing, they are available in a variety of innovative packages. Visit our booth to see our full lineup of Sunset quality-assured gourmet greenhouse vegetables.



10719 NATURALLY FRESH FOODS

Atlanta, GA
There are lots of different ways to make a salad. The secret, of course, is finding a dressing that not only brings out the best in a salad, but also keeps customers coming back for more. Created from Parmesan and Romano cheeses, Feta cheese, Bleu cheese and savory spices, we think our Naturally Fresh® Four Cheese Italian is that dressing.



10728 SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE, INC.

Oxnard, CA
San Miguel Produce, Inc., the creator of Cut 'n Clean Greens, specializes in the cooking greens niche and offers 12 varieties of farm fresh, ready-to-cook greens. As third generation farmers, San Miguel Produce is committed to providing the freshest and most nutritious greens for the food industry.



AISLE 10700

10813 DULCINEA FARMS, LLC

Ladera Ranch, CA
We stand behind the Dulcinea Promise. We promise to provide the best produce eating experience in any season. Dulcinea's unsurpassed taste and consistency is growing the category by exceeding consumers' demands. We hand-select each product from the finest growing areas year-round. Dulcinea's produce is unsurpassed in taste, consistency and exceeding consumers' needs.



AISLE 10800

10821 OCEAN MIST FARMS

Castroville, CA
Artichokes have been found to have more antioxidants than all other vegetables. With health and nutrition issues high on the national agenda, growing awareness of the nutrition benefits of fruits and vegetables is likely to translate into a rise in consumption of artichokes. See the Artichoke experts at to help build your Fresh Artichoke program.



10833 PRODUCE PRO, INC.

Woodridge, IL
Produce Pro provides software designed specifically for the business and operational needs of produce distributors. We've got every tool you need to take your business to the next level — including fully integrated accounting, inventory management, powerful pricing logic, user-friendly order entry, e-commerce, business analysis, warehouse management and more.



10935 CONWED GLOBAL NETTING SOLUTIONS

Minneapolis, MN
Conwed Global Netting Solutions is the industry leader in providing innovative and comprehensive single-source plastic netting solutions. Our different lines of "value-added" packages include header bags, net bags, mesh bags, bio-degradable and custom designs for newly launched products, citrus, organics and gourmet fruit and vegetables.



AISLE 10900

11001 EUROFRESH FARMS

Willcox, AZ
Eurofresh Farms is the nation's leading grower/marketer of premium quality, pesticide-free greenhouse tomatoes available every day of the year. Eurofresh produces TOV, Roma, cherry and Campari tomatoes and English cucumbers in a 315-acre glass greenhouse complex in Arizona. Eurofresh has consistently received the annual ChefsBest Award for best-tasting tomato.



AISLE 11000

11011 WATSON TRADING COMPANY

Hillsdale, MI
Complete fruit basket program setup. Come visit our booth and learn how easy it is to set up a profitable and unique fruit basket program for your stores. Create eye-catching displays that will add visual interest and excitement to your produce department with our line of display baskets.



11036 CRYOVAC, SEALED AIR CORP.

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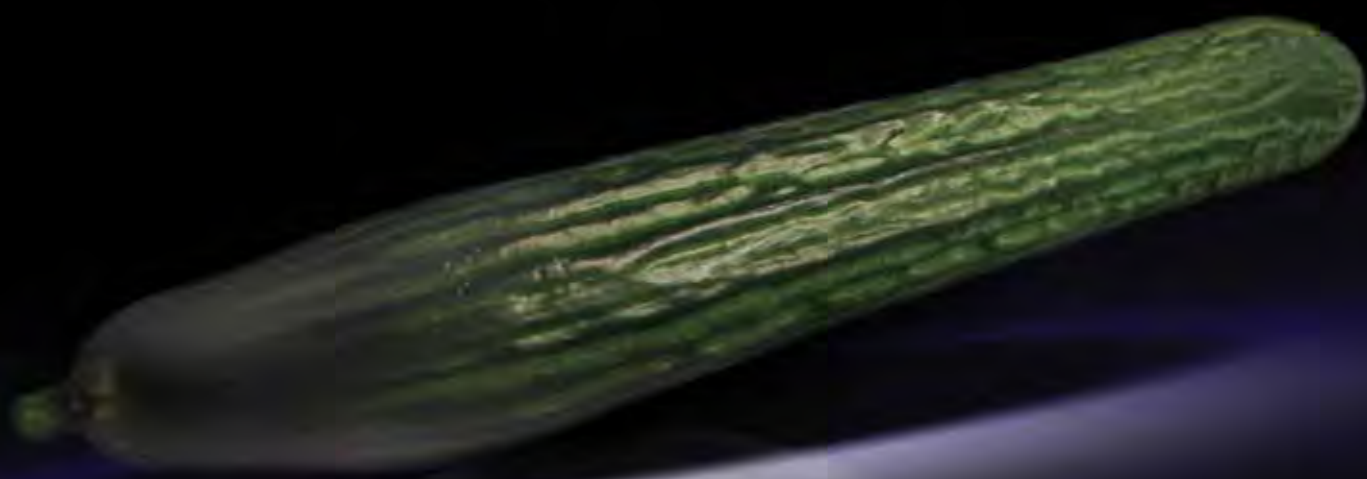
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Anticipating Southern Vegetables

The South produces old favorites and grows new varieties to supply the nation with vegetables throughout the summer months.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Summer is often thought of in terms of sweet, juicy fruits that arrive fresh from the orchard, but summer is also characterized by the many fresh vegetables that become available from the farms of the South.

The arrival of fresh southern vegetables is an opportunity that should be anticipated and promoted. "I believe running the bulk ads and having a lot of product on the shelf is a huge plus in increasing sales," notes Ashley Rawl, director of sales and marketing at Pelion, SC-based Walter Rawl & Sons Inc., which began canning fresh vegetables and peaches more than 75 years ago.

Rawl produces yellow squash, zucchini, jalapeño and specialty peppers in summer and collard beans, mustard greens, turnip greens, kale, green onions, cilantro, parsley, turnip roots, beets

and radishes throughout the year. The company also produces a variety of value-added products.

As southern vegetables arrive, many customers' thoughts turn toward outdoor cooking. "A lot of vegetables you can grill," says George Wooten, president of Chadbourn, NC-based Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co., a leading producer of fresh, processed and fresh-cut sweet potatoes since the 1930s. "It depends where you are. Some people call it barbecuing and some people call it grilling — it's cooking outside. Grilling a lot of vegetables is very tasty."

SQUASH, POLE BEANS AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

Some of the fresh summer vegetable harvest is in crops that are traditional to the Southern diet, although many are no longer considered regional.

"When I think of Southern vegetables I think of crookneck squash, okra and pole beans," explains Harry Sheaffer, sales representative at Marker 29 Produce, Lake Park, GA. "These days I guess you would throw in bell peppers and cucumbers. But old school Southern vegetables are crookneck squash, pole beans and okra. We sell a lot of pole beans and okra, bell peppers, green beans, squash, eggplant and cabbage for the majority of the growing season."

The range of vegetable crops grown in quantity on southern farms has increased in recent years. "We are the largest carrot shipper outside of California," Sheaffer claims. "Carrots are a pretty new deal for the South. The carrot we produce in Georgia is very sweet. It's comparable to or better than the California carrot."

Marker 29 has two warm-weather growing seasons in Georgia. The



first harvest begins in April and continues into July. The second picks up in September and continues into December.

Major summer vegetable crops include green beans, Holloway cucumbers, bell peppers, straight neck squash, zucchini squash and all the specialty squashes.



Green beans are a major southern vegetable crop.

Southern vegetable grower and marketer Rosemont Farms, headquartered in Boca Raton, FL, offers year-round production from its own farms and alliances with growers in southern states, says Hurley Neer, vice president of sales and marketing.

"We bring bell peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, squash and other southern vegetables to the market," he says.

"Our biggest summer crops would be yellow and green squash, tomatoes, cucumbers and cabbage," says Martin Eubanks, senior marketing specialist at the South Carolina

Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia, SC. "Some things might not be available when it gets really hot, but we generally are shipping something all year long."

"Peppers are a huge crop for us," says Eubanks. The spring pepper harvest in South Carolina begins in May and runs until the frost in October or early November.

"We have four of the big multi-state tomato companies here in Virginia," says Butch Nottingham, marketing specialist at the Virginia Department of Agriculture in Richmond, VA. "They'll start harvesting the first or second week in July and keep going until there is frost. "Green beans are also important. We have the largest packer of green beans in the country in Virginia. They'll start harvesting in May and go until the frost."

Virginia also harvests and ships a wide variety of potatoes in the summer. "We grow round white superiors the most," adds Nottingham. "But we also grow red skin potatoes, some Yukon gold and a few acres of Russets." The potato harvest begins around the 10th of June, depending on the weather, and continues into early August

"Cabbage comes in around Memorial Day," says Bailey's Wooten. "The zucchini squash, yellow crookneck squash and eggplant would probably come in around the beginning of June, and the bell peppers a little after that."

The collard greens, mustards and turnips start to pick up before the summer crops at Rawl. The volume of the green onion harvest also increases in the summer months. "As far as our summer crops, we would harvest the most sweet corn, yellow squash and zucchini squash," Rawl says.

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Reader Service # 101

Pompano Beach, FL, the major summer vegetable crops include green beans, Holloway cucumbers, bell peppers, straight neck squash, zucchini squash and all the specialty squashes. "In the summer months cucumbers, green beans and corn are the top items," says Ed Myrick, owner.

Because the supply and variety are bountiful, some producers believe the key to merchandising is an aggressive pricing policy. "They've got to get in the right ball park on the price if they want to sell in volume," Myrick Produce's Myrick suggests. "The retailers should try to move more product by lowering the price. Most of the consumers would be more receptive."

NATIONWIDE DISTRIBUTION

Most of the vegetable grower/shippers in the South regularly sell to markets in every area east of the Mississippi River.

"Probably 75 percent or better of the harvest is shipped out of the area," says SCDA's Eubanks. "Our major market is up into the Northeast. We ship everywhere east of the Mississippi from Miami to the Canadian border."

Rawl & Sons Inc. harvests and ships to virtually everywhere east of the Mississippi.

"We grow in Georgia and we ship to all 48 states," according to Myrick

Some shippers find faraway markets for specialty crops from the South. "You might sell a few of the old Southern vegetables in big markets in New York and Chicago," Marker's Sheaffer says. "All those guys use that stuff because they have people from the South."

A few producers are even shipping Southern crops around the world. "In times past we have shipped to pretty much every state in the country," Wooten says. "On sweet potatoes, we ship all over the United States, and we export."

Some of the firms have fully embraced the global economy, with the goal of supplying as many crops as they can over as many months of the year as possible.

"We have farms in Florida and all the way up the East Coast through North Carolina," says Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director for Raleigh, NC-based L & M International, which supplies a full range of fruit and vegetable products from its network of 13 locations across the country. Bell peppers, squash and eggplant are among the most important of the summer vegetables, according to Oxford.

But these crops and others are available

Merchandising Tips

Freshness is a major selling point as summer vegetables in the produce department replace vegetables in the frozen-food cases. "Introduce them as being fresh," Wooten suggests. "If they are local, maybe you can highlight that and include some pictures of the producers."

One way to highlight local vegetables is to parallel the highly successful farmers market format. "Retailers can set up a farmers market-like atmosphere in their parking lot if they want to compete with all the produce stands," says Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director for L & M International. Raleigh, NC. "In the summer we like to focus on the homegrown aspect of the vegetables."

Another merchandising technique is to publicize recipes based on locally grown vegetables. "Concentrate on recipes highlighting locally grown items," suggests Harry Sheaffer, sales representative at Marker 29 Produce, Lake Park, GA. "A lot of people like to buy stuff as local as possible. We work with guys trying to create a private label, and I think that can also help with sales."

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12 months of the year from L & M. "We don't like to be seasonal," she adds. In order to maintain a year-round supply of produce, L & M supplements its own southeastern growing operations with produce from Arizona, Texas and even as far away as the apple orchards of Washington state. "The only crop we don't do all year-round are cherries," Oxford notes.

"Our nationwide system of distribution centers enables us to provide high quality product when and where our customers need it," says Rosemont's Neer.

"Our goal is to exceed our customers' expectations, not only by having timely delivery but through innovation. We continue to work on development of new varieties and utilizing new ag practices, which enable our farms to use sustainable growing techniques that appeal to health- and environmentally-conscious consumers," he adds.

The Southeast Produce Council of Sun City Center, GA, represents a broad range of agricultural producers from throughout the region. Its Web site includes considerable information on produce from the region, including a list of a substantial number of Southern produce suppliers.

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Marketed under the registered trade name of EarthFirst, the product offered by Plastic Suppliers is as good as and often better than petrochemical-based films pertaining to machining, printing, product finishing and overall appearance. Examples of our films outstanding properties are lower initiation heat seal temperature, improved shelf life, increased productivity, natural dyne level of 38, superior scratch resistance, FDA compliant and heat tolerance up to 142° F, not the 104° F stated by others.

"One thing that makes Plastic Suppliers unique is our blown film process," says Rich Eichfeld, vice president of business development. "We are the only manufacturer that is successfully blowing 100% PLA resin into a viable flexible packaging product at the commercial level."

This blown film process is cost effective and it results in PLA film that has very high heat resistance compared to other PLA films on the market. "The general rule of thumb in the industry is that distortion occurs at 104° F," Eichfeld explains. "Our EarthFirst products hold up at much higher temperatures and that has implications related to shipping, storing and using it on equipment. We are unique in our heat resistance compared to other PLA films.

EarthFirst PLA is BPI certified, meeting ASTM D6400 test criteria. EarthFirst PLA film breaks down in industrial compost facilities quite readily in the presence of heat, moisture and bacteria.

EarthFirst is a pure biopolymer even though it is virtually indistinguishable from typical plastics. "It looks like any other plastic, and you may mistake it for plastic made from petrochemicals. There are absolutely no additives to this product that can migrate to the surface. There are no petrochemical plasticizers and no slip additives, nothing will leach out of this product," Eichfeld says.

The products made from this material are currently in use as packaging for spinach and tomatoes. Future prospects include green onions and broccoli. EarthFirst is also being used in shrink sleeve labels, folding carton, overwrap, lidding, tamper evident and windowing applications.

It can be used in applications where modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) technology is being incorporated. One very important characteristic of EarthFirst PLA film is its very low heat seal initiation

temperature; therefore, sealing the material into packages takes less energy. Eichfeld says this allows processors to dramatically reduce their equipment operating temperatures.

Scott Cordial, the company's marketing manager adds that one of the reasons people in the produce business are looking at this material is because of its rigidity, referring to the sound the film makes when handled. "It depicts freshness," he explains, "because it sounds crispy."

While developing produce industry clients Plastic Suppliers discovered that by educating end users like growers in the product's abilities those potential end users would request the product through their package suppliers. Today, the company counts River Ranch and New-Star among their clients.

Eichfeld is enthusiastic about the role this product can play in making the world a little bit greener. "Sustainability is defined as the ability of the current generation to meet its' needs without compromising the needs of a future generation," he says. "This product allows that because it is an annually renewable resource that can fit into a cradle to cradle program. The corn is grown, converted to a PLA film, from which a package is made, the package is composted when its useful life is up and that compost is then fed back to the land to grow new corn. What we offer the brand owner is the option of packaging nature-in-nature. If enough of this material is in the market place the product can also be recycled."

Cordial adds some interesting facts regarding adopting the use of this product. "The energy savings gained from using 100 pounds of biopolymer film, or EarthFirst, versus 100 pounds of petrochemical-based plastic film saves 14 gallons of gasoline or enough energy to power a 100 watt light bulb for eight months. Plus, in the production of biopolymer resins, the CO₂ savings is equal to eliminating carbon dioxide emissions from an automobile for a six week period."

EarthFirst PLA film is readily available. For more information contact Plastic Suppliers at 1-866-ERTH-1ST or visit us online at: www.earthfirstpla.com.

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Reader Service # 32

PRODUCE PACKAGING PORTFOLIO

PRIMARY PACKAGE, INC.

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P rimary Package was recently named exclusive representative in the United States and Mexico for world-renowned S.A.M.M.O., the Italian manufacturer of complete systems for the treatment and packaging of fruits and vegetables. Already representing Infia, the largest manufacturer of thermoformed packaging for fruits and vegetables in Europe, Primary Package can now bring even more innovation to packaging applications.

"We have a reputation as an innovative company in terms of developing packaging for new applications," says Scott Cernosek, president. "We can call on a wide variety of resources when we address a problem. We can address equipment and materials issues plus a wide variety of technical considerations like post harvest physiology. We have a lot of contacts in the academic community and work closely with them in developing many of these solutions. Our international contacts add to our large perspective on consumer packaging for fruits and vegetables."

A new patented innovation is a peel-and-seal label for clamshells. It does double duty as a tamper-resistant seal that works especially well for field-packed produce. The label is being shared with others in the produce industry because it meets a critical need. The affiliation with Infia has allowed Primary Package to offer a trace-back system for several years. This solution, widely used in Europe, relies upon specially labeled containers that travel from field to consumer. Specific information about product in the containers is sent by wireless readers that update a database. Primary Package also supplies biodegradable containers, modified-atmosphere packaging and sorting and packaging machines.

"We're specialists and we stick to consumer packaging for perishables — that's what we do," sums up Cernosek. "We are focused on trying to advance the science and art of consumer packaging for the fresh produce industry. We're known for being innovative and for creating applications in packaging that improve efficiency and safety."

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The company that introduced the clamshell to the berry industry 20 years ago continues to re-engineer packaging for produce in the 21st century. By continually thinking about “what is best for the produce” Sambrailo innovates its way to success.

“We recognize trends and opportunities in produce packaging and fill the demands of our customers,” says Jim Scattini, director of new business development. “The company’s been in existence for 84 years now. Our thorough understanding of the needs throughout the supply chain guides our continuous innovation of new products.”

Sambrailo’s latest success story is the one-piece, dual-hinged Snap Flap container. While this clamshell is currently being used for shed-packed spinach and spring mix, it can be applied to almost any product. In addition to keeping its contents fresh, the Snap Flap allows the processor to eliminate steps from the production process, gives the retailer a “tamper-evident” seal and provides the consumer with a versatile, reusable container.

Scattini also points to the patented MIXIM® line of packaging systems. “MIXIM® was created as a modular system,” he explains. “The clamshells’ and trays’ unique alignment of vents promotes more efficient cooling. Similarly, the clamshells’ smooth-sided walls reduce mechanical damage and enhance store-shelf presentation. In addition, the MIXIM® system saves transportation cost by maximizing pallet cubage.”

Sambrailo is currently at work on labeling-systems that will help with product traceability, new multi-pack clamshells for artichokes and other commodities, and applying “smart” lid stock for their Snap-Flap line to serve the needs of the fresh cut industry. The company also has plans to supply corn-based packaging during the coming year. Sambrailo is also excited about the opening of a Florida production facility and warehouse this March.

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Reader Service # 13

Eight Ways To Sell More Sweet Onions

Sweet onions are no longer a seasonal item but are instead a sought-after, year-round necessity.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

It is difficult to find a produce department that does not offer sweet onions.

"Five years ago, we only stocked sweet onions as in-and-out special buys," explains Mike Kemp, director of produce, Save-A-Lot, a 1,252-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, and a subsidiary of Super-Valu, based in Minneapolis, MN. "Today, they are a regularly stocked core item.

"There is some price sensitivity over sweet onions. That was our biggest challenging in introducing them. Consumers see 29¢ to 39¢ per pound for the storage onions and 49¢ to 59¢ per pound for the sweets and wonder what's up. So, we've used signage and other means to educate customers. In the future, I think sweet onion sales will continue to grow and take the whole category with it. I don't think they'll cannibalize storage onion sales, just add volume and dollars to the overall onion category," he notes.

1. INCREASE CATEGORY SHARE

"Consumers continue to gravitate more and more toward the sweet onion category," says Matt Curry, president, Curry & Company, Brooks, OR. "Sweet onions by nature have a milder taste, but another important element is they tend not to make the user cry. That's important. I think this point gets lost within the onion-growing community because we're accustomed to growing an ingredient that makes your eyes tear when using it to prepare a dish. Talk about a deterrent to use! Sweet onions accomplish both — great taste and ease of use."

"Whereas consumers once thought of using sweet onions in raw applications, they are now cooking more with them. One of the big factors is the growing popularity of caramelized onions. With their high sugar



Consumers, who have come to love sweet onions, expect to find them year-round.

content, sweet onions are perfect for this use. In short, they are now treating them as a versatile all-purpose onion," says Rodger Helwig, the San Francisco, CA-based marketing communications director for Oso-Sweet Onions. "I've heard figures bandied about of 30 percent to 40 percent of onion sales come from the sweet category."

According to Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral, Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain based in Carson, CA, year-round availability "is what has made sweet onions the onion of choice for many of our customers."

The profit in sweet onions, notes Jim Richter, executive vice president of business development for Market Fresh Produce, Springfield, MO, "comes from having a year-round sweet onion program. In the short term, I think we'll see incremental sales from sweet onions. In the long term, as we continue to promote them, we'll see the benefits of a sweet onion program from a dollar stand-

point. The dollars will be there in sales of medium, jumbos and colossal sweet onions sold by bag and in bins. At that point, we'll see storage onions relegated to a bagged value item. So what we'll end up with is a two-tier program — premium and value."

Barry Rogers, president, Sweet Onion Trading Company, Palm Bay, FL, sees the future slightly differently. "I think we'll get to the point where the three big onions at retail will be reds, whites and sweets."

2. STOCK YEAR-ROUND

Sweet onion supply follows a cycle that begins and ends the year with South American imports and has sweet onions from domestic growing regions in between.

"If I were a retailer," says Helwig, "I would use the following plan for promotion: OsoSweets from Chile in the winter. We promote our onions to consumers as the winter sweet onion. Then Texas Sweets and

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Vidalias from Georgia in the spring, Walla Wallas from Washington in the summer, and then the best quality sweet onions I could find in the fall."

"We just finished up our Patagonia Sweet program from Chile at the end of February," explains Curry's Curry. "Our inaugural season went extremely well and we have really demonstrated the quality and sweetness we can deliver from Chile. It is a category item."

Maui onions out of Hawaii start in February. Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, notes, "Maui onions have

experienced a decline in production of about 10 percent due to a rise in competition and growing space in Hawaii. Other sweet onions are eclipsing their availability slot and they are a more expensive variety."

"This season Texas had a number of issues during planting to reduce the length of the season and this may lead to a gap between Mexico and Texas. Vidalia looks to be the most logical sweet onion ripe for promotion as retailers come off very tight supplies and high prices. The end of April would be the ideal time to begin promotions for Vidalias," Curry adds.

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce, Inc., Reidsville, GA, notes, "Vidalias peak in May and June. They're definitely a

"I think we'll get to the point where the three big onions at retail will be reds, whites and sweets."
**— Barry Rogers
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spring staple, something consumer's look forward to."

The fresh Vidalia crop lasts through mid-July, when controlled atmosphere storage Vidalias take over and last into Labor Day.

Wendy Brennan, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA, adds, "We produce a range of sizes, but the jumbo Vidalias are most popular, our bread-and-butter. The colossal size is in demand for blooming onions, while baby Vidalias are a niche for salads."

Carzalia Sweets out of New Mexico are available from June through September. "We've worked on breeding our onion for 15 to 20 years. It has a sweet flavor and very low pungency with a pyruvate level of only 3," says Chadelle Robinson, marketing director, Carzalia Valley Produce, Columbus, NM.

"This is our fourth season, and since we compete with the Vidalia season, our strategy is to really push west of the Mississippi. With over 3,400 acres under cultivation, we have good volume for promotions and a freight advantage over Vidalia for markets on the West Coast," she adds.

Walla Walla sweet onions out of Washington state hit their promotional volume from the last week of June through the middle of August, says Bryon Magnaghi, general manager of Walla Walla Gardeners, Walla Walla, WA. "Heat curing prior to packing has improved shelf life and quality. We have conducted controlled atmosphere trials, but then questioned if it would be economically viable to extend the season due to the start of imports from Peru.

"When the Walla Wallas finish, we start with the Washington Sweets, which continue into December. They're a different hybrid variety and not quite as mild as the Walla Wallas," he adds.

New on the sweet onion scene is the Sweetie Sweet, grown and marketed by Peri & Sons Farms, Inc., Yerington, NV. It is a sweet onion variety grown from an exclusive



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Weather Woes Drive Prices Higher

One of the challenges to merchandising sweet onions is year-round supply, says Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral for Bristol Farms, based in Carson, CA. "It was an unusual year weather-wise and supplies were short, plus demand for sweet onions is increasing all the time."

"There's usually a seamless supply of sweet onions year-round, sometimes gluts of domestic and imports," adds Barry Rogers, president of Sweet Onion Trading Company, Palm Bay, FL. "It's not normal to have a prolonged shortage over 12 months, but that's what we've seen this year. It started with Vidalias last year, then affected Peru, Chile, Mexico and Guatemala. It's all weather related."

Looking ahead, Steven Phipps, owner and sales and marketing director at Market Fresh Produce, LLC, Springfield, MO, notes, "Early crop projections of an approximately 30 percent supply decline and anticipated high prices continue to be confirmed for the upcoming Mexican/South Texas growing season. Of the two areas, Mexico seems to have fared a little better supply-wise. However, experts are saying there will be an unusually high percentage of onions that will stay in Mexico, therefore affecting the

amount of volume available for the U.S. market. This will keep a demand-exceeds-supply situation.

"Quality is reported to be sound, but they are reminding us that new crop onions are generally mostly bald with very little cured outside skin. There are also mis-shaped [torpedo] onions, which seem to be more predominate this season," he continues. "This is caused by the early rains at the beginning of the growing season. Once we get more into the actual Texas onions, that condition should minimize. Mexican onions should go until the first week of April, then Texas should be ready barring any weather issues that may occur between now and then.

"Growers are very concerned with the upcoming season as the supplies and pricing are going to be very unsteady throughout the season. Similar to Mexican reports, descriptions of the Texas onions indicate they will be light skinned. Please keep in mind that Mexican/South Texas onions are fresh-out-of-the-ground product, not storage, so continuous turnover is needed to maintain the best quality," he concludes.

The Vidalia onion season will start around April 15 and early reports point to a very good quality crop. **pb**

proprietary seed that is harvested in August and is available throughout fall and winter.

"Sweetie Sweet in an onion that fills the domestically grown supply niche in the fall and winter," explains Jessica Peri, sales and

marketing. "Since Sweetie Sweets are grown domestically their freshness appeals to retailers. Retailers are also recognizing Sweetie Sweet as a fun, new brand that is attractive to moms and kids."

The company began test marketing Sweetie Sweets in September 2005. Volumes last season were sufficient to supply retailers nationally and the upcoming season is also projected to have national supply, Peri



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3. OFFER ORGANICS

Organic, according to Bob DeBruyn, president of DeBruyn Produce, based in Zeeland, MI, "hasn't seemed to be a big deal in the onion category."

However, interest in organics shown by large conventional retailers as well as natural foods and specialty retailers has led some onion growers/shippers/marketers to step into this arena.

Melissa's imports organic sweet onions from Peru from September to March. Beginning in February 2007, the company started importing and marketing organic sweet onions from Bolivia. "These onions are produced at high altitude in the Andes," Schueller says. "They have a much sweeter taste than Maui onions." Melissa's markets organic sweet onions in 3-pound vexar bags.

"More of our growers are getting into organic Vidalias. In fact, about 200 of our total 12,300 acres are devoted to organic," VOC's Brannen says

Five years ago, Hendrix Farms, Metter, GA, became the first organic Vidalia onion grower. "We've seen more interest every

year," says Kevin Hendrix, vice president at Hendrix Produce, the company that markets the organic Vidalias.

There is not a huge supply of organic Walla Walla onions, says Walla Walla Gardener's Magnaghi, "but there's a few."

Next year, says Peri, "We'll have a good volume of organic Sweetie Sweets."

4. ASSURE SWEET ONIONS ARE SWEET

After year-round availability, says Market Fresh's Richter, "Certification is the second big trend in sweet onions."

Bristol Farm's Gallegos would like to see certification become widespread.

Save-A-Lot's Kemp, however, does not consider certification to be paramount. "What is important is that the vendors we do business with will look for, search out or use the growing practices that will produce a sweet onion that our customers want to buy and buy again. We look for consistency and set that out in our specifications."

Lara Grossman, director of business and marketing development, Tanimura & Antle, Inc., (T&A) Salinas, CA, explains why she thinks certification and assuring customers onions are sweet is crucial. "There are no industry guidelines to regulate what allows an onion to be labeled as sweet."

The problem, Grossman continues, "is sweet onions sell at a premium compared to storage onions and this premium is tempting to cash in on even if your onion may not be sweet to the taste. Marketing orders have added a good bit of assurance that an onion grown from a specific region to a specific standard will be sweet. However, testing is an additional level of assurance.

"There are two parts to making an onion sweet. The first is the genetic potential of the plant itself. Over the past 20 years or more, we have developed proprietary sweet onion lines by naturally selecting and reproducing plants that have mild and sweet flavors. The second part is the natural cultural practices of the growers. The bottom line is all about flavor," she adds. T&A is the first company to offer certified sweet red onions.

Marty Kramer, sales manager for the northeast office of Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., Greencastle, PA, notes, "We're a proponent of certification. It's key to deliver a positive eating experience to consumers and encourage repeat sales."

Standardization of certification will not happen any time soon, according to Kim Reddin, director of public and industry relations for the National Onion Association (NOA), Greeley, CO. "There has to be a consensus on methodologies as well as guide-

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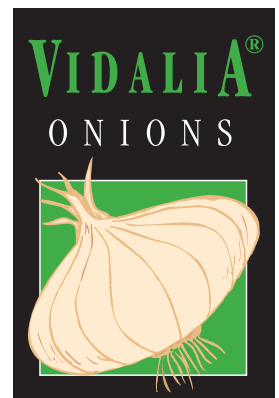
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lines on sugar and pyruvate levels and what there should be in relation to one another to be meaningful.

"I feel the road to a standard certification that's adopted industry-wide needs to start at the research level. If not done correctly, we run the risk of confusing customers and losing their confidence in the sweet onion product," Reddin adds.

5. DISPLAY BOTH BULK AND PACKAGED

Bulk sweet onions sold individually are the preferred merchandising method at Save-A-Lot stores. However, says Kemp, "We will also have a special-buy bagged Vidalia onion when these are at their peak of the season, a bag with nice graphics and information about the product. We move a lot of volume this way."

Although many consumers prefer to purchase sweet onions in bulk, says Chris Eddy, vegetable sales manager for the central region, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, McAllen, TX, "Three- and 5-pound bags are also quite popular."

VOC's Brannen notes, "With more one- and two-person households, we're seeing a preference for smaller consumer packs, 2-, 3- and 5-pound bags of Vidalias rather than 10-pound bags and boxes that are sold primarily through club stores."

In general, adds Walla Walla's Magnaghi, "It's medium size onions that are packed into consumer bags rather than large, jumbo or colossal size onions."

"Typically, at 99¢ per pound, I think bag sales of medium sweets are a good value and usually a good ring for the retailer," notes Curry's Curry

Packaging is a great way to educate customers and promote sweet onions, believes OsoSweets' Helwig. "We think bags work well because they provide an opportunity for us to tell our story. There is only so much you can put on a PLU sticker."

"We're offering a new consumer bag this season for two reasons," says Shuman's Shuman. "First, a high graphics bag makes the Vidalias more visible. Second, we put storage and handling tips and recipes on the bag."

Clamshells for sweet onions, says DeBruyn's DeBruyn, "are unnecessary and ineffective, first due to size and second breathability."

6. BUILD A WELL-SIGNED DISPLAY

Sweet onions are prominently displayed at Save-A-Lot stores, notes Kemp. "Onions are on a wall merchandiser next to potatoes. The potatoes occupy two-thirds of the display and onions one-third. In the onion sec-

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tion, sweet onions are in the prime position, while 3-pound bags of storage onions are on a lower level. Stickers on the sweet onions assure the correct ring, while signage lets customers know the onions are sweet."

Sweet onions should be clearly identified with point-of-sale (POS) material, agrees Duda's Eddy.

Size-wise, says OsoSweet's Helwig, "there's nothing like a mass display to move product. Our wood crate shipping boxes are ideal for building stand-alone and large displays. The crates give a farm fresh look and help to tell the story behind the product. POS like price cards and banners help sell the display too."

"Utilizing a bin or carton on high traffic end caps with appropriate signage should create significant movement," advises Eddy.

Banners touting the availability of Walla Walla onions were well received by retailers last year, relates Walla Walla Gardeners' Magnaghi. "This year, we'll be offering a whole new bin design for club stores. Bins are usually low graphic, but ours will have full color graphics. The bins are ideal for merchandising 5- and 10-pound drawstring bags of Walla Wallas."

Market Fresh offers a one-touch high graphic box, says Richter, "that is labor saving and ideal for building eye-catching over-

flow displays."

7. EDUCATE CONSUMERS

There is much emphasis today on adding flavor to food, says T&A's Grossman. "If customers are provided with usage ideas, even just a POS visual, it will instantly call to mind how easy and satisfying sweet onions are."

"Sweet onions add exceptional flavor to salads, sandwiches, hamburgers, salsas, dips and vegetable medleys," notes Melissa's Schueller. "Show or tell customers how to sauté or slowly roast sweet onions to enhance their sweetness."

Carzalia's Robinson adds, "So many consumers see sweet onions as just a seasoning. They're a vegetable, too, and healthful as well as fast fixing."

Demo sweet onions sautéed in a little butter and serve in a soufflé cup, recommends Richter. "You can also demo them in the deli foodservice area by offering them as a choice on sandwiches."

Grossman agrees, adding, "In the deli, consumers often seek the components of an 'ideal sandwich.' Consumers will pay a premium for a particular cheese and buy their favorite hoagie rolls. Putting a basket of sweet onions in the area might create some cross-purchase excitement.


"Another more obvious area of opportunity is in the meat department. Onions and meat go extremely well together. Just as merchandising a basket of lemons next to the fish case increases ring, a basket of sweet onions in the beef area should provide some lift," she continues.

Sweet Onion Trading's Rogers advises, "Cross-promote onions as well as mushrooms and peppers in the meat case as kabob fixings."

Set up a fajita focus in the in-store flyer or ad circular advises says Carzalia's Robinson. "Feature flank steak and sweet onions."

"Grilling season is an ideal time of the year to cross-promote sweet onions in the meat department," says Eddy. "Since they can be stored at room temperature or refrigerated, cross-promoting with ground beef and steaks during this time of year can create movement in both categories and provide the consumer with a meal solution at the same time."

This season, VOC is offering its 'Very Vidalia Recipe Contest' from May 1 to Aug. 17. "The in-store campaign will encourage customers to create and submit grilling recipes using Vidalia sweet onions. To support this promotion, we have a POS kit that contains a 22x 28-inch poster, 11x 7-inch shelf price cards and a tear-off recipe book-



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Reader Service # 100

Texas Sweet Onions

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Texas spring sweet onions are the first domestically harvested onions of the year. March arrivals of the early-maturing varieties from the Rio Grande Valley can help spark spring sales. However, this year demand is predicted to exceed supplies throughout the season, which usually lasts into June. Unlike recent years, the south Texas onion industry has official promotions underway to help boost sales. Individual shippers agree buyers may struggle to fill orders for even their most loyal customers.

According to John McClung, president, Texas Produce Association (TPA), Mission, TX, a later-than-usual peak in volume and a lighter-than-usual crop yield are combining with a good quality end result. There have been no reports of disease problems or other adverse conditions that would blemish the bulbs significantly. This includes several popular yellow varieties of sweet onions — some labeled Texas 1015 — with white and red onions also in the mix.

In the “sweet” arena, many Texas onion shippers are continuing to lab-test a portion of their crop for pungency to provide added assurance to retailers that their onions have earned the premium price normally attached to those in the “sweet” classification. In recent years, an unofficial industry standard has defined sweetness through pyruvic acid content. Onions tested with a pyruvic level of below 5.0 are determined as sweet, or mild, and can be packed in cartons. Those tested above that level are usually shipped in consumer-sized bags or in 50-pound sacks.

Mike Martin, president, Rio Queen Citrus Inc., and its subsidiary onion grower/shipper Elmore & Stahl Inc., both Mission, TX, says determining the pyruvic acid content can benefit the buyer and the grower/shipper. “It helps us customize our orders and pick the sweeter onions for our cartons, which will contain the premium product.”

According to Amy Gates, COO, Frontera Produce Inc., Edinburg, TX, “We’ve proven South Texas onions have a valuable niche in the market.” She stresses “freshness and taste. The pyruvic acid levels in our onions are more consistent than our competitors.”

Hal Hoffman, owner, San Antonio Commission Co. of Texas Inc., McAllen, TX, says retailers in increasing numbers are asking shippers what they are doing to assure safe product. San Antonio continually updates its food safety plan and maintains its certification by third-party auditor Primus Labs. “We have a food safety plan because it’s the right thing to do.”

Chad Szutz, general manager, A-W Produce Co., Weslaco, Texas, believes freshly harvested sweet onions from Texas draw excitement to retail displays. For assurance they are selecting from the new crop, “Shoppers should look for the lighter-colored onions, with thin, outer skins, and a fresh, juicy appearance.”

Newly harvested Texas onions provide fresh, juicy alternatives to the remaining fall-harvested crop, which has been in storage through the winter and is beginning to show its age, notes Don Ed Holmes, Onion House LLC, Weslaco, TX.

Curtis DeBerry, president, Progreso Produce Ltd., Hidalgo, TX, notes that fewer onions remain in storage in the Northwest, compared to last spring, according to statistics compiled by the National Onion Association (NOA), Greeley, CO, and this will strengthen demand for the new crop from Texas.

Texans remain confident their onions hold up well against their rivals — if given the chance to compete directly. McClung invites retailers to generate new opportunities for consumers to compare the differences between sweet onion varieties. In-store taste tests offer immediate flavor comparisons. Creative displays positioned nearby might feature both Texas and Vidalia onions, shown side-by-side, with appropriate distinguishing signage. **pb**

let of 100 recipes each developed by our celebrity chef, Jon Ashton.

“The in-store campaign will be supported by a national public relations campaign and national satellite media tour.” Brennan says.

The grand prize winner has the choice of

flying to Orlando for a summer vacation or having Chef Ashton grill a sweet summertime feast in his or her hometown.

8. PROMOTE OFTEN

Sweet onions are highlighted at Bristol

Dramatic Changes In Marketing Vidalia Sweet Onions

BY BILL MARTIN

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce Co. of Reidsville, GA, is entering his 11th season as part of the Vidalia sweet onion deal. He has witnessed dramatic changes in the way his product is marketed to retailers. "It dawned on me a few years ago to quit selling my company to the retailers and instead help them sell more product and manage product for them."

Other grower/shippers in this southeastern Georgia onion deal also chronicle significant ways in which they adapt to a changing industry to market their products.

No company appears more aware of the changes needed than Bland Farms of Reidsville, GA. The deal's largest shipper is in the second year of a 3-year \$1.5-million warehouse improvement program, according to CFO/general manager Michael Hively. Bland has increased sales 25 percent a year since 2002 and is now handling 2.6 to 2.7 million boxes of onions in its year-round program, which includes imports from Ecuador, Peru and Mexico.

The improvements are part of an overall marketing strategy at Bland, which is adapting to an industry undergoing change. Pointing to consolidations at the retail and wholesale levels, sales manager Johnny White points to the need to service fewer but larger-volume customers. "It's happening at retail. I know of two wholesale distributors in the last month who have been swallowed up."

Kevin Hendrix, vice president, Hendrix Produce Co. of Metter, GA, says marketing support has gone well beyond fax machines and equipment geared to handling 50-pound cartons and bags. The company is incorporating a new 4-lane grader providing more accuracy with weight and sizing of onions for its different packages.

Danny Ray, a principal in Ray Farms of Glennville, GA, agrees with Hendrix' assessment. To more effectively market his onions to retailers and wholesalers, he is packing more 2- and 3-pound bags, unlike in the past when he packed 5- and 10-pounders. He also markets a sweet Georgia red onion, and for the first time this season has a few acres of organic sweet Vidalias.

Gerrald's Vidalia Sweet Onions, Statesboro, GA, has formed an alliance with Curry & Co. Inc. of Brooks, OR, to market some of its Vidalia onions on the West Coast, according to Jamie Brannen, a Gerrald's principal. Gerrald's, which recently completed its first season as an importer of Peruvian onions, also is introducing 50 acres of organic onions.

Shuman, past chairman of the Vidalia Onion Committee and founder of the non-profit Produce for Kids program, says marketing has gone beyond taking purchase orders to providing services for retailers. "Retailers now want category management. You let them know what product is available, where it is coming from and when and how to merchandise it. It is about relationships. Consumer tastes are constantly changing, so you have to focus on different packaging options."

At the annual banquet of the Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC) on Feb. 3 in Vidalia, GA, Bo Herndon, VOC chairman and president of L.G. Herndon Jr. Farm of Lyons, GA, stood before the audience holding a \$20 bill and challenged the Vidalia sweet onion industry to hold that price throughout the season. In 11 years of covering the Vidalia deal, this is the most optimism entering a season this writer has witnessed. There is reason for high hopes.

Bob Stafford, director of the Vidalia

Onion Business Council, says there are 12,229 estimated acres planted this season, down nearly 1,500 acres from a year ago. He says 1,000 of those missing acres are due to Del Monte Fresh Produce (Southeast) Inc. pulling out of the deal.

According to grower Alan Sykes of Sykes Farms, Collins, GA, a number of growers have been weeded out since the late 1990s and the remaining farmers are the better ones. Unlike the past two years of record yields, more normal yields are seen this season, which he tends to associate with an El Niño weather year.

Steve Roberson, president of Roberson Onion Co., Hazlehurst, GA, believes the advent of year-round onion deals combined with increased national production over the years have made everyone work harder for their business since demand has not increased accordingly.

The VOC marketing program helps increase the demand for Vidalia onions. VOC has contracted with Sahlman-Williams, a Tampa, FL-based public relations and marketing firm, to help carry out its marketing plans, according to executive director Wendy Brannen.

Brannen points to the Sweet Rewards Merchandising Program "which allows produce store managers to get involved" and be rewarded for winning display contests, etc. A colorful summer grilling theme on the point-of-sale materials allows managers to get creative, she notes.

Chef Jon Ashton, who has his own TV show in Florida, will be demonstrating grilling techniques and featured on in-store display materials. He also will be part of a national public relations campaign that includes a national media tour involving TV interviews held from a single location. **pb**

Farms when each growing region comes into seasonal production. "We call out the different varieties and promote them on a regular basis," Gallegos says.

According to Duda's Eddy, sweet onions should be promoted at the beginning of each season. "When Vidalias hit, make sure they are sweet. Early season Vidalias may be quite pungent. Then, place the sweet onions on ad and promote to get people to purchase them and continue to purchase them throughout the season."

Interestingly, says OsoSweet's Helwig, "The retail price for sweets has increased

over the past several years. Now, you'll typically see retail prices of sweets from \$1.29 to \$1.69 throughout the year, whereas you only saw those prices in the winter season in the past. Consequently, storage onions are getting more, anywhere from 49¢ to over \$1 per pound, depending on the availability of sweets. Therefore, with demand and a solid price, the profit opportunity is tremendous."

The price varies significantly from retailer to retailer, says Eddy. "Some retail outlets prefer to keep all onions priced at the same level while others offer sweets at a premi-

um. I believe there is a potential to market sweet onions at a premium with the caveat being they must indeed be sweet. If you offer a sweet onion at a premium and it turns out not to be sweet, you can bet that that particular consumer will not pay a premium for a 'sweet' onion again."

"A lot of promotions hinge around price in order to drive sales and push volume through retail, says Shuman Produce's Shuman. "But, there are other ways to promote in addition to price and sell sweet onions successfully. Brand strength. Consumer recognition. Availability." **pb**

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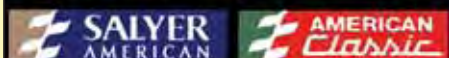
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Reader Service # 1

Eight Ways To Sell More Tomatoes

Consumers have come to expect tomato variety, so smart retailers provide it.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

What was basically a one-item category a few decades ago is now a multi-SKU, major contributor to produce department sales. “Tomatoes are probably our second most important category. They’re a real dollar sales generator. Just five or six SKUs represent an average of about 5 percent of produce sales,” notes Mike Kemp, director of produce for Save-A-Lot, a 1,252-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, and a subsidiary of Supervalu, based in Minneapolis, MN.

Steve Williams, director of produce and floral, Sweetbay Supermarket, a 103-store chain based in Tampa, FL, and a subsidiary of Delhaize America, the U.S. division of Brussels, Belgium-based Delhaize Group, believes the tomato category will continue to grow. “The growth will come as consumers look for the tried-and-true as well as something new, both in terms of usage ideas and flavor profiles.”

1. FEATURE FIELD, VINE-RIPE AND ROMAS

Field grown tomatoes represented 32.6 percent of volume and 35 percent of dollar sales at retail in 2006, according to FreshFacts data from the Perishables Group, West Dundee, IL. Steve Lutz, executive vice president, says, “While the field tomato has the highest volume and generates the greatest dollar sales of any item in the category, its growth is not only flat, but slightly declining. Growth in the category is being driven by romas and hothouse varieties.”

This sales decline has caused Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral, Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain based in Carson, CA, to re-think his mix. “We’ve done away with small field tomatoes due to space allocation.



Consumers expect to find a variety of tomatoes — whenever they shop.

We do carry a larger beefsteak and up to 20 to 25 other varieties in peak season.”

Still, says Bob Spence, vice president of business development, Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Triple E Ltd., Palmetto, FL, field tomatoes “do respond well to promotion.”

Samantha Winters, director of education and promotions, Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), Maitland, FL, can back up how a promotion can boost field grown tomato sales.

“Campaign activities last year helped Florida field-grown tomatoes to gain some increase in market share over rival hothouse-grown beefsteak and on-the-vine varieties,” she explains. Much of this growth occurred “from the second quarter of 2005 to the second quarter of 2006 — when our ads would have had the most effect.”

This year’s FTC nationally televised ad campaign finishes between April 30 and May 13. Four different commercials will air a total of 550 times to 35 million viewers of

the Food Network, HGTV, Discovery Health Network, Discovery Home Network and DIY Network.

While mature green tomatoes are favored by foodservice, Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Coral Gables, FL, says “Retailers prefer vine-ripened field-grown.”

Peter Kroner, director of business development, Eli & Ali’s, Brooklyn, NY, notes, “Our No. 1 variety is the vine-ripe beefsteak. A vine-ripe remains on the vine longer than a gas green. We can tailor product to the retailers’ inspection process. They can determine which stage they want the tomato and we can provide them not only with the stage but also with the sizing.”

“Our No.1-selling tomatoes are romas in bulk. They’re popular with Hispanic customers and versatile for use in salads and salsas. No longer are romas the ethnic Italian tomato sold mainly in the Northeast,”

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Reader Service # 69

relates Save-A-Lot's Kemp.

2. HIGHLIGHT GREENHOUSE-GROWN

Greenhouse-grown tomatoes are a mainstay in produce departments year-round across the nation, says Dwight Ferguson, CEO, Eurofresh Farms, Willcox, AZ. "It used to be that greenhouse product didn't offer the quality or consistency. But now it does, in addition to an overall superior flavor."

K. Steven Phipps, sales and marketing director and principal owner, Market Fresh Produce, LLC, Springfield, MO, adds, "Hothouse varieties also offer extended shelf life from field-grown product and an outstanding cosmetic appeal. These attributes are gaining them greater shelf space."

Of greenhouse-grown, Ferguson adds, "TOVs or tomatoes on-the-vine continue to expand in volume and market share."

What is driving sales of TOVs, according to Jim DiMenna, president of J-D Marketing, Leamington, ON, "is their medium size, popularity of use in salads and sandwiches, and the freshness appeal of the stem on. Over the years, we've been able to breed varieties where the tomatoes are better able to stay on the vine without sacrificing taste."

The cocktail-type is another popular hot-

house variety, he adds. "We're close to offering a cocktail-type with higher brix level and lycopene content than what's currently out on the market. It's a tomato that really tastes like a tomato. We're working with a specialty retailer to introduce it later this year."

On the opposite side of the size spectrum, "Hothouse beefsteak tomatoes still occupy a meaningful share of the category, but they have been declining over the last five years," says Ferguson. "After taste, freshness is the second most important factor driving tomato sales. Beefsteaks just don't hold up through the distribution system like the smaller sized varieties."

3. MARKET GRAPE TOMATO AS SNACKS

Snackability is driving sales of grape tomatoes, says Rob Meade, director of grape tomato sales, East Coast Brokers & Packers, Plant City, FL. "They're ideal to promote as a healthful on-the-go snack as well as in salads."

"Grape tomatoes are consistently available year-round, so there's no downtime in supply. They even promote well in the summer, a time when home or locally grown tomatoes dominate the market, because they have a different usage," he continues.

Availability, niche uses and popularity,

says Pacific Tomato's Spence, have "led us to see double-digit growth on our grape tomatoes throughout the country."

Grape tomatoes have cannibalized sales of cherry tomatoes in many markets. Chris Cunnane, director of tomato sales for Proccacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA, says, "Our Santa Sweets outsell cherry tomatoes 50 to 1. It's flavor driven."

However, says Maureen Sheehan, senior director of marketing, BC Hot House Foods Inc., Surrey, BC, "There are a lot of smaller or miniature varieties of hothouse tomatoes that are becoming popular. Cherry tomatoes on-the-vine have a wonderful flavor profile."

Eli & Ali's offers a clamshell containing a medley of grape, cherry and pear-shaped tomatoes in different colors. "This product is sensitive, so the cold chain must be preserved to maintain integrity," Kroner notes.

4. ADD HEIRLOOMS AND HOMEGROWN

At Bristol Farms, heirloom tomatoes have overtaken TOVs as best sellers year-round. "The heirloom has made huge inroads and it's all due to flavor," says Gallegos.

"We don't offer any one type. Our customers like a mixture of different heirloom varieties to choose from," he notes.

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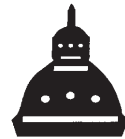
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On arrival, Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, advises "Inspect product dates and product package integrity. Manage inventories to ensure first-in, first-out, and promptly place tomatoes in storage or a display to avoid extreme temperatures.

"Do not place tomatoes on refrigerated racks or refrigerate them at all. Tomatoes are best when stored at temperatures between 55° and 60° F," he notes.

The adage not to refrigerate toma-

atoes is not universally accepted in the industry, says Bob Spence, vice president of business development, Pacific Tomato Growers/ Pacific Tripe E Ltd., Palmetto, FL. "We continue to see leading retailers display their tomatoes on a refrigerated unit."

According to Samantha Winters, director of education and promotions Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), Maitland, FL, "Tomatoes produce a flavor enzyme as they ripen. As soon as the body temperature goes below 55° F, the enzyme stops producing any more flavor — permanently. Even worse, the longer tomatoes are kept in the cold, the

flavor they have already developed will degrade until brought back up to a warmer temperature. Also, when storing tomatoes at a cold temperature, you risk having the water inside the tomato expand, which causes individual cells within the tomato to burst. This results in a tomato that may look fine to the naked eye but will be mealy when you bite into it."

To make sure customers enjoy flavorful tomatoes at home, Dwight Ferguson, CEO, Eurofresh Farms, Willcox, AZ advises, "Add signage to your tomato displays advising customers not to refrigerate their tomatoes." **pb**

"Heirlooms are still a niche item," says Perishables' Lutz. "They represent a very small portion of total tomato sales, about 1 to 2 percent. However, they do have pockets of success with certain demographics of customers, such as those with a higher education, higher overall produce consumption and higher income, who don't mind paying

upwards of \$3 to \$4 per pound."

According to Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, "The most popular variety of heirloom tomato is the Red Brandywine. It's unusually large, twice the size of a regular tomato. It resembles a beefsteak. After that, the Marvel Stripe and the

Golden Brandywine follow. Most all of the heirlooms we sell are in a 10-pound mixed case with up to 10 different varieties. There are as many as 65 different heirloom varieties of tomatoes that are grown.

"Heirlooms are available year-round," he adds. "We get our supply from Florida, California and Mexico. The peak season is late

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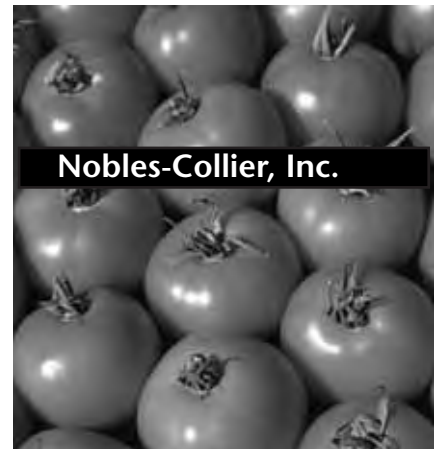


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summer — from July through September.”

The UglyRipe, an heirloom-type variety developed by Procacci Brothers and marketed by Santa Sweets, a Plant City, FL-based company owned by Procacci, is showing increased demand, says Cunnane. “We can ship out of Florida now and have good year-round availability. Although the product has received good press, it’s still a new item to many. It needs to be promoted, demoed and have point-of-sale signage at display.”

This year, Eli & Ali’s will introduce mini heirloom tomatoes. “We’ll have 10 to 15 different varieties and pack them in 300-gram clamshells,” Kroner says.

In addition to heirloom, homegrown tomatoes have a popular seasonal following. “Our distribution center in St. John, MI, will handle homegrown tomatoes from Arkansas and Tennessee and offer these in regional

stores. We sell them as an additional SKU for four to six weeks. If they’re priced right, they do pretty well,” explains Save-A-Lot’s Kemp.

Brooks Lisenbey, sales manager, Arkansas Tomato Shippers, Monticello, AR, relates, “Arkansas has the first commercial homegrown tomato of the summer. It’s big, like a beefsteak. We start the deal around June 10. The tomatoes have a flavor like hothouse, only better, because of the soil. We sell a lot into New Jersey because of the homegrown taste.”

5. PRESENT ORGANIC

According to a December 2006 survey of 2000 consumers nationwide by the Perishables Group, tomatoes tied with lettuce and ranked second only to apples in organic produce items purchased by respondents. Both light and heavy organic consumers showed

keen interest in organic tomatoes.

“One of the first purchases consumers make as an entry to the organic category is tomatoes,” notes Pacific Tomato’s Spence. “Tomatoes have high household penetration, so it follows there would be a high interest in organic tomatoes compared to other fruits and vegetables. However, sales of organic tomatoes are still a small part of the overall category because of limited supply.”

Grower/shippers are rounding out inventories with organic counterparts of many of their best selling tomato varieties. According to East Coast’s Meade, “We have a secondary organic program for our grape tomatoes and it’s growing by leaps and bounds.”

“We’re a certified organic handler and carry a wide variety of organic as well as conventional products,” Kroner adds. “We’ve expanded our line to include specialty pack-

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ages of organic and conventional petit romas on the vine, organic and conventional heirlooms and organic mini heirlooms.”

Procacci's Cunnane comments, “We’ve developed organic UglyRipes, Santa Sweets and others. The important thing to retailers is to get the right ring. That means there’s more packaging. We offer an oversize, high-visibility PLU.”

6. OFFER BULK AND PACKAGED

“Some of our stores carry nothing but bulk displayed tomatoes. They like to offer customers a farm stand look,” says Bristol Farms’ Gallegos. “However, in some of our newer stores, especially in neighborhoods where there are families and children, we offer packaged product, like packaged heirloom tomatoes. These make a quick grab-

and-go purchase for time-starved shoppers.”

No one size fits all, according to BC Hot-house’s Sheehan. “Some consumers and retailers like their tomatoes bulk, some like packaged. It all depends on location and the retailers’ market profile. By that I mean what type of customers they are trying to attract and satisfy. Demographics.”

Demographics are key to deciding whether to offer bulk or packaged, says Market Fresh’s Phipps. “The Pacific Northwest is predominantly bulk in their display approach, while in the Midwest package tomatoes sell very well. Also upscale operators like Whole Foods will sell majority of their product bulk, while a Save-A-Lot or Aldi will drive sales in packaged product.”

As for the type of packaging, “Over-wrapping the product seems to reduce shelf life and allow additional bruising which results

in higher shrink for the retailer. Clamshell packaging breaths well and protects the tomato from bruising,” he adds.

Eurofresh’s Ferguson notes, “We’re seeing more clamshell packs every year. For example, a few years back I’d say 12 to 15 percent of tomatoes were packaged. Now, it’s about 30 percent of sales.”

“Trends in packaging are moving towards recyclable and biodegradable packaging,” Sheehan adds.

7. BUILD A DESTINATION

Tomatoes are a signature category at Sweetbay. A selection of over 20 different varieties are offered on a year-round basis. “Field, TOVs, romas, UglyRipes — these are among the varieties that do well for us and are staple sellers.” says Williams.

Sweetbay merchandises tomatoes on a

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Reader Service #66

How Many Varieties To Stock?

How do you know when you have enough variety to capture the greatest incremental sales versus so much variety that one type of tomato cannibalizes sales of another?

Sweetbay Supermarket, Tampa, FL, offers over 20 SKUs everyday. "The key for us is to be selective. We choose what we offer based on what customers are looking for, flavor profiles and usages," says director of produce and floral, Steve Williams.

This tactic rings true at Save-A-Lot, St. Louis, MO, even in its limited assortment format. "We carry six SKUs on an everyday basis — roma, 6-pack field or vine ripe, 25-pound bulk 6/5 size, premium hot house

on-the-vine, 28 size beefsteak and grape in a pint container. The roma is for our Hispanic shoppers. The 6-pack is our value pack, and a big mover for us. The bulk is another value tomato — it has the best price. The premium hot house is for taste. The beefsteak is for taste and slicing, while the grape tomatoes are for snacks and salads," says Mike Kemp, director of produce.

"Consumers continue to ask for 'something new,'" explains Chris Cunnane, director of tomato sales, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA. "It's important to strike a balance. You probably have four or five items that equal 90 percent of the sales, but retailers, especially high-end

retailers, are always looking at how to differentiate themselves, add variety."

Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Coral Gables, FL, notes, "Successful retailers focus on addressing the preferences and tastes of consumers in their particular market. It is important to stock tomato SKUs that are in demand in their region."

Bob Spence, vice president of business development, Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Tripe E Ltd., Palmetto, FL, agrees. "It's pure category management. The way you manage your category gets down to the store level — the demographics of shoppers, their individual needs and wants." **pb**

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freestanding cart, with each variety sold bulk out of a whicker basket. Items, such as fresh herbs and avocados are merchandised on and around the cart. Farm market-style signage on the top of the cart draws customers to the display.

Sweetbay participates yearly in FTC's display contest. "One of the important factors in entering a contest like this is that it brings fun to the job. Creativity and competition is good," he notes. "Our produce managers are always proud of their work, and their efforts pay off in increased sales of large field tomatoes, which we promote at the same time. After participating in the contest for four or five years, our customers look forward to it. So, it's a win-win for our stores."

Save-A-Lot uses display-ready boxes on 4-shelf merchandisers. "When one box sells down, produce staff just open a new box up," Kemp explains. In summer, "We add a Euro table to expand the tomato display."

One way to create an attractive display, says Eli & Ali's Kroner, "is to build a waterfall with boxes and display the tomatoes from a table/end cap right to the floor. Displays can include 40 to 50 cases of tomatoes to make a visual impact with customers."

"Give greenhouse product enough space. Sales represent about 50 percent of the category, but you don't see greenhouse product given 50 percent of the display footage," adds Ferguson of Eurofresh.

For heirloom and petite romas, Kroner advises, "Build a display in a conventional location and then have the same heirlooms, mini heirlooms and petite romas in the organic section. Point-of purchase materials such as shelf talkers will help draw attention to some of the more unique products and also educate consumers."

8. CROSS-MERCHANDISE

Taste demos are an ideal way to cross-merchandise tomatoes. "We've conducted a sampling of roma tomatoes made into bruschetta," says Sweetbay's Williams. "We've also cross-merchandised tomatoes with mozzarella cheese and olive oil as a simple salad. One store tied in canned tuna with its tomato display and featured a tuna-salad-stuffed tomato as a meal." A secondary display of tomatoes is set up in the meat department next to the ground beef.

"We've demoed heirloom tomatoes with goat cheese and fresh basil," adds Bristol Farms' Gallegos

"Try them near salsa and guacamole ingredients like garlic, onions, sweet bell peppers and avocados. This mix adds a nice color break and consumers can find items they are looking for in one location," adds BC Hothouse's Sheehan.

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Mushrooms On The Menu

Consumers' love of mushrooms translates into foodservice opportunities.

BY KIMBERLY RINKER

Portobello, shiitake, cremini — names once foreign to restaurateurs and consumers — are now abundant and prevalent in America's commercial kitchens. In the last decade, raw, fried, sautéed and dried mushrooms have become one of the trendiest additions on foodservice and restaurant menus. These amazing fungi bring flavor and versatility to both high-end and mainstream eateries throughout the world.

In the early 1990s, only a few chefs — and even fewer consumers — knew what a portobello was. (In actuality, it is a mature cremini, a fact many consumers still do not seem to know.) Today, this ubiquitous favorite is being joined by more exotic mushroom blends. Foodservice chefs love mushrooms, as they offer up exotic flavors sure to enhance any dish through a variety of applications or as stand-alone entrées.

According to Fred Recchiuti, general manager of Basciani Foods, Inc., Avondale, PA, enhanced flavoring is just the edge most restaurant chains are looking for. "Restaurants are in the flavor business." Basciani grows all sizes of white and exotic mushrooms for national retail and restaurant chains and distributors, with processing facilities in Chicago and Minneapolis.

Although large portobellos are still a hot item with most restaurant chefs, who are always looking for new ways to enhance old favorites, smaller portobellos are increasing in popularity. "The larger chains are starting to realize smaller portobellos are more tender, juicier and more flavorful than the giant portobellos," Recchiuti notes. "They're also more cost effective. For the same money, you can put one giant portobello on a plate or four small ports for more plate coverage, better presentation and better flavor."

According to the Mushroom Council, San Jose, CA, portobello mushrooms are still sizzling — representing 10 percent of chain mushroom mentions in 2006. Portobellos



Mushrooms are ubiquitous on both high-end and mainstream restaurant menus.

lead the growth of mushrooms in chain restaurants, followed by cremini and then shiitakes a very close third. In 2004, the Council began tracking shiitakes, which had been considered part of the "exotic" category, separately in chain data. From 2004 to 2006, usage of portobellos in restaurants grew by 23 percent and shiitakes by 17 percent.

"We have a chain restaurant that now uses the royal trumpet — or king oyster mushroom — in an oriental dish, and I think we will start to see more exotic custom blends of mushrooms being utilized," Recchiuti notes. "Today's busy chefs like the fact that these blends are sliced, prepped and read to grab-and-go."

"The shiitake and pom pom are new varieties in this category, but I believe portobello, cremini and whites are the mainstays," Alan Kleinman, sales manager, Gourmet's Finest, Avondale, PA, says. "I believe chefs are using more of these mushrooms in more new and different ways than in the past." Gourmet's Finest grows, packages and ships fresh and processed mushrooms throughout New England and the Midwest.

"Portobellos remain the mainstay in the brown mushroom category, but there is also increased usage of the cremini mushroom," Kleinman notes. "Sliced mushrooms on pizzas



Photos Courtesy of the Mushroom Council

remain one of the most steady uses for sliced mushrooms that now include pizzas with cremini, portobellos and traditional white [mushrooms]."

"Portobello burgers are a huge item as a meat substitute for many establishments," he adds. "Stuffed Portobello caps and, of course, the original stuffed white mushroom caps are still the most popular menu item."

UNDERSTANDING THE MUSHROOM MARKET

Pennsylvania is the mushroom capital of North America with 53 percent of the market; California is a distant second (15 percent) and Florida third (5 percent) in terms of production. In addition, some 2,500 to 7 million pounds of wild mushrooms are cultivated in the Pacific Northwest. Overall, 30 states contribute to making the United States the second largest producer of mushrooms (16 percent of world output), behind top-producing China (32 percent of world output), according U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) figures.

The U.S. mushroom market did not become commercially successful until the early 1900s — primarily in the Kennett Square, PA, area, where it still reigns tops in terms of production. Mushrooms from here

are shipped throughout the United States and Canada, and to other parts of the world.

In the past 25 years, the per capita consumption of mushrooms has increased considerably in North America, as consumer dollars spent on food eaten away from home now exceed those spent on food consumed at home. According to the USDA, 23 percent of standard meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner) are consumed away from home — to the tune of \$483.5 billion in 2005. Mushrooms are most often found as part of an entrée — served mainly with pastas, pizzas, steaks and on salads.

Three decades ago, only 32 percent of U.S. mushrooms were available fresh to consumers — most consumers used canned varieties — while today, fresh mushrooms account for 78 percent of the market, according to the Mushroom Council. One of its customer surveys indicates salads are the most popular way that consumers enjoy mushrooms, followed by usage with beef, pasta and as a pizza topping.

Popularity in home kitchens has translated to popularity in restaurants. In addition, greater usage by television chefs has prompted consumers to demand similar plates in both high-end and chain eateries.

FRESH OPTIONS AND VERSATILE FLAVORS

Mushrooms are one of the most popular and versatile culinary ingredients to invade restaurant kitchens in the last decade. Growth in the overall restaurant business, along with consumer demand for more exotic dishes — and for mushrooms in general — has led to a boom in the fungi market.

According to the Mushroom Council, 58 percent of foodservice operators use fresh mushrooms, 25 percent used canned and 7 percent use frozen mushrooms. The highest usage is in full-service restaurants (79 percent) and pizza establishments (62 percent). It is important to note, however, that while pizza parlors make up only 5 percent of total foodservice industry sales, they account for 22 percent of the mushrooms used among all restaurants. Seventy-eight percent of foodservice operations use whole mushrooms, 38 percent use pre-cut fresh items and 4 percent use marinated varieties.

Mushrooms have paved the way for chain restaurant chefs to create more exotic dishes for a mainstream customer base. Mushrooms are versatile — they can be served sautéed, puréed, braised, grilled, raw, fried and as a stand-alone entrée. According to the Mushroom Council, grilled and sautéed mushrooms accounted for 30 percent of all chain restaurant menu mentions in 2006, while mushrooms in general were

on more than 75 percent of the top 200 chain menus.

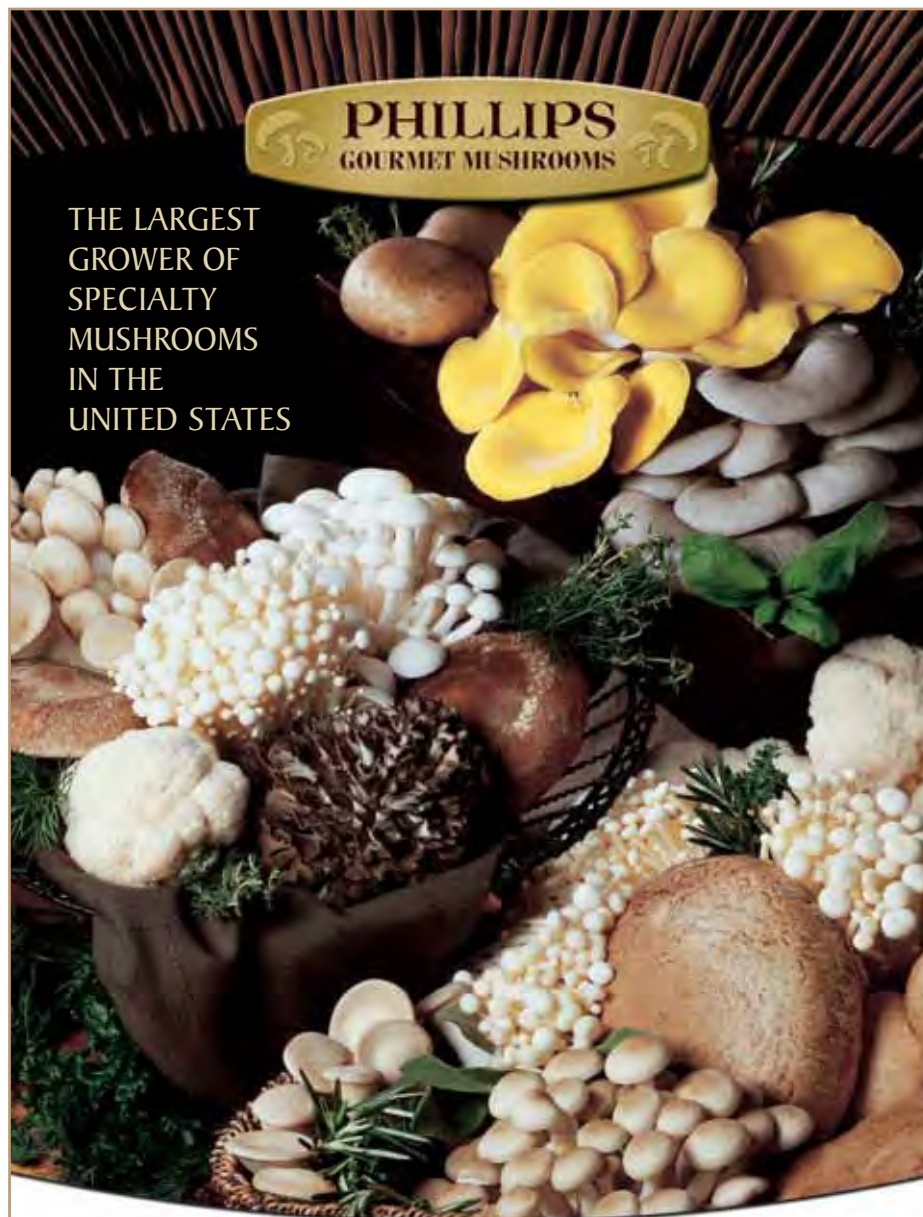
Mushrooms also offer an alternative for consumers seeking healthful food choices. They are low in fat with almost no cholesterol and offer substantial amounts of potassium and vitamin B2.

MULTIPLE USES FOR MUSHROOMS

“The brown and whites are still the most popular of all of the mushrooms. The shiitakes, oysters and enoki are the three follow-ups to the white and browns. This is

mainly because the exotic mushrooms are a bit more cost prohibitive and produce a smaller yield, so they're not as grower friendly as the brown and whites,” states Dan Lucovich, of Creekside Mushrooms, Ltd., Worthington, PA. Creekside is one of the world's largest mushroom growing facilities, with an underground growing plant and over 500 employees. The company labels its mushrooms under the Moonlight brand.

“A lot of the chain restaurants are really promoting mushrooms by making them a center-plate item,” he stresses. “They're not just part of a salad anymore, and chefs have



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Steak And Mushrooms

A Mushroom Council (San Jose, CA) Foodservice Research survey of 100 restaurant consumers (50 men, 50 women) indicates that virtually all respondents preferred eating a steak with mushrooms added. Respondents' preferences, in order of importance, include: the flavor the mushrooms add, the appearance of more food on the plate, what they perceive as a juicier appearance when mushrooms are present and hunger satisfaction. Overall, 88 percent of the respondents preferred a steak with mushrooms.

In similar surveys conducted by the Mushroom Council regarding other menu items, 88 of 100 respondents preferred mushrooms on pizza, and 82 percent preferred a dinner salad with mushrooms. **pb**

realized this and are taking advantage of the diversity of the mushroom. The great thing about mushrooms is that they can go with almost any dish, and they're a great complement to other vegetables.

"Everyone's looking to produce the next hot portobello," Creekside's Lucovich adds. "The portobello has become such a reliable standard and is still extremely popular with consumers."

Debbie Sullivan, menu development and procurement manager for Ground Round restaurants, a division of Independent Owners Cooperative, LLC, Freeport, ME, says portobellos "are still popular, but the craze

has diminished somewhat.

"We utilize baby portobellos and other mushrooms in some of our sauces that are used for toppings, such as Portofino mushroom sauce and caramelized onion and mushroom gravy," she continues. "Mushrooms, of course, are a staple in Marsala dishes and are very popular for burger, chicken and pizza toppings."

According to Kevin Donovan, sales, Phillips Mushroom Farms, Kennett Square, PA, while upscale restaurants have been using exotic mushrooms for some time, more chain eateries are beginning to include them in their menus. "We've been

seeing an increase in the usage of specialty mushrooms for years now in the upscale market. But now the chains are using them — especially the portobellos — due to a renewed interest in casual dining.

"The portobellos are still a hot item, and I think in the future we'll see a shift to more and more organics, which, of course, includes a wider variety of mushrooms," he continues. "The great thing about the portobello is that it lends itself well as a vegetarian dish. The exotics add a lot in terms of flavors to soups and sauces, and they're found a lot in those dishes today.

"Overall, chains are looking to do more with mushrooms," Donovan adds. "The high-end restaurants already have multiple mushroom dishes on their menus, and trends in dining habits tend to have a trickle down effect, so the chains shouldn't be far behind."

The mushroom's versatility lends itself to multiple uses, as reflected in Mushroom Council statistics. White mushrooms are still tops in terms of usage among foodservice operators at 67 percent. Portobellos come in second at 39 percent, shiitakes at 21 percent, oysters and cremini at 11 percent each, wood ear at 6 percent and enoki at 4 percent.

Italian chains have the highest number of mushroom items on their menus with an average of 9.4, followed by family-style and



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steak restaurants with 6.2 each and varied menus with 6.1, according to the Council.

THE FUTURE FOR FUNGI

Mushroom Council surveys indicate that in all instances, casual and family-style restaurant consumers are attracted to menu dishes that include mushrooms.

Overall, 52 percent of consumers selected at least one dish with mushrooms, with 28 percent of respondents choosing an appetizer with mushrooms and 35 percent selecting an entrée with mushrooms — and 10 percent select one of each. Fifty-five per cent of consumers who preferred an appetizer with mushrooms specifically chose the item because they like mushrooms, while 24 percent chose an entrée for the same reason.

CHEFS SPEAK OUT

Alexandra Guarnaschelli, executive chef at Butter Restaurant, New York, NY, has been cooking professionally for 15 years and a chef for six. Her passion for mushrooms extends to her menu offerings. “I’m just wild about mushrooms — I love to eat them and I love to cook with them. I lived in France for seven years and worked for a chef who followed the seasons faithfully in his produce choices. I never really knew before I got into this field that mushrooms could be seasonal.

“I grew up in a house where we ate a lot of mushrooms, but my formative years as a cook were spent with a person who was very into their seasonal aspect,” she continues. “Most wild mushrooms are appreciated at different times of the year, unlike our cultivated mushrooms that we are able to enjoy year-round in the United States. I love cultivated varieties, too, and always find a way to sneak them into almost any dish.

“Mushrooms are the kind of ingredient that you love the more you use them — and the more you cook with them, the more new ways you find you can use them,” she adds.

Guarnaschelli has created a multiple mushroom salad popular with patrons. “I’m a big fan of mushroom salads — utilizing seasonal mushrooms. I like to roast mousseron mushrooms — a little, brown, earthy mushroom from France — for a long time because it creates an intense flavor. I pair the salad with some Manchego cheese and add dressing and shaved cheese — the salty taste of the cheese marries well with the earthiness of the mushrooms. People really have reacted well to this dish, which is especially good as an appetizer.”

For an entrée, Guarnaschelli prepares a dish of braised beef short ribs with roasted hen-of-the-woods mushrooms. “Again, I’ll roast the mushrooms in the oven, adding hazelnut oil and lemon juice. The hen-of-

the-woods is a good-sized, clumpy mushroom that does well being cooked a long time. Especially in the colder months, the combination of the beef and mushrooms makes for a great warmer-upper.”

Todd Humphries, chef and co-owner of the Martini House, St. Helena, CA, enjoys a reputation for using wild, foraged ingredients in adventurous ways. His customers’ favorite mushroom preparation is his cream of mushroom soup. “It’s made from button mushrooms, with dried porcini and button mushroom essence. It’s been our biggest sell-



Photo Courtesy of the Mushroom Council

er since we opened. Even in 100° temperatures people still order hot mushroom soup.”

His other culinary favorites include mousseron mushrooms made into a sauce, combined with curry and served with fish, cauliflower mushroom braised with lamb cheeks, and candy cap mushroom bread pudding for a unique dessert.

“I’m a big fan of button mushrooms in the agaricus family, as well as cremini and portobello,” Humphries says. “These mushrooms have great flavor when you know how to get the essence out [of them]. We have an all-mushroom tasting menu at Martini House that incorporates all kinds of cultivated and wild mushrooms, too. It’s really hard for me to say which is my favorite.”

Chef Chris Nason, Sapphire Grill, Savannah, GA, has difficulty pinpointing favorite dishes involving mushrooms because he uses them so generously. He opened Sapphire Grill, which features local and regional organic ingredients in January 1998.

“I don’t necessarily prefer one mushroom over another. I think one might offer a different texture and flavor that will lend itself better to a certain fish or meat,” Nason says. “I often find myself in the height of chanterelle and morel seasons building dishes around the mushroom instead of around the prime ingredient. I can say this — consumers have many more options available to them now than they did in years past.

“Most of the mushrooms I use are harvested in the wilds of Washington and Oregon so I am more or less controlled by the seasons of those two states,” he explains. “Obviously, mushroom growing patterns are deeply affected by the weather on the terrain in which they grow. Most consumer mushrooms are grown by very large farms — thus impeding one’s ability to use many wild mushrooms at home. Over the past few years I have seen some of the more sought-after mushrooms — such as chanterelles and morels — on the shelves of such places as Fresh Market and City Market. They are expensive, but the beauty in flavor and texture far outweighs any expense one would have to put forward.

“At the Sapphire Grill, we rotate the mushroom season accordingly with chanterelles, lobsters, morels, wild oysters, hedgehogs, cauliflowers, hen-of-the-woods, black trumpets and a few others,” Nason says. “I would say my personal favorite would have to be the chanterelle, with morels a close second. The morel market of the past few years has been plagued with worm infestation so we have become very picky as to what we accept. Hedgehogs tend to take over the end of the chanterelle season and act as our base through mid-winter and into early spring. We do get the most fantastic lobster mushrooms that offer such a meaty, woody experience.”

Nason describes one of his favorite dishes served at the Sapphire Grill — polenta-encrusted Nantucket diver scallops with roasted chanterelles, golden heirloom tomato essence and pineapple sage. “The clean, delicate flavor of the diver scallop and the rich nutty meat of the Oregon chanterelle are not to be taken lightly,” he laughs. “Truly one of the most exciting combinations with the addition of a bit of alder-smoked sea salt. The heirloom tomato essence offers just enough acidity and warmth.”

Another popular dish created by Nason is pan seared local American red snapper with morel-speckled rutabaga broth, handpicked baby root vegetables and rocket shallot dumplings. “The American red snapper of our coastal waters is very mild and super moist. A simple sear allows the snapper to retain its moisture, almost melting like butter in your mouth. The characteristic I so love of the morel mushroom is its texture. It is almost like a small pasta, with an al dente bounce, that wakes up your senses as the true, rich, woody flavor offers an almost chocolate experience. The rutabaga broth and the baby root vegetables reflect on each other’s offerings perfectly, complemented by baby turnips, beets, golden beets and baby parsnips.”

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What Drives Fresh-Cut New Product Innovation?

How new products go from the drawing board to shoppers' carts.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Fresh-cut produce is a fast-growing field. Better technology — from breathable, microwavable packaging to cut fruit that does not brown or spoil for weeks — is developed every day. What separates the next big thing from a complete failure? While strong marketing research does not guarantee success, those in the know say it goes a long way toward product acceptance.

For many companies, the first step when developing any new fresh-cut product is speaking with retailers. Many ideas stem from a partnership between suppliers of fresh-cut produce and their retail customers. "It comes down to what specific customers want," explains Jerry Welcome, executive vice president of business development, United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C. "Marketing is out there listening to what customers are saying."

"We're talking to retailers every day, all the time," says Tony Freytag, national marketing director, Crunch Pak, Cashmere, WA. "Our relationship with our retailers is extremely important."

A good company is in constant contact with retailers. "We listen to our sales people who meet with VPs of produce throughout the United States," says Wes Pratte, director of product development, Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA. "If a VP requests a certain product and we think we can manufacture it, we will set up a meeting with our director of product development to discuss options and next steps. Our sales staff and director of product development will keep in touch throughout the process via phone and e-mail."

Retail customers often have direct insight to what consumers want, notes Walter Strickland, president, Strickland Produce, Inc., Nashville, TN. During a Thanksgiving/Christmas holiday season, his cus-



Consumer desires and new technology are expanding the fresh-cut playing field.

tomers noted shoppers buying diced onions and celery from the salad bar to use in their dressing or stuffing. Once the company knew there was a demand, Strickland developed cup-sized packages of fresh-cut celery and onions. He describes the successful project as "a mutual venture to satisfy a need."

In other cases, says Strickland, his company went to retailers with an idea. "There are intentional meetings where we talk about what they see is needed, and there are times when we point out what we see in the marketplace." Once an idea is developed, "We draw up a plan, design the packaging, preview it with the person who would be the chief purchaser and ask what they think."

"The involvement of our retail partners in the new product development process will vary significantly on the scope of each individual project," notes Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL. "New prod-

uct development is not one-size-fits-all."

When bringing a new idea to a retailer, Freytag says Crunch Pak takes store demographics into account. For example, if an area has a lot of children, he may ask the retailers there what they think of adding caramel dip to packages of apple slices, knowing a product like this is more likely to appeal to kids than to adults.

Crunch Pak relies on retailers to help determine price point. "The rule of thumb at retail is, if you go up in price by 10 percent, your volume will go down by as much," says Freytag. Finding the balance — a high enough price to make a profit but not so high consumers will not touch it — is tricky. "Usually retailers are the best resource for that."

Companies work with retailers throughout the development process. "The stage where the involvement of our retail partners is critical is during the testing stage," says Del Monte's Christou. "This is where follow-

Del Monte's Christou. "This is where follow-up and true partnership with a retailer is instrumental. Product testing protocols are set up and monitored. If needed, new products are tweaked and changes made to ensure their success. This may include our central management and field-based merchandising teams working closely to support store audits, as well as storage, handling and merchandising practices. Part of the new product test and later market launch plans include, among others, customized planograms, high-impact merchandising and promotional programs, quarterly reviews and monthly meetings to share category information and receive retailer feedback."

WHAT CONSUMERS WANT

While he believes talking to long-time retail customers is important, "The first step is finding what consumers want, because they're the ones who are going to be buying the product," says Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing, Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. Grimmway uses focus groups in key areas of the country, conducts research over the Internet and talks to shoppers in individual grocery stores. "They're the ones with the money, who are going to walk into the grocery store and buy it."

"We have used consumer focus groups and polls to provide insight to possible acceptance of new product concepts. We also continue to monitor consumer trends," says Apio's Pratte. "Often, it is truly difficult to understand exactly what the consumer wants until the product is on the shelf."

Companies try to eliminate guesswork. Crunch Pak gets direct consumer contact from e-mails sent to its website, printed on every package of sliced or diced apples. "Every day, we have numerous e-mails from consumers saying, 'We love this,' or 'We don't like that,'" says Freytag.

When contemplating what consumers want, Freytag believes in looking beyond supermarket trends and taking in the entire consumer trends picture, from what is happening at department stores to the pharmaceutical ads on television. When developing packaging, he looks at what colors are popular in everything from dry goods to cars.

"Consumer trends are a major factor in our decisions where to focus our new product development resources," says Christou. "As consumers' palates become more refined and consumers begin to demand more variety in products, we find working with trade organizations is very useful. We also utilize other sources of information, such as demo-

graphic data, polls, research studies, etc."

THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

New ideas are nothing without the technology to pull them off. And sometimes, it is the technology itself that leads to new ideas.

"Technology always played an important role in the produce industry," says Christou. "By applying appropriate technological innovations, we are able to better address unmet customer and consumer needs and bring delicious, safe and affordable fresh-cut produce to consumers across North America."

"We are always looking for new technology, and fortunately we continue to lead the industry in breathable packaging applications for fresh-cut produce," explains Pratte. "Most of our new product innovation is driven by package design with the utilization of our Breathway technology. While most manufacturers with new technology come to us, there are opportunities where we source out for certain applications."

"I think it goes both ways," notes Grimmway's Gruszka. For example, with microwavable packaging, "They'll bring new packaging to us and say this packaging does this and this packaging does that." Sometimes he will see another product's packaging and ask manufacturers how they can make it work



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Bringing It To The Masses

Once a new product is ready for introduction, retailers place it on the shelf and introduce it to consumers. How a company convinces stores to carry a new product can vary.

"Most of the time, our product has to speak for itself," says Wes Pratte, director of product development, Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA. "If retailers like what is presented and feel it would be good for their stores, they make the space. If they don't like the product, it is very difficult to get shelf space."

"I think it is a challenge. There's a limited amount of space available at retail. You're going to have to compete against what's there," notes Jerry Welcome, executive vice president of business development, United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C. "It's hard to take a proven winner out of a case and replace it with something new." Some companies look outside of produce, cross-marketing fresh-cut items in other departments, such as meat, deli, or dairy.

When introducing a new product to consumers, retailers play a vital role, so smart suppliers do their homework, discovering what consumers want and discussing the idea in advance with their regular retail customers. "By the time you get to the presentation, you have a pretty good idea it's going to be accepted," says Tony Freytag, national marketing director, Crunch Pak, Cashmere, WA.

"New products are always a challenge, but the more you do your homework and the more consumer research you have behind you, the better," agrees

Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing, Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. The more success retailers have had with a company's new products in the past, the more likely they are to trust that supplier again, he adds.

Having a retailer who believes in the product can make a huge difference in its promotion. For example, "So many of the stores have their own affinity cards," says Freytag. Giving card-holders a discount during the introduction period gives loyal customers the option to try a new product at a discount without giving the impression the product is worth less than the usual price point.

"Promotion, promotion, promotion makes it move," stresses Walter Strickland, president, Strickland Produce, Inc., Nashville, TN Produce. "If you can't get a retailer to promote it, it may not work. It really takes a partnership to do that."

"When a new product is developed, we work closely with our retail partners to place it within the produce department where there is the correct temperature and traffic flow," says Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL. "These efforts are supported by displays and other POS materials that help retailers educate consumers about the new product."

Once a new product gains shelf space, Crunch Pak continues its dedication to moving the product. "We look at the space the retailer gives us as real estate," Freytag says. "We're one store in the mall, so to speak."

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for Grimmway's fresh-cut carrots.

"It's a little bit of both," agrees Strickland. Manufacturers may come to him with a machine that chops better or creates better salad blends. Other times, he may go to them and say, "We need an automated system to dry lettuce."

"Technology plays a great role," adds Crunch Pak's Freytag, especially for an item such as sliced apples that need to retain consistent taste and texture all year, despite a major difference in raw product from one harvest until the next. "How you treat an apple in October is vastly different from how you treat an apple in May." Add to that the need for a 21-day shelf life, he says, and "That's a puzzle. It's very complicated. It's something we've learned to do very well."

"Packaging is one key area where technology played a major role in the tremendous growth of the fresh-cut industry," notes Del Monte's Christou. "Responding to the increasing environmental consciousness of our North American consumers, we introduced a complete line of products in corn-based clear packaging that is biodegradable. The response has been overwhelming. Other more obvious technological advances have become a day-to-day necessity that are often overlooked, such as GPS systems and lab equipment, as well as processing and farming equipment, to name a few."

Developing technology that lowers the price for consumers is key to making fresh-cut products that sell, believes Welcome of UFPA. "I think that's where the technology really comes into play."

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Selling Walnuts In The Produce Department

Health claims continue to spur sales growth.

BY HEATHER CROW

The days of buying little more than tomatoes, potatoes and lettuce in the produce department are long gone. According to the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in the 10-year period from 1987 to 1997, the average supermarket produce department went from stocking 173 items to carrying 335 — nearly doubling the number of different products carried. One major addition to many produce departments is the inclusion of nuts, and today walnuts play a large role in nut sales.

For the 52-week period ending Jan. 28, 2007, Chicago, IL-based IRI InfoScan statistics show walnuts make up 49.4 percent of culinary nut sales, with pecans trailing at 26.7 percent and almonds bringing in 14.2 percent of sales. These statistics, provided by Vicky Zeigler, public relations manager at Diamond Foods, headquartered in Stockton, CA, show how popular the walnut has become in today's consumer diet.

According to USDA, the United States produces nearly 350,000 tons of walnuts annually, and American consumers rank second in the world in terms of walnut consumption, behind only China. The California Walnut Marketing Board, Sacramento, CA, reports that 94 percent of the walnuts sold in the United States are sold shelled.

Other USDA statistics show that between 2000 and 2006, in-shell sales increased from 116 million pounds to 130 million pounds, and kernel (shelled) walnut sales increased from 390 million pounds to 570 million pounds, a 46 percent increase.

The California Walnut Commission, Sacramento, CA, reports on a new trend in consumer attitudes. The percentage of consumers with a positive opinion of walnuts



Walnuts make up nearly half of all culinary nut sales.

has increased from 50 percent to 80 percent. The Commission also reports 87 percent of consumers will replace other fats in their diet with walnuts, and 64 percent of consumers snack on walnuts.

When compared to other nuts, walnuts have some distinct advantages. First, when compared to the typical, highly perishable product carried in the produce department, walnuts have a relatively long shelf life. Second, Zeigler points out, "Walnuts are natural partners for other items sold in produce departments. For example, they are a welcome addition to fruit and vegetable salads. They can quickly turn a side dish into a nutritious main dish — a real benefit for time-challenged Americans."

The main reason to carry walnuts, of course, is consumer demand. The high percentage of walnut sales, when compared to overall nut sales, makes it obvious con-

sumers want walnuts, whether for snacking or baking.

This increase in demand has been building over the past few years. In a letter to stockholders in 2004, Jasper Sanfilippo, chairman and CEO of Fisher Nuts, headquartered in Elk Grove Village, IL, stated, "We continue to see strong volume growth in the sales of nuts as even more consumers recognize the health benefits of consuming nuts regularly. Interest in using nuts as an ingredient in other food products is also on the rise."

So what is fueling this continually growing consumer demand?

The biggest catalysts are the health aspect of walnuts and the press attention generated as a result of numerous studies showing walnuts' health potential. Consumers are regularly exposed to media reports that draw attention to the health

benefits of adding walnuts to their diet.

The walnut gets an enormous amount of press. In the past few months alone, the healthful attributes of walnuts have been profiled or used as a primary recipe ingredient in *Martha Stewart's Everyday Food* and *Body & Soul* magazines, *Food & Wine*, the *Washington Times*, *Redbook*, *Family Circle*, *Reader's Digest*, *Prevention* and many more.

Walnuts are also a key ingredient in the popular Mediterranean and Sonoma diets. Additionally, walnuts have recently been highlighted on popular health and diet Web sites, including eDiets, RealAge, WebMD,

Consumers are regularly exposed to media reports that draw attention to the health benefits of adding walnuts to their diet.

and SuperfoodsRXletter. In addition, Oprah Winfrey's website includes walnuts on its list of superfoods.

Even McDonald's, a food chain not generally known for healthful food, has gotten in on the act, utilizing walnuts in its Fruit & Walnut Salad, which earned the company a Distinguished Service Award from the California Walnut Commission and the California Walnut Marketing Board.

With all this attention, it is no wonder the walnut has become a ubiquitous part of contemporary consumer diets.

OPTIMUM MERCHANDISING AND DISPLAY

The numerous studies showing the health benefits of walnuts have prompted an unprecedented wave of positive press. Produce retailers have an opportunity to increase walnut sales simply by making them available and merchandising them properly.

Zeigler says supermarkets should carry walnuts "because they are growing in popularity with consumers, who are much more knowledgeable today about the health bene-

fits of incorporating walnuts — and all nuts — into the daily diet."

Amy Myrdal, North America marketing director for the California Walnut Marketing Board, has several recommendations for merchandising walnuts. They include:

- Produce departments should display both shelled and, when available, in-shell walnuts. Some people want the convenience of shelled product, and others want the nostalgia and interactivity of in-shell. Retailers selling in-shell walnuts should consider merchandising them with nutcrackers. Consumers who have never cracked a walnut before will need a nutcracker — and it contributes to a higher ring.

- Display shelled walnuts with produce items that pair nicely with them. Consider displaying walnuts with bagged salad greens, pears, blue cheese and a balsamic salad dressing. This salad combination is increasingly being seen on restaurant menus, and consumers may be eager to prepare it at home. If you make it easy for them to find all the ingredients, you will sell a lot more than just walnuts.

The Health Benefits

While no one expects the produce department to replace dieticians, it makes sense for retailers to be aware of the health benefits of a popular product, both to highlight these benefits and drive sales through proper marketing and merchandising, and to address customer questions.

Amy Myrdal, North America marketing director for the California Walnut Marketing Board, Sacramento, CA, points out walnuts "are the first whole food to receive a qualified health claim from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA], which appears on packages of walnuts." The health claim states: "Supportive but not conclusive research shows that eating 1.5 ounces of walnuts per day, as part of a low saturated fat and low cholesterol diet, and not resulting in increased caloric intake may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease."

Since 1994 when the FDA first approved the qualified health claim for walnuts, numerous studies have shown they can play a role in the prevention of, or offer health benefits against, many diseases, including cancer, improved bone health, Alzheimer's and other related dementias, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease with multiple benefits including preventing hardening of the arteries and high blood pressure plus reduction of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Additionally, pregnant and postpartum women looking to increase omega-3 fatty acids in their diet can do so by eating walnuts rather than fish, which may contain harmful mercury.

Vicky Zeigler, public relations manager at Diamond Foods, Stockton, CA, notes, "Walnuts are particularly notable since they contain a much higher concentration per serving of essential omega-3s than any other type of nut." When compared to other nuts, walnuts contain 2.6 grams of omega-3 fatty acid per ounce, more than nine times the next closest nut — the pecan, which has .28 grams per ounce. Almonds contain none.

Walnuts are also a primary plant food source of antioxidants. According to a study by researchers from the University of Oslo (Norway), the University of Minnesota and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, walnuts contain more antioxidants per serving than any other nut and rank second only to blueberries in overall food sources.

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- Produce managers can call more attention to the health claim by placing signage with the claim near walnuts. Produce managers can also call attention to the high omega-3 content of walnuts. Consumers are very interested in products with omega-3s. Here is an example of what could be placed on signage: *Walnuts are a rich source of heart-healthy omega-3s.*

It is important for retailers to know handling and storage guidelines. Because of their high fat content, nuts can go rancid. It is important to handle nuts in the proper manner to maintain high quality, freshness, flavor and nutritional value. The California Walnut Marketing Board offers these tips:

- Store in airtight packaging.
- Store away from foods with strong odors, such as cabbage and onions.
- Rotate inventory. Practice FIFO — First In, First Out.
- For storage up to six months: Refrigerate at 32° to 41° F (and at 65 percent relative humidity).
- For storage longer than six months: Freeze at 0° F.

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Cut Flowers Bring In Dollars

Target what your customers want and flower sales will bloom.

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

More and more people are buying flowers — for themselves or as gifts for others — on a regular basis, yet many consumers consider walking into a florist and picking out flowers very intimidating. This mindset presents a great opportunity for supermarkets to capitalize on the more casual, less intimidating atmosphere of the floral department.

Proper product upkeep and marketing to potential floral consumers can go a long way toward selling more flowers and building up a repeat clientele.

"It's hard to find any other product that says as much as flowers without saying anything," explains Tom Lavagetto, president of the Floral Consulting Group (FCG) in Spokane, WA.

"A floral department can be very profitable," notes Bruce Brady, director of business development and marketing for The Sun Valley Group, Arcata, CA. "The markup is higher than most items in a store. You can have a bouquet with a \$3.99 cost and market it up to \$7.99. It's not always obvious how much profit floral can generate."

To take advantage of floral department profitability, stores need to show customers why they want and need flowers.

"All customers want a good experience with flowers," states Christine Boldt, execu-



Photo courtesy of Pohmer Consulting

Floral items can offer a substantial profit margin.

tive vice president, the Association of Floral Importers (AFIF) of Florida, Miami, FL. A good experience includes the visit to the floral department, quality product and a lasting effect from the flowers.

Many stores think bouquets and flowers are mainly used as

gifts. However, the trend of self-purchasing is really driving sales. Home décor is now the No. 1 reason people purchase flowers. This is positive for supermarket retailers since those who buy for themselves or for decoration are more likely to purchase regu-

larly at a store that delivers a quality product and a good experience.

"Flowers are a fashion business," according to Lavagetto. "People decorate their homes and offices. Colors, shape and size make a difference. The full product is part of a decorative lifestyle."

The growing demand for floral decoration is reflected in the many available resources. Kathryn Miele, director of marketing for the California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC) in Capitola, CA, suggests looking at the American Floral Trends Forecast link available on the Commission's Web site. It outlines upcoming styles and colors and also offers a variety of brochures and information for supermarkets.

"Ultimately, people buy things because it makes them or someone else feel good," according to Brady.

With flowers, feeling good is part of the package. Giving or receiving flowers as a gift



Photo courtesy of Sun Valley

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makes one feels good, but the act of keeping flowers around the house, as the self-purchasing demographic does, has been shown to increase wellness. Stan Pohmer, CEO of Pohmer Consulting and executive director of the Flower Promotion Organization, both in Minnetonka, MN, cites a study done by Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School by Nancy Etcoff, PhD, that shows, “[P]eople who live with flowers report fewer episodes of anxiety and depressed feelings.” The study, completed in September of 2006, suggests physical health benefits to being exposed to fresh flowers. This information can, in turn, have a healthy effect on flower sales.

DEMOGRAPHIC ROOTS

“Every store has a potentially different set of customers,” explains Sun Valley’s Brady. “Stores should find out the truth for their demographic. There is no ‘one size fits all.’ Stores should identify to whom they are selling. Find out if consumers prefer variety, if the market is a gift market or if customers are looking for price points.”

Although the overall trend shows more people buying bouquets for themselves and for decorative purposes, some stores still have high gift sales. Rick Rutte, produce and floral director for Holiday Quality Foods, based in Cottonwood, CA, says, “It’s about equal for us, between home and gifts.”

Janet Palmer, floral manager of SPD Market, Grass Valley, CA, cites the holidays as a driving force for flower purchases. “Holidays are always the best time to have fresh flowers,” she says but is quick to add, “There are still everyday needs and wants on bouquets.”

Demographics help determine who will buy flowers. “Over 70 percent of all flowers are bought by females,” says FCG’s Lavageto. “It used to be over 80 percent. The male contingent is buying more product with more consistency than before.”

In the self-purchasing market, Brady offers, “The demographic is usually women, 40 and older, who are successful and want to enhance their lifestyle.”

Pohmer suggests stores can find out more about their demographics by offering an e-newsletter about flowers or having customers fill out a loyalty card at the point of sale. Both can be vehicles for providing information on floral trends and news, such as whether the wellness aspect of fresh flowers is resonating with consumers..

FRESH MARKETING AND EDUCATION

Retailers often have only a few crucial seconds to capture the consumer’s attention. “Many stores have floral departments at

A Little Care Goes A Long Way

A good flower experience depends on quality product and there are several easy things floral departments can do to ensure quality product.

“The No. 1 thing to do is to clean the water,” states Christine Boldt, executive vice president of the Association of Floral Importers of Florida (AFIF) in Miami, FL. Bacteria and dirt collect in the water and can cause disease and clog the stems, which, in turn, cause the flowers to look dead. “Every time you put new flowers in, change the water,” she advises.

Cutting the stems regularly helps flowers to drink. Janet Palmer, floral manager of SPD Market, Grass Valley, CA, notes, “Trim every couple of days. We do it twice a week or whenever we get new shipments. At home, do it more often.”

Boldt also cites the importance of maintaining temperature. “You need to maintain the cold chain. Flowers should be kept at 30° to 40° [Fahrenheit].”

“The product needs to be fresh,” says Rick Rutte, produce and floral director for Holiday Quality Foods, based in Cottonwood, CA. “We code our plants so the don’t stay in the department long.”

Freshness is integral. Product that does not look good should be pulled and discarded. The sales lost because a display looks bad due to wilting or dying flowers costs more than the shrink from removing the old product. **pb**

the front of the store,” says Pohmer, “and lots of customers come in the front door, but they don’t stop to smell the roses.”

“People will look for about three seconds before they decide if they will move on to something else. That is a very short opportunity to make an impact,” says Brady.

Flowers are still mainly an impulse buy. The longer customers look at a bouquet or an arrangement, the longer they spend in the floral department and the more likely they are to buy something. There are a number of ways to do keep those consumers in the department and looking.

“Keep your displays full and keep them fresh looking,” advises CCFC’s Miele. “That is going to encourage more people to buy flowers than anything else.”

Another easy merchandising technique is color blocking — grouping flowers of the same or similar colors together in a display. This can make almost any display stand out.

It is also important not to crowd too many flowers in a single display. “A lot of times, consumers can’t see the flowers through the display,” explains Brady. “It doesn’t have impact.”

Clear signage and pricing also make a big difference. Easy-to-see prices keep customers from going through and touching the product, explains Miele. Having to move around the flowers to find a price can cause shrink due to worn product, broken stems or wilting from the oils on human hands.

Education is also very important. AFIF’s Boldt cites the importance of “having people

who know the differences between flowers, how long they last and the proper care. [Consumers] can be intimidated if they walk into a florist. They know what looks good, but they don’t know the information.”

“A lot of customers don’t know what to do with flowers once they buy them,” explains Pohmer. “People don’t realize how simple it is to make arrangements in the home or what steps to take to make the flowers last.”

Both Pohmer and Boldt suggest having “flower recipes” available in the floral department. These are instructions for consumers on what they can do with the flowers to create their own arrangements and decorations. Retailers and consumers can download this information from the Web site of the Flower Promotion Organization.

Pohmer suggests stores choose a “Recipe of the Week,” then create that display and include the cards, not unlike the way the deli, meat and fish departments provide recipes for their weekly specials.

Boldt emphasizes the importance of making this information easily accessible. “Because flowers are still an impulse buy, the information has to be right there for consumers. People may not think to find this information beforehand; they don’t necessarily think to look for a flower recipe before going shopping.”

With a little effort, floral departments can create a positive experience for customers. The right marketing and a little education plants the seeds for new and repeat sales for fresh flowers and bouquets. **pb**



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Creative Minds

Henry Ford was quoted as saying, "If I listened to everyone else, I would have made a faster horse." Other more recent entrepreneurs, such as Michael Dell, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and a host of others, could easily make comparable statements.

Yes, entrepreneurs change the face of our world. But what about the innovators following them and taking those ideas to levels the originator never even considered? Often they are the little known implementers, making the decisions, continually revising the original concepts to keep in touch with ever changing consumer trends. Sooner or later, the question of continuing growth becomes a challenge to the future strategic direction as sales trends begin to slow and markets reach a higher saturation level.

The foodservice area provides an ideal example in the recent history of McDonald's. Five years ago this fast-food giant was stumbling as rapid additions to its thousands of golden arches curtailed profit growth.

Then the decision was made to refocus expansion by improving existing locations while making less frequent unit additions. Not only were existing locations physically upgraded, but the offering also was enhanced, including substantial fresh fruit and vegetable additions. Menu alternatives became more nutritionally friendly, better tasting and a better value, and this was coupled with faster, friendlier service.

As a result of this altered approach, McDonald's returned to its former profit growth, rewarding investors with a 40 percent gain during the past two years as customer visits increased by 15 percent in less than four years. What other company can count 50 million daily customers?

When we observe McDonald's, we are analyzing a slightly over 50-year-old organization. Just look at the changes occurring during that time period in the produce distribution system. Fifty years ago, retail produce operations were relatively basic. Pre-packaging was sweeping most of the country as a way to increase sales. Store back rooms were processing centers. Shrinkage due to deteriorating quality was always an issue. Consumers bought primarily a few basics plus high-volume seasonal items when supplies were large and prices relatively low. Prices followed a channel for decades, rarely going above a specified level. Often the majority of a product's volume sold at levels difficult to achieve real profitability anywhere in the distribution system from producer to retailer.

Gradually entrepreneurs and innovators brought changes such as pre-wrapped lettuce, packaged berries and pre-cut produce while the world was being revolutionized as globalization and immigra-

tion become catalysts to change consumer dynamics. Rather than just building on the three Rs, new thought processes were required.

Recently, Howard Gardner, professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and author of more than 20 books, discussed the growing need to develop fine minds for the future. With the increasingly rapid pace of change, maintaining the status quo or simply innovating on past success to stay on the cutting edge will no longer achieve results needed to meet worldwide competition for consumers' attention.

Professor Gardner's guide for developing Creative Minds stresses the years between ages 20 and 30, with the caveat that one's first regular job is the last hope for developing a respectful and ethical mind-set. Prior to entering the labor force, one should focus on three cognitive areas.

First, one should acquire Scholarly Discipline by mastering expertise in one or more subjects, which include history, art, math and/or science, in order to understand the world and major methods of thinking. Science presents a model for how the world works, including the contrast between evidence and faith. History shows how each generation rewrites the interpretations with extended steady and consistent learning, not simply crash courses.

Second, one must nurture the Synthesizing Mind, which requires learning to discern information and the appropriate methods for communication. One's goal should be arriving at a best guess, evaluating and following a methodology for the critique.

Third, one must develop the Creative Mind, which goes beyond the known, thinking outside the box in an environment of being unafraid of failure. It becomes extremely important to utilize the judgment of the informed, not the uninformed.

Additionally, one's mind needs to develop a Respectful Persona, recognizing diversity is a fact of life. Being tolerant, learning how people relate to one another and understanding others' traditions is essential in the new world of globalization that is gradually reducing nation-state borders to informal lines.

All of these goals must be accomplished with an understanding of the Ethical Mind. Emerson wrote, "Character is more important than intellect." Know the right thing. Create an environment of being fair.

Henry Ford put the automobile ahead of a faster horse. Recently Ford management has found itself falling further and further behind the balance of the industry. Without Creative Minds, individuals and companies within all industries are subject to similar fates. No level of the produce distribution system is exempt. **pb**

One must develop the Creative Mind, which goes beyond the known, thinking outside the box in an environment of being unafraid of failure.



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To participate, send us the following:

1. Your name, company, address and phone.
2. Type of business.
3. Names and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2006 and May 31, 2007).
4. Promotion objectives.
5. Description of promotion.
6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention).
7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

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Memories Rekindled

It was with great interest that I read Jim Prevor's article [*From The Pages Of The Perishable Pundit: Dispatch From Frankfurt — An American Jew Goes to Germany*, PRODUCE BUSINESS March 2007] about his recent trip to Germany. I lived in Holland during WW2, just an innocent child. And I cannot remember our family was ever exposed to German brutality.

I guess my father never took any risks and when we met with our closest friends, doors and windows were closed, literally. We had Jewish neighbors but they managed to escape into Spain via France. Other Jewish friends — we had many — disappeared and never returned. After the war we found out what happened to them. They ended their lives in Polish camps.

As a child we liked to play close to German army camps near the North Sea coast. The Germans feared an allied invasion. The soldiers were always friendly and often asked whether we had older sisters. We did not understand what they wanted them for. And as food was becoming short, we started begging for the German army bread. Then the very best in the world.

There was a prison close to where we lived. Always, at 5 PM, gunshots were heard. Jews and resistance members were shot and buried in faraway places. They were supposed to be a threat to the German occupants. I think many people went for that propaganda at an early stage.

The strange situation was the fact that the Germans started to dig themselves in all along the coast. A so-called anti-tank wall. To stop an allied invasion. While their army was still victorious in Russia and standing outside the walls of Moscow.

Then the war ended. Never even fighting a battle in Holland except an airborne invasion in the eastern part of the country in fall 1944. British paratroopers meeting a German armored group crossing the country on their way to Russia. Intelligence failed somewhere. Many lives were lost on the allied side.

So when did I get reminded? About 15 years later in Sweden. We were on an onion-buying trip in Poland. After the Poznan Affair, where Polish workers protesting communist rule were killed in the streets. Having dinner with our Polish trading partners, Hortex. I was in charge of a special company called Polteam. In those years business with Poland was important.

Our hosts asked whether I had anything against some Germans joining us. How could I? I was from neutral Sweden.

Right from the start I did not like one of them. He certainly did not like me. He thought I was a Swede. He told me I looked "Jewish." After too many beers and schnapps, he said that Polish people did not learn anything from many years' occupation. But that the most obstinate Poles died during the war trying to resist the peaceful German occupation. That his father knew how to handle them. As an officer in the Great German Wehrmacht. That statement put me on fire.

I finally asked him which concentration camp his father was running. "One of them," he answered. My beer went right into his face. The other dinner guests understood the situation and wanted to "guide" us out of the restaurant, which took a while. And now the real German emerging.

The next morning at breakfast, he was late, tried to buy flowers. Told me his father was just a cook. Never fired a bullet. Would not even kick a dog. Did not have to. I told him that I respected soldiers who were on the front, no matter which nationality but not those running kitchens in concentration

camps. Because you do not have to be a cook to make meals for Poles in concentration camps. All they were served was cabbage soup.

After this incident I have never met with Germans except the few I met when I worked for Dole and visited their branch office in Hamburg. By then I had matured, could hold my temper and figured that 40 or so many years had gone. Really?

pb

Our hosts asked whether I had anything against some Germans joining us. How could I? I was from neutral Sweden.

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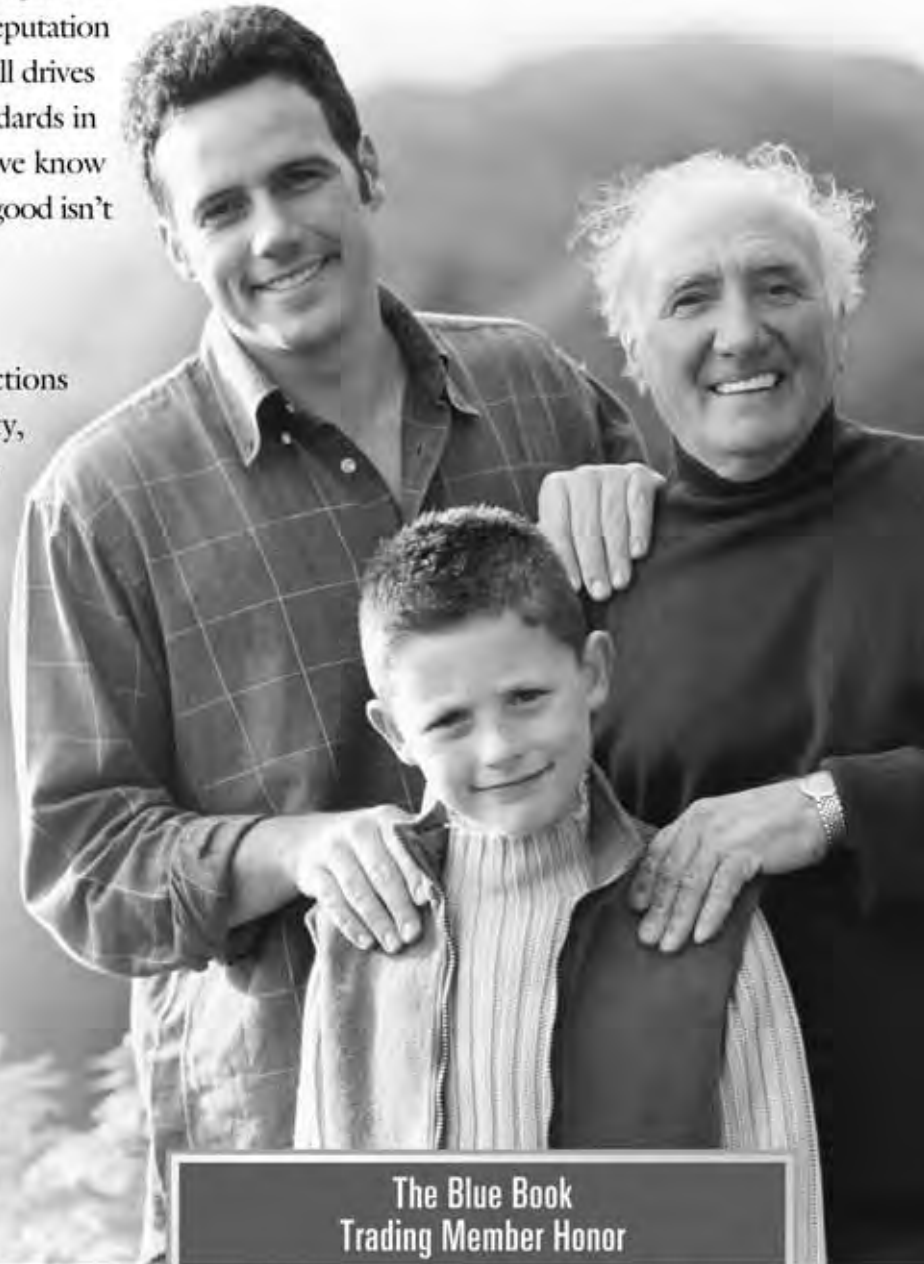
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Profit from Experience.

Reader Service # 3

Blast from the Past

This picture, taken in 1967 or 1968, was submitted by John Pandol, vice president of special projects at Pandol Bros., Delano, CA. The young man in the cowboy hat is Louis Pandol, who grew up to be the secretary of Pandol Bros. and the current president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, Fresno, CA. He is pictures with Jack Pandol, who was the League's president in the early '60s. The picture shows them in a Delano vineyard stamping grape boxes with variety, weight and pack style information.



The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com

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APRIL 2007

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Abbott & Cobb	93	103	731-983-5299	731-983-5299
Albert's Organics	81	66	800-899-5944	610-388-8418
American Ripener, LLC	78	10	800-338-2836	704-527-6705
Amerifresh, Inc.	41	58	559-266-2000	509-884-2223
Arkansas Tomato Shippers, LLC	77	4	888-706-2400	520-377-2874
Arkansas Tomato Shippers, LLC	72	2	888-706-2400	520-377-2874
ASG Produce, Inc.	89	47	805-981-1839	805-981-1842
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	15	9	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Babe Farms, Inc.	72	67	800-648-6772	805-922-3950
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	94	16	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Bland Farms	63	42	800-VIDALIA	772-564-7121
Blue Book Services	105	3	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
C&S Wholesale Grocers, Inc.	16	68	860-627-2550	413-247-3978
California Table Grape Commission	31	59	559-447-8350	559-447-9184
California Tomato Farmers	75	69	559-261-2630	559-261-9804
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	48	50	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	76	24	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	83	40	360-855-0566	360-855-2430
Christopher Ranch	81	17	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Coastline Produce	72	70	831-755-1430	831-755-1429
CrunchPak	23	52	509-782-7753	509-782-0869
Curry & Company	61	37	800-929-1073	503-393-6085
DeBruyn Produce Co.	69	60	800-733-9177	616-772-4242
Del Monte Fresh Produce	108	23	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	6	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	88	46	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Earthbound Farm	80	71	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	107	11	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eurofresh Farms, Ltd.	21	38	520-384-4621	520-384-4187
Flavour Pict Produce, Inc.	50	15	888-FLVRPKT	519-326-0851
Fresh Partners AB	26	26	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Plants, Inc.	52	61	800-424-3553	229-928-0183
FTD	99	14	800-788-9000	630-724-6022
Gills Onions	62	53	800-348-2255	805-240-1932
Giorgio Fresh Co.	88	5	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
The Giumarra Companies	39	62	509-663-4409	509-663-7113
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	82	72	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Goodness Greeness	80	73	800-215-2872	773-224-6593
Grist Truck Brokers, Inc.	94	86	800-647-3698	229-386-5046
Hendrix Produce, Inc.	64	44	800-752-1551	912-685-4420
L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Inc.	68	45	912-565-7640	912-565-7158
Hinkle Produce	29	74	815-457-2650	815-457-2400
J-D Marketing/Jem-D	76	7	519-733-3663	519-733-9970
JBJ Distributing, Inc.	84	35	714-992-4920	714-992-0433
Kerian Machines, Inc.	78	49	800-551-5188	701-352-3776
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	84	18	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Lakeside Organic Gardens	82	75	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
Malena Produce, Inc.	34	63	520-281-1533	520-281-2156

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	51	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	72	76	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	84	48	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Mexican Hass Avocado Importers' Assoc	47	41	410-877-3142	
Mexican Hass Avocado Importers' Assoc	49	77	410-877-3142	
Mexico Quality Supreme	33	12		
Mills Family Farms	73	1	831-757-3061	831-424-9475
Misionero Vegetables	84	87	800-EAT-SALAD	831-424-0740
National Mango Board	25	39	877-MANGOS-1	407-897-2262
New Harvest Organics, LLC	84	78	520-281-0231	520-281-0237
Noahs Organic	82	72	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Nobles-Collier, Inc.	78	88	239-657-4401	239-657-4407
Oliva's Organics	28	102	617-884-1816	617-884-4919
The Oppenheimer Group	40	64	888-321-6779	206-282-0533
Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Triple E	79	79	209-835-7500	209-835-7956
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	37	36	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Peanuts	29	74	815-457-2650	815-457-2400
Phillips Mushroom Farms	87	54	800-722-8818	610-444-4751
Plastic Suppliers	57	32	866-ERTH-1ST	614-471-9033
Primary Package	58	81	559-741-1047	559-741-9709
Primavera Marketing, Inc.	89	31	209-931-9420	209-931-9424
Produce Exchange Co. of Atlanta, Inc.	54	30	800-480-4463	404-608-0401
Produce for Better Health Foundation	97	25	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
Produce For Kids	27	82	912-557-4477	912-557-4478
The Produce Marketing Association	85	19	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	91	20	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.	18	104	803-894-1900	803-359-8850
Ray Farms, Inc.	69	21	800-692-3093	912-654-9065
Roberson Onion Co.	68	55	912-375-5760	912-375-3610
Rosemont Farms Corporation	53	101	877-877-8017	561-999-0241
Rosemont Farms Corporation	5	27	877-877-8017	561-999-0241
Royal Madera Vineyards	34	89	559-486-6666	559-661-1427
Salyer American	72	83	800-872-5937	831-455-2187
Sambraio Packaging	59	13	831-724-7581	831-724-1403
The Sample Dome	26	29	800-596-3676	403-936-5868
Shuman Produce, Inc.	65	43	912-557-4477	912-557-4478
Bruce Smith Produce Sales, Inc.	70	100	956-686-4910	956-686-0961
State Garden, Inc.	28	102	617-884-1816	617-884-4919
Sun World International	26	57	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sun World International	89	56	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sun World International	35	84	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sweet Onion Trading Company	66	85	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Trinity Fruit Sales	89	65	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
Uncle Matt's Organic	84	22	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
United Fresh Produce Association	7	8	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Vidalia Onion Committee	7	28	912-537-1918	912-537-2166
Weil-Pict Berries	89	34	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
West Lake Fresh	89	33	831-724-0644	831-724-0117

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Reader Service # 11



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