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SECOND ANNUAL SUPER CHEF Q&A

Favorite Produce Item?
Future Trends?
Biggest Produce Challenge?
Creative Dishes?
Local/Organic Preferences?



BEN POLLINGER



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FABIO VIVIANI

APRIL 2012 • WWW.PRODUCEBUSINESS.COM • VOL. 28 • NO. 04 • \$9.90

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATIONS • CANADIAN RETAILERS
SWEET ONIONS • GUACAMOLE • TOMATOES • SPRING GRAPES
AUSTRALIAN/NEW ZEALAND FRUIT • MUSHROOMS ON THE MENU
FRESH-CUT PACKAGING • WALNUTS • MELONS

UNITED FRESH BOOTH REVIEW



Dole leads the way in nutritional education, helping consumers to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

The DOLE brand is synonymous with high quality and safety standards for fresh fruit and vegetables.





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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



John Henton
Produce Buyer
M J Kellner Foodservice
Springfield, IL

John Henton has been in the produce business for 28 years — first with Produce Wagon and then Bunn Capital, prior to taking on his current position as produce buyer at M J Kellner Foodservice, where he has been for six years. “We are a broadline distributor that services restaurants, hospitals, schools, state institutions and the like,” says Henton. “As the produce buyer, I am checking our inventory, looking for dated items and inspecting the quality of what’s arrived. I am the salesman’s next step once they have locked in their orders.”

The company buys from Cincinnati, OH-based Castellini Company and Heimos Pro-

duce Co., located on the St. Louis Produce Market, which is about 100 miles away and undergoing a large renovation process, according to Henton.

Henton enjoys working in the industry and acknowledges, “The business has been good to me. I like working within the seasonal changes and seeing the new items coming in.

Henton has been reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* since joining Kellner Foodservice. “The issues keep me updated on everything that’s going on in the business. Plus, you can see what your competitors are up to, which is helpful. It keeps the pulse on not only what is happening in my neighborhood, but also across the country.”

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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QUESTIONS FOR THE APRIL ISSUE

- 1) California Giant uses which social media sites to promote its berries? _____
- 2) What action hero stars in the latest installment of IPC’s Field Force comic strip? _____
- 3) What is the booth number for Duda Farm Fresh Foods at CPMA? _____
- 4) How many products does Flandria offer? _____
- 5) What company provides traceability for Shuman Produce’s Real Sweet onions? _____
- 6) Name two flavors of Dole’s new Extra Veggie Salads. _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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UNITED'S GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COUNCIL ASKS FOR NEW FARM BILL IN 2012

By Ray Gilmers
Vice President of Communications

This Farm Bill is going to be different." So says Krysta Harden, chief of staff for USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. There's a resounding imperative in Congress to save money, cut the deficit and strip programs. It's a charge that could threaten the gains won by our industry in the 2008 Farm Bill — important victories on block grants, nutrition, market promotion and more.

"We're going to spend money in this town. The question is on what," said Harden, in a Georgia accent that added a friendly tone to her prescient observation. Speaking before United's Government Relations Council meeting in Washington in March, USDA's chief of staff offered advice for building support for fruit and vegetable programs in the Farm Bill. "Some people in Congress think research is a big black hole where the money disappears. We need to be specific about what the research is for, why it's important to address that need, and what consequences we face if we don't get it," she said.

Harden's insights are valuable. Prior to her current post, the Georgia native served as USDA's assistant secretary for congressional relations. She's also worked on staff at the House Agriculture Committee, and was chief of staff to former Rep. Charles Hatcher of Georgia. She has proven to be a dedicated ally of the produce industry and United Fresh on numerous issues. "Be very specific about the programs the industry needs. Tell stories about farms, communities, people and jobs that depend on the Farm Bill," said Harden.

United's Government Relations Council is comprised of leaders from produce industry organizations across the country, each with their own valuable perspectives on the issues and challenges facing their members. While in D.C., the council members visited with key Senate staff to urge support for passing a Farm Bill this year, rather than just approving a one-year extension of the current bill. In most of our meetings on Capitol Hill, we heard solid support for advancing a new Farm Bill that



From left: Randy Marcum of Cabbage Inc.; Manuel Rodriguez, Chiquita Brands; Robert Lehman, chief of staff for Sen. Rob Portman (OH); Ray Gilmer, United Fresh; Julie Manes, United Fresh. Julie Manes asks for broad Senate support for advancing a Farm Bill this year.



Mike Stuart, FFVA (left) and Chris Valadez, California Grape & Tree Fruit League, at a Senate reception hosted by the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance.



From left: Joel Nelsen, California Citrus Mutual; Kam Quarles, McDermott, Will & Emery; Chris Valadez, California Grape & Tree Fruit League; Lio Barrera, Western Growers Association; Joaquin Esquivel, staff of Sen. Barbara Boxer (CA).



Krysta Harden, chief of staff for Secretary Tom Vilsack, speaks to members of United's Government Relations Council on May 14 about the importance of educating lawmakers about the critical need for specialty crop research.

supports produce industry priorities. The Senate is taking the lead on crafting a bill, and Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow and Ranking Member Pat Roberts of the Senate Agriculture Committee have a good, cooperative working relationship for getting it done. In fact, they've said they are committed to moving a bill before the end of the year.

However, it's an election year, which abbreviates the time available for working on the bill. Add to that very genuine concerns about deficit reduction, and you can understand why some observers are saying that getting a new Farm Bill this year might be a long shot.

Specialty crops can't retreat from achievements gained in the 2008 Farm Bill, and we're working every day to ensure produce industry priorities are supported in the next bill. To



At a Senate reception hosted by the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (from left): Julie Manes, United Fresh; Joel Nelsen, California Citrus Mutual; Autumn Veazey, Senate Agriculture Committee Republican staff; Charles Hall, Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association.

learn more about the industry's Farm Bill objectives, visit the website for the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance at www.strongeragriculture.org.

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Conference Management: Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Ottawa, Ontario Canada

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Website: www.cpma.ca

April 18, 2012

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Conference Venue: Alameda Fairgrounds, Pleasanton, CA

Conference Management: Fresh Produce & Floral Council, La Mirada, CA

Phone: 714-739-0177 • **Fax:** 714-739-0226

Email: info@fpfc.org

Website: www.fpfc.org

April 25, 2012

NEW ENGLAND PRODUCE & FLORAL EXPO

Conference Venue: Gillette Stadium, Foxboro, MA
Conference Management: New England Produce Council, Burlington, MA

Phone: 781-273-0444 • **Fax:** 781-273-4154

Email: nepc2@rcn.com

Website: www.newenglandproduce.com

MAY 1 - 3, 2012

UNITED FRESH

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Conference Venue: Dallas Convention Center, Dallas, TX

Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.

Phone: 202 303-3424

Email: united@unitedfresh.org

Website: www.unitedfresh.org

May 1 - 3, 2012

FMI SHOW

Conference Venue: Dallas Convention Center, Dallas, TX
Conference Management: Food Marketing Institute, Arlington, VA

Phone: 202-452-8444 • **Fax:** 202-429-4519

Email: fmi@fmi.org • **Website:** www.fmi.org

May 5 - 8, 2012

NRA SHOW

The International Foodservice Marketplace

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: National Restaurant Association, Chicago, IL

Phone: 312-853-2537 • **Fax:** 312-853-2548

Email: kskibbe@restaurant.org

Website: www.restaurant.org/show

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Conference Management: NASDA, Fairfax, VA

Phone: 703-934-4700 • **Fax:** 703-934-4899

Email: aff@naylor.com

Website: www.nasdatradeshow.org

May 9 - 11, 2012

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Conference Venue: Shanghai New Int'l Expo Centre, Shanghai, China

Conference Management: IMEX Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC

Phone: 704-365-0041 • **Fax:** 704-365-8426

Email: erich@imexmanagement.com

Website: www.imexmgt.com

JUNE 10 - 12, 2012

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Conference Venue: Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA

Conference Management: International Dairy Deli Bakery Association, Madison, WI

Phone: 608-310-5000 • **Fax:** 608-238-6330

Email: IDDBA@iddba.org

Website: www.iddba.org

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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Conference Management: Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME

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Email: floriexpo@divcom.com

Website: www.floriexpo.com

JULY 17, 2012

FRESH PRODUCE AND FLORAL COUNCIL EXPO

Conference Venue: Disneyland Hotel, Anaheim, CA

Conference Management: Fresh Produce & Floral Council, La Mirada, CA

Phone: 714-739-0177 • **Fax:** 714-739-0226

Email: info@fpfc.org

Website: www.fpfc.org

July 20-22, 2012

PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE AND EXPO

Conference Venue: The Monterey Conference Center, Monterey, CA

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: 302-738-7100

Email: solutionctr@pma.com

Website: <http://fsc.pma.com>

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CELEBRATING
FRESH

CONFUSION IN THE MARKETPLACE

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



All over America, indeed all over the Western world, there are conventional supermarket chains that, for decades, have carefully cultivated reputations as quality venues in their markets. They may have focused on meat, sometimes produce, great customer service or other attributes that staked the claim that this was the place where you wanted to buy your food.

For some time now, the positioning of these chains has been under attack. It is a truism that the middle is a difficult place to be, and on one side of the pricing spectrum we first had Wal-Mart, then dollar stores and deep discounters such as Aldi staking discount propositions below conventional chains. On the other side, Whole Foods, gourmet concepts such as Trader Joe's, chain concepts such as HEB Central Market, delivery services such as Fresh Direct, repositioned independents, artisan direct-mail food outlets, plus explosive increases in direct marketing and the Costco phenomenon redefined upscale to a healthful, environmental, fresh and foodie concept that knocked the conventional chains from the top.

Though these issues have been percolating a long time, the financial crisis of 2009 and the ensuing recession created an environment in which conventional chains felt a need to change their approach. The question was: Change into what? Even today, that question floats out there like a balloon not ready to land.

Owners and executives at these conventional chains that once staked their claims on offering very good products and service have increasingly found that their value proposition is inadequate to produce the profits they require or to grow the business as they would have hoped.

Some, savvy in management and fortuitous in geography, have decided to change the game. When Kings, a longtime conventional supermarket chain that pitched to upscale consumers, unveiled its newly remodeled Bedminster, NJ, store, it also became Kings Food Markets: Where Inspiration Strikes! — and began positioning its price points against not ShopRite, or Pathmark but against Whole Foods.

Not everyone, though, has the advantage of the dense and affluent Northeast market. For most, the situation is a quandary. Although retail executives will talk about the importance of the value proposition and will note that for most consumers value perceptions revolve around much more than price, the truth is that changing the value perception around a long-established retail brand can take a long time. Maybe more important, many retailers are in a morass where they know they want to change, but are not really sure what they want to become.

Some retailers will find they have a store with demographics that

don't really fit their generally upscale concept. They typically make half-hearted efforts to push price points down, but they don't change the overall cost structure; they don't change the banner; they don't change the ad. The store winds up neither here nor there, not focused on economy sufficiently to woo the value shopper, but not upscale enough to keep the chain's traditional clientele. The very presence of such a store creates confusion in the marketplace.

Yet even when the demographics are fine, the question remains how to build business. Some of the issue is a traditional tradeoff between short-term profitability and long-term brand-building. Quite possibly, the optimal long-term strategy to maximize profitability may be to do nothing. Sustain one's upscale marketplace image and, in time, when the economy rebounds, one will be well positioned to ride that wave. Unfortunately, ownership — public or private — often has neither the capital nor the patience to wait out broad economic swings.

Yet there is more to it than that — especially an unwillingness to let go of customers when their circumstances change. It is not uncommon for retail executives at traditionally upscale operations to hear ownership or CEOs express the dilemma this way: "As a result of the financial crisis and subsequent recession, 'our customers' are hurting — and we need to show them that we care by offering better values."

It is an admirable sentiment, but may not make very much sense. A Neiman Marcus customer who goes bankrupt is not a customer who is hurting, but now a former customer who has to shop at more economic venues.

Because consumption of food is common to all people, it is easy to think that everyone can be one's customer. The reality is that it rarely works out that way. The ad, the merchandising display, the product assortment, etc., can rarely serve two masters. Indeed the clientele itself — distinguished by race, region, ethnicity, economic class and more — will often alienate certain groups of customers.

Value is a tricky proposition. To one customer, quality is worth paying for, whereas another can be satisfied with less august product. One consumer may appreciate a low price per pound, whereas another looks to the out-of-pocket expense. One shopper sees a lack of assortment as a tax on her time, whereas another is happy to cherry-pick multiple outlets.

What is certain, however, is that as Abraham Lincoln pointed out in another context, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." There is surely room for upscale, downscale, ethnic and other concepts. There is probably no place for concepts that can't clearly state what they are all about. Efforts to broaden appeal inevitably weaken appeal to the core customer; there is no value in that proposition — for consumers or retailers.

pb

Because consumption of food is common to all people, it is easy to think that everyone can be one's customer.

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*AC Nielsen w/e 12/31/11

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PRODUCE WATCH



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TRANSITIONS



PRO*ACT MONTEREY, CA
Kathleen Phillips has joined the company as sustainability coordinator. This new position was created to focus on continuous improvement and local produce safety. Phillips will work collaboratively with all levels of the supply chain to enhance and further develop the PRO*ACT

sustainability initiative. Phillips was most recently the sustainability consultant for Trebol Consulting in Laguna Beach, CA, where she led projects such as corporate sustainability, carbon footprint analyses and strategic planning for sustainable business growth. In 2010, she earned her MBA in Sustainable Business Management from the Presidio Graduate School in San Francisco, CA, and in July of 2011 completed the LEED Green Associate program.



WAWONA PACKING CUTLER, CA
John Hein has been added to the sales team. With over 30 years of produce experience, Hein will manage the development of Wawona's expanding commodity base to include kiwi, pears, Asian pears and cherries.



GIUMARRA LOS ANGELES, CA
Giumarra Nogales welcomes **Eddie Lerma** to its sales team. He is a 15-year veteran of the produce industry who most recently worked for Star Produce as head of quality control. His new responsibilities with Giumarra include handling customer accounts for the vegetable and melon categories.

ANNOUNCEMENT



NEW GROWTH AT KINGSBURG ORCHARDS
Kingsburg Orchards announced a 45,000-square-foot expansion to Cornerstone, its roadside packing and shipping facility. There are now 11 new docks, an additional shipping office to accommodate check-ins, and more cold storage and staging areas for fresh stone fruit from the Kingsburg, CA-based company. Red Line inventory management systems will be installed throughout the building. Cornerstone has also added more members to its shipping crew to adequately staff the new docks, and is dedicating at least one dock as an Express Lane for one- to two-pallet orders, transfers and airport shipments.

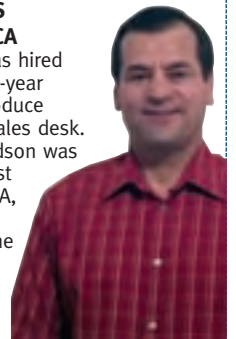


GLOBAL ORGANIC SPECIALTY SOURCE SARASOTA, FL

Jim Costello, a former customer of the company, has joined the team as director of sales. Costello is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Sustainability. He combines a strong background in leadership and business with a passion for organics.

BOOTH RANCHES ORANGE COVE, CA

Booth Ranches has hired **Rick Hudson**, a 13-year veteran of the produce industry, on the sales desk. Most recently, Hudson was the owner of Finest Fruits in Fresno, CA, and also spent several years in the tree fruit industry. He is a graduate of UCLA.



ANNOUNCEMENT

BLUE SKIES USES TEMPTRIP TIME/TEMPERATURE SYSTEM

Blue Skies, in Pitsford, Northamptonshire, UK, is using a time/temperature monitoring system from Broomfield, CO-based TempTRIP LLC to help make sure its fresh-cut fruit maintains its quality as it travels from African fields to UK tables in as little as 48 hours.

Blue Skies supplies a variety of customers including some of the biggest supermarket chains in the UK, Europe and South Africa. The company sources fruit (pineapple, papaya, mango, coconut and passion fruit) from local fields and cuts and packs them at local facilities. The race against time begins the second fruit is harvested. The TempTRIP time/temperature monitoring system is used to tell what has happened during the lengthy journey by incorporating three basic components: RFID smart cards, RFID reader with optional integrated barcode scanner and the Internet. Blue Skies is currently introducing TempTRIP on its shipments to Europe.



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 info@producebusiness.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS



GREEN GIANT FRESH PARTNERS WITH WINDSET FARMS

Windset Farms recently joined Salinas, CA-based Green Giant Fresh as a trusted grower and brand supplier of Green Giant Fresh Greenhouse products. Headquartered in British Columbia, Windset Farms has begun shipping

Concerto grape tomatoes under the Green Giant Fresh label and will introduce beefsteak, Romas and TOVs later this spring.

CAL GIANT KICKS OFF NEW MARKETING INITIATIVES

Watsonville, CA-based California Giant has announced two key programs to begin its 2012 marketing program: *The Cool Factor* chain training video series and the *Sweet Taste of Spring* online recipe contest. The *Sweet Taste of Spring* recipe contest is in response to the No. 1 request of the company's

consumers — more recipes! The contest will include a social media effort and blogger contest. This is the first in a series of seasonal consumer-focused planned promotions. Keeping with the giving back tradition of California Giant, several charitable programs are also planned.



SCHNUCKS BRIGHTENS UP WINTER WITH CITRUS PRODUCE UNIVERSITY

Los Alamitos, CA-based Frieda's and Schnucks teamed up this past February to hold a tasting event of specialty citrus, sampling Frieda's Blood oranges, Cara Cara oranges, Shasta Mandarins, Pummelos, Meyer lemons, Kumquats, Melogolds and more. Schnucks produce managers and personnel were on-hand throughout the day conducting tastings of citrus and providing education to consumers. The tasting and education event took place at all Schnucks, Logli, and Hilander locations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin. Schnucks has partnered with Frieda's for the past four years to offer Frieda's Produce University.



"BLUEBERRY KITCHEN" DVD OFFERED FREE TO PROFESSIONALS

The Folsom, CA-based U.S. High-bush Blueberry Council is pleased to offer its *Blueberry Kitchen: Contemporary Recipes from the Culinary Institute of America* program on DVD. The DVD menu allows the viewer to choose from 14 how-to recipe videos and other materials to learn more about blueberries' versatility on menus and how they fit into today's breakfasts, salads, sandwiches, sauces, cocktails and more. The blueberry curriculum is designed to be especially useful to working chefs and to culinary instructors and students.

OPPENHEIMER BUILDS PROGRAM, PARTNERS WITH HARRY SINGH

When grower Harry Singh Jr.'s (pictured) vine-ripe tomatoes make their return to the market in July, they will be backed by the sales, marketing and distribution expertise of The Oppenheimer Group of Coquitlam, BC, Canada. Oppenheimer and Singh's new company, West Coast Tomato Growers LLC, joined forces earlier this month. Oppenheimer also markets greenhouse tomatoes from the United States, Canada and Mexico and organic greenhouse tomatoes grown in Canada.



2012 POTATO INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE TRAINS NEW LEADERS

Eighteen potato growers and industry representatives from across the country joined together to form the 2012 class of the Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI), an annual program designed to identify, develop and cultivate new leaders within the potato industry. Participants sharpened their skills in the areas of leadership development, public policy, marketing, team building and public communication. The first half of the program was located in the Finger Lakes region near Rochester, NY, where participants toured local production and retail facilities. The second half of the Leadership Institute's training was held in Washington, D.C., where the focus moved to legislative and regulatory priorities for the U.S. potato industry. Grant Morris of Schneider Farms in Pasco, WA, served as the group's grower-leader. The 2012 Institute elected Derek Peterson, of Wilcox Fresh in Rexburg, ID, to serve as the grower-leader for next year's Institute. The National Potato Council and the United States Potato Board coordinate the annual program.



DOLE SALAD FANS UNITE

Dole Fresh Vegetables, Monterey, CA, is giving the growing legion of salad lovers a members-only destination to swap recipes, receive exclusive money-saving offers, plan the ultimate salad dinner party and chat with noted food, cooking and party-planning experts, all with the click of a mouse button. Salad fans who register for DOLE Salad Circle membership receive immediate access to "insiders-only" salad-themed information, merchandise and offers not available to the general public. To join DOLE Salad Circle, go to www.facebook.com/DOLESaladGuide. Salad Circle membership is free and open to the public.

CINCO DE MAYO PROGRAM KICKS OFF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO SEASON

The Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC) plans to kick off its spring through early fall season with a strong Cinco de Mayo program that integrates consumer advertising, public relations outreach, retail activity and online marketing. California celebrity chefs and restaurateurs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger will serve as CAC's Cinco de Mayo spokespeople. Milliken and Feniger will participate in media interviews and their Crunchy California Avocado Fritters and California Avocado and Shrimp Tostadas recipes will be featured online. The Commission also will create a Cinco de Mayo microsite and mobile page so that shoppers can access California avocado recipes and party ideas while on the go. A social media sweepstakes for California avocado fans also will encourage consumer awareness.



UNITED FRESH BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #10406
AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO
AVUAPAN, MICHIOACAN,
Mexico

As the U.S. category leader, Avocados from Mexico producers and packers follow stringent quality measures to ensure year-round production of distinctly delicious avocados that are rich in flavor and tradition.



BOOTH #12208
AZ LEAFY GREENS MARKETING
AGREEMENT

Phoenix, AZ
Arizona Leafy Greens Food Safety Committee initiated an industry groundbreaking safety initiative called Harvesting Safe Leafy Greens, a culturally relevant program designed to educate field workers in safe food handling practices.



BOOTH #11113
DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE
NORTH AMERICA INC.

Coral Gables, FL
Del Monte Fresh Produce offers retailers an array of innovative solutions that address the evolving lifestyle needs of today's consumers.



BOOTH #11006
DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES
FORT PIERCE, FL

DNE World Fruit is a year-round global citrus source. At the United Fresh Convention, DNE World Fruit will showcase its line of fresh summer citrus from Australia, South Africa, Chile, Peru and Mexico. Let DNE help you grow your summer profits by creating a custom program to meet your needs.



BOOTH #10520
HOLLANDIA PRODUCE/
LIVE GOURMET
Carpinteria, CA

When it comes to Live Gourmet hydroponically grown living lettuces, cresses and leafy greens by Hollandia Produce, every item is "Absolutely fresh because it's still alive!"



BOOTH #10102
JEMD FARMS
Leamington,
Ontario, Canada

JemD Farms provides you with greenhouse perfection all year long. We're known as your greenhouse go-to team, with six North American distribution centers and designated regional sales teams to support your greenhouse category needs including planning and marketing support and new product launch support. Stop by our booth to learn about our new line of specialty greenhouse produce, the Red Sun Artisan Series.



BOOTH #11309, #11028
MASTRONARDI/SUNSET
Kingsville, Ontario, Canada

Mastronardi Produce is a pioneer and industry leader in the gourmet greenhouse industry that grows and markets nationally recognized brands such as the Campari®, Splendido™, Kumato™, Zima tomatoes and Ancient Sweet™ peppers under its SUNSET® label. Family-owned and employee-managed for more than 50 years, Mastronardi prides itself in producing consistently flavorful gourmet tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers year-round.



BOOTH #10915
MIXTEC GROUP
Pasadena, CA

Mixtec Group is the No. 1 executive search firm in the produce industry. We provide exceptional executive recruitment and leadership consulting to the "who's who" of the industry.



BOOTH #10407
PAKSENSE
Boise, ID

PakSense XpressPDF temperature monitoring labels feature a USB connection, which can be plugged directly into a computer. Eliminating readers and proprietary software, it automatically generates a PDF of temperature statistics.



BOOTH #10409
PRODUCE BUSINESS
Boca Raton, FL

PRODUCE BUSINESS delivers marketing, merchandising, management and procurement insights to retail, foodservice and other buyers. Its 27-year relationship with leaders worldwide is extended through sister publications, Jim Prevor's PerishablePundit.com and PerishableNews.com



BOOTH #10813
PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE
Woodridge, IL

Produce Pro is an integrated software solution for wholesale food distributors, terminal markets, processors and importers. Produce Pro provides real time inventory, traceability, reporting and accounting capabilities. Proudly on the cutting edge of traceability, they provide their clients with the tools to meet the demands of their customers.



BOOTH #11008
PROPHET NORTH AMERICA
Bakersfield, CA

Prophet offers software designed specifically for the produce industry, combining real time inventory, quality control, logistics management, traceability, materials and resource planning, sales and purchase management, integrated ledgers and grower accounting.



BOOTH #10212
PURE HOT HOUSE FOODS INC.
Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Pure Hot House Foods Inc. is a grower, shipper and marketer of greenhouse-grown vegetables and ready-to-cook fresh-cut vegetable trays sold under the Pure Flavor name across North America.



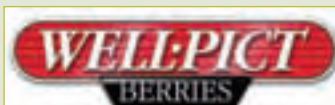
BOOTH #10510
SAMBRAILO
PACKAGING
Watsonville, CA

Sambriilo Packaging is a third-generation family owned company that has served the produce and floral industries since 1923. With locations in California and Mexico, we have built our reputation on service and quality. Known for our "design to distribution" packaging innovations, Sambriilo truly does "whatever is best for the produce."



BOOTH #11118
WELL-PICT BERRIES INC.
Watsonville, CA

Well-Pict Berries offers 12-month availability for our premium proprietary strawberries in both conventional and organic lines as well as proprietary raspberries. Our newest varieties offer expanded availability with the sweet, wonderful flavor that Well-Pict's berries are famous for.





Turning **Cool** Berries into **Cold** Cash

When it comes to fresh strawberries,
blueberries, blackberries and raspberries
from California Giant Berry Farms—
colder is cooler

In fact, it's proven that cold berries amount to **hot profits**

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Marketing Gone Wild: The Use And Abuse Of Food Safety 'Certifications'

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 02.27.2012

The produce industry has come to work so hard on food safety. This is seen collectively through institutions such as the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and the Center for Produce Safety.

It is also true on an individual company level. Anyone who has been involved in the produce trade for an extended period has seen an enormous increase in attention and commitment on food safety issues, especially following the Spinach Crisis of 2006.

But each company, and the industry as a whole, have to make sure their marketing efforts don't get ahead of themselves. Particularly, those who offer seals or indicia, or who use them in their marketing, have a responsibility to make sure that these are not misused to imply things that are not justified.

We check out a lot of industry web sites and we find these seals are often misused.

Many are at fault, and sometimes these situations are inadvertent, caused by web designers handed a bunch of logos and not understanding the importance of each of them individually. But in the end, every company has a responsibility to not exaggerate its food safety credentials.

One web page we looked at, from a substantial company that has actually been the focus of food safety concerns, offers an example of the problem more common than would be desirable. As part of its webpage, the company has a group of logos and corresponding type. Here are the words:

OUR CERTIFICATIONS INCLUDE:

- Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) Compliant
- Safe Quality Food (SQF) Certified
- Primus Certified
- Produce Marketing Association Gold Circle, Advancing Food Safety Certified
- United States Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism Cooperative

The most obvious and most egregious problem here is the use of PMA's Gold Circle in this fashion. Gold Circle is a terrific program through which PMA member companies so inclined can donate an extra \$1,000 to support food safety and consumer communication efforts. It is a very industry-minded thing to support, and any company that supports it deserves a hat tip. It is not, however, in any way, a "certification" of anything. All it means is a company donated \$1,000. That is it. PMA doesn't inspect companies. PMA has no idea if a firm's food safety program is good or not. All this means is the check didn't bounce.

To imply that this is a certification is to deceive.

Obviously, this company should change its web site. Other firms should check theirs, and PMA should issue a reminder to all other Gold Circle members about the appropriate use of this logo. It is fine to use it to demonstrate that a company is supportive of industry food-safety efforts, but it should not imply certification by PMA.

Besides protecting the integrity of the logo, if PMA does not act to stop these types of claims, one day someone will sue PMA, claiming it was complicit in the implication, and that PMA had certified this company in some way, and thus, had liability. That risk is not worth \$1,000.

This may be the most egregious example, but most of these types of claims are too broad.

Primus-certified? What in the world does that mean? Primus does have a Platinum Supplier program, and one of its benefits is allowing use of the Primus logo, but this company is not listed on the Primus web site as a Platinum Program member. More importantly, though, what is the implication a buyer or consumer — this is an open web site — should draw from this? That if one buys from this company, every box has been certified in some way by Primus? We doubt that is true, as the company whose website we took this from sells many products from many different places. In all probability, the company buys "shorts" from other shippers and terminal markets. Even if the company does not and all of its product is certified, the obvious question is certified for what? Primus will certify product to be organic. It has a pesticide-certification program, GAP, GMP, PrimusGFS, etc.

SQF-certified? It is even less likely that every box sold has SQF certification in this diverse company.

GFSI isn't a certification at all, and the company whose website we drew this from is known to have, in at least some cases, required that suppliers do only standard GMP audits, not GFSI audits.

In fact of all these claims of "certifications," the only one we could endorse would be the claim that the company is certified as a partner in the United States Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism Cooperative, which is actually a claim that applies to the company, not the product.

The truth is that these kinds of certifications mostly apply to specific fields or specific plants for specific things. They typically don't apply to companies at all. This may be a distinction without a difference if one is a fresh-cut processor and all the plants are certified the same way and there is a requirement that all growing operations be certified the same way, or if one is a grower/shipper/packer and all the fields are certified the same way and the packing house is certified one way.

But for most, these logos should be used specifically and in a limited way: "Our company supports industry food-safety efforts by contributing to PMA's Gold Circle campaign to advance food safety."

"Our fresh-cut facility in Los Angeles is certified annually by Primus Labs to meet the Global British Retail Consortium standard."

Claiming lots of "certifications" that don't exist or are easily misinterpreted indicates a company is less concerned about food safety than marketing food safety. Nothing good can come of that, and owners of these trademarks should be vigilant in preventing their misuse.

Every company has a responsibility to not exaggerate its food safety credentials.



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THE IDAHO POTATO FIELD FORCE

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AND KEN "POWER PROFITS" TUBMAN!

CATEGORY MANAGER MARY WAS TRYING TO DRUM UP SALES...



HMM, MAYBE I SHOULD DISTRIBUTE A CIRCULAR FEATURING OUR SPECIAL ON POTATOES.



YOUR SPECIAL WILL BE MORE SPECIAL IF YOU FEATURE THE IDAHO SEAL IN THE AD! STUDIES SHOW IT INCREASES SALES!



AND YOU CAN EVEN EARN ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR USING THE SEAL!

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL "CIRCULAR" LOGIC!

KRA-THASH!

INCREASE CATEGORY PROFITS AND EARN SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS WHEN YOU FEATURE THE IDAHO SEAL! CONTACT YOUR IDAHO POTATO FIELD REP FOR DETAILS. AND STAY TUNED FOR OUR NEXT EXCITING EPISODE!

IDAHOPOTATO.COM/RETAIL

Restaurant Industry Growth Is Good News For Produce Industry

BY HUDSON RIEHLE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE GROUP, NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

The restaurant industry is projected to expand in 2012, according to the National Restaurant Association's 2012 *Restaurant Industry Forecast*. Total restaurant industry sales are expected to reach a record high of \$632 billion in 2012, a 3.5 percent increase over 2011.

The quickservice segment is again set to grow at a slightly higher rate than the tableservice segment, at 3.1 percent, or \$174 billion, compared with 2.9 percent (\$201 billion).

Segments expected to post sales growth at a higher rate than the overall industry include military foodservice, retail-host restaurants, social caterers, transportation, employee foodservice and healthcare.

In addition, the restaurant industry will continue to fuel U.S. employment in the year ahead as the nation's second largest private sector employer. Overall, restaurant industry employment will reach 12.9 million in 2012, representing 10 percent of the total U.S. workforce. And, this marks the 13th consecutive year that restaurant industry job growth will outpace the national job growth.

Looking ahead, the Association expects a jump in restaurant employment to 14.3 million individuals in the next decade — an increase of 1.4 million jobs, with first-line supervisors, combined food-preparation and serving workers, and counter attendants being the fastest growing positions.

While the industry is expected to grow in 2012, the top challenges cited by restaurateurs are food costs, building and maintaining sales volume, and the economy.

Because about one-third of sales in a restaurant goes to food and beverage purchases, food prices are a crucial component for operators. Last year, we saw wholesale food prices post their strongest annual increase in more than three decades. In 2012, we will see continued increases in the cost of some commodities, while price pres-

ures will ease for others. Restaurants are expected to spend a collective \$225 billion on food-and-drink purchases this year.

However, opportunities are also present for operators to be successful by understanding and leveraging consumer trends to attract new guests and make current ones come back. The good news is that there is substantial pent-up demand for restaurant services, with 2 out of 5 consumers saying they are not frequenting restaurants as often as they would like. With the right incentives, that demand can translate into sales.

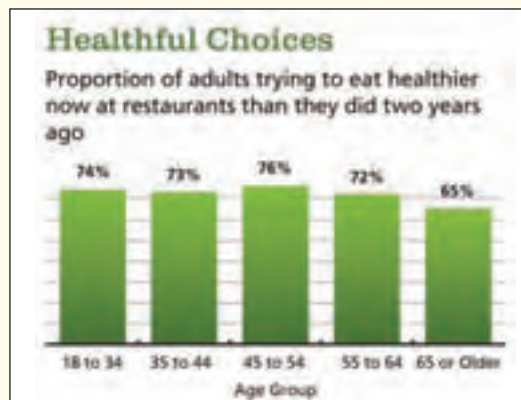
Giving consumers what they want will be crucial for restaurant operators in 2012. As the recession has caused 8 out of 10 consumers to cut back on spending to some degree, it is more important than ever for operators to nudge those guests into patronizing their restaurants.

Food quality, customer service quality and value are the top attributes consumers look for when choosing a tableservice restaurant. For quickservice restaurants, customers are looking for food quality, value and speed of service when picking where to dine.

When it comes to food, the top menu trends are all about local sourcing and nutrition, especially kids' nutrition. Nearly three-quarters of consumers say they are more likely to visit a restaurant that offers locally produced food items, and more than

half of all restaurants currently offer locally sourced produce. In addition, 6 in 10 restaurant operators say they've noticed increased interest in locally sourced items among their guests. This interest is most noticeable among fine dining and casual dining operators (see chart below left).

Similarly, nearly three-quarters of consumers say they are trying to eat healthier now at restaurants than they did two years ago, and a majority of restaurants agree that customers are ordering more such items (see chart below).



SOURCE: NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION 2012 RESTAURANT INDUSTRY FORECAST

Another continuing menu trend is a focus on environmental sustainability as a culinary theme. Fifty-five percent of consumers say they're more likely to visit a restaurant that offers food that was grown or raised in an environmentally friendly way. Among operators, 6 out of 10 operators agree that their guests are more interested in environmentally sustainable menu items now than two years ago. Among industry segments, this sentiment is higher in the fine dining, casual dining and fast casual operator categories.



Picked Fresh

Proportion of restaurant operators offering the following food items

	Fast Casual	Casual Dining	Family Style	Quick Service	Table Service
Locally sourced produce	56%	63%	67%	38%	43%
Locally sourced meat or seafood	38%	54%	77%	10%	33%
Food items from an on-site garden	9%	8%	25%	2%	2%

SOURCE: NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION 2012 RESTAURANT INDUSTRY FORECAST



For more than 90 years, the National Restaurant Association (NRA), based in Washington, D.C. has represented, educated and promoted the restaurant industry. The NRA's 2012

Restaurant Industry Forecast contains detailed analysis of additional economic, workforce and consumer trends. For more information, visit www.restaurant.org/forecast.

Does Sentiment For 'Local' Translate Into Sales?

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

It is, of course, inspiring to hear that consumers claim they are seeking locally grown foods, better nutrition for their children and foods produced in an environmentally friendly way. It is, however, always a quandary to know precisely what consumers are trying to tell us when they answer surveys in this way. Such data must be assessed in the context of other data points. For example, McDonald's recently announced that in February 2012, its U.S. same-restaurant sales for units open more than 13 months are up 11.1%. The big drivers: Chicken McBites, the new coffee program and other beverages, breakfast and the Filet-O-Fish sandwich.

Though there is, of course, a rarified Farm-To-Table restaurant segment, it can't possibly account for even 1% of foodservice sales. It is also rife with fraud. Time after time, a quick overview of Farm-to-Table menus indicates local sources being claimed for product that is highly unlikely. One recent visit to a Florida restaurant that claimed to be serving Florida broccoli, which does exist but is unlikely to be in this restaurant's supply chain, bore this out when the restaurant gave the name of a local farm that supposedly was growing Florida broccoli.

Knowing this operation, we thought this unlikely and were going to check it out. The point was moot, though, as what the restaurant actually served was Mann Packing's Broccolini – not broccoli, local or otherwise.

Without any kind of third-party certifications and no standard definitions, one hesitates to attribute too much to consumer statements in this area. Add in the propensity for survey subjects to say the "politically correct" thing, and one wonders precisely how this actually plays out in sales.

The data regarding restaurants that sell locally grown produce is also somewhat meaningless. Some might call it the Wal-Mart problem: Wal-Mart defines locally grown as grown in the state of the store it is being sold in.

This is a political definition and actually accords with a lot of consumer sentiment that revolves around consumers supporting

their own "tribe," but many, for example, environmentalists, would find fault with such a definition as it encourages purchasing across the broad reach of, say, Texas, rather than just across the state border in Oklahoma.

In the end, the Wal-Mart definition — because it includes both products always sold locally, say California citrus in California, and any special local buy efforts — creates a kind of absurdity. In the case of Wal-Mart, it means that in light of heavy produce procurement in California, if Wal-Mart wants to announce an increase in the sale of local produce, the most effective technique involves no change in merchandising or procurement; it just involves opening more stores in California.

Equally one wonders what the restaurants that sell "local" actually sell. A few — mostly white table cloth types — do direct procurement from small scale, bio-diverse farms. They might also adjust menus to take advantage of local items. Some college foodservice programs also reach out in this manner. Certainly there is more consciousness on these issues so that distributors are more likely to offer more local options and restaurants to order them.

Still and all, for the vast mass of foodservice outlets one suspects that their trumpeting of local is more marketing than substantive change. This is not surprising. Even at retail, marketing of locally grown options has increased far faster than any local sales.

Another issue related to consumer surveys is that consumers may assume that all other things are *ceteris paribus* — or all other things are equal — but that is not necessarily so.

It is interesting that when one looks at a concept such as Darden's Seasons 52 — a concept one would think would fit right in with the local phenomenon — one sees very little reference to local. One suspects this has more than a little to do with Darden's rigorous food safety program, which would make buying from random, local, small scale, bio-diverse farmers — or from local

Without any kind of third-party certifications and no standard definitions, one hesitates to attribute too much to consumer statements in this area.

farmer's markets — almost impossible.

Surely incorporated into consumer perceptions of food quality, value and the idea of eating healthier is the idea that the food will be safe. Yet consumers really don't have the ability to evaluate whether a local vendor is able to execute to the food safety standards of a national shipper. Most chefs who make a big deal of going to the local farmer's market to buy ingredients haven't the foggiest idea of the sophistication or integrity of the food safety practices of the producers of the food they are buying.

This leads to the obvious question, what are the assumptions behind consumer expressions of preference for particular types of food? Does the rise of the Filet-O-Fish express dissatisfaction with rising beef prices, or do people believe that the deep fried patty is nutritious or healthy?

Do consumers prefer local per se, or in that expression, are consumers expressing beliefs that local is less expensive, fresher, better for the environment, etc.? And if these things are not the case, perhaps consumer interest won't translate to purchase activity.

Clearly, the research on these topics is just beginning.

SUPER CHEFS

SPEAK OUT ON FRESH PRODUCE



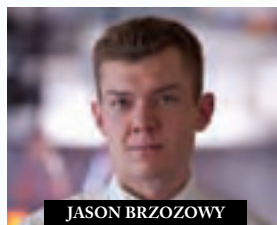
JAMES ASARO



DAN BARBER



RICHARD BLAIS



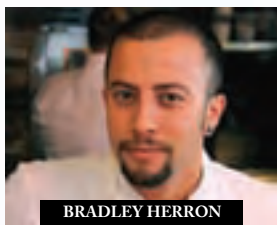
JASON BRZOZOWY



CAT CORA



JAIME GWEN



BRADLEY HERRON



SPIKE MENDELSON



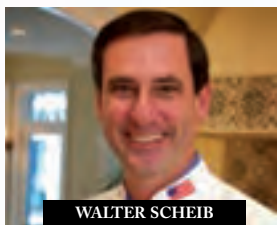
SARA MOULTON



BEN POLLINGER



JONATHON SAWYER



WALTER SCHEIB



FABIO VIVIANI

AS CONSUMERS BECOME MORE FOCUSED ON EATING HEALTHFUL NUTRITIOUS ITEMS, NOW IS THE TIME TO SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT ON FRESH PRODUCE.

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD

Diners today are hungry for locally sourced good-for-you menu choices. Nearly three-quarters of consumers, in fact, are more likely to dine at restaurants that offer locally produced foods, and over half of all chefs are currently catering to this desire by offering locally sourced produce, according to the National Restaurant Association's (NRA) 2012 *Restaurant Industry Forecast* [For a more detailed explanation, see our Research Perspectives article on page 18]. Similarly, nearly three-fourths of consumers want to eat healthier now than they did two years ago when dining out, and restaurateurs are finding that customers are indeed putting their dollars where their mouths are. Combine these two front-burner trends with the USDA's new MyPlate symbol, which calls for half the plate to be filled with fruits and vegetables, and Foodservice 2020, an initiative that calls for doubling the use of fresh produce on restaurant menus in a decade, and this all adds up to good news for the fresh produce industry.

With this in mind, PRODUCE BUSINESS interviewed a baker's dozen of today's top chefs on the key role produce plays in today's menus. Included are **James Asaro**, former executive chef at the Palm West in New York, NY; **Dan Barber**, executive chef/co-owner of Blue Hill & Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills, NY; **Richard Blais**, winner of Bravo's *Top Chef*

All-Stars; **Jason Brzozowy**, chef de cuisine at Tilth Restaurant in Seattle, WA; **Cat Cora**, restaurateur and first female "Iron Chef"; **Jamie Gwen**, TV and radio food host; **Bradley Herron**, chef de cuisine at Michael's Genuine Food & Drink in Miami, FL; **Spike Mendelsohn**, Bravo's *Top Chef Chicago* contestant and owner of the Good Stuff Eatery in Washington, D.C., **Sara Moulton**, professional chef, author and TV food celebrity; **Ben Pollinger**, executive chef at Oceana Restaurant in New York, NY; **Jonathon Sawyer**, owner of Cleveland, OH-based The Greenhouse Restaurant; former White House chef, **Water Scheib**; another *Top Chef* contestant, **Fabio Viviani**, executive chef and owner of Café Firenze, Italian Restaurant and Martini Bar in Moorpark, CA; and Firenze Osteria, Italian Restaurant and Martini Bar, in Toluca Lake, CA.

What is your favorite fresh produce item and how do you use it?

James Asaro: Tomatoes. All kinds. They're all over our menu. Sliced beef-steaks with basil and mozzarella in a Caprese salad; oven-dried in our Nova Scotia Lobster BLT Sliders.

Dan Barber: Depends on the time of the year, but right now, parsnips. The farmers planted them last March and just started harvesting. The tubers, which look more like elephant tusks, are delicious — impossibly sweet from the



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DandyFresh

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BOOTH #224**

winter frost, but also full of concentrated parsnip flavor. We cut them into thick “steaks” to serve with a black peppercorn sauce.

Richard Blais: I don’t discriminate when it comes to produce.

Jason Brzozowy: It’s hard to say. I definitely have a favorite for each season. For example, I like strawberries and tomatoes in the summer and celery root in the winter. We’ll make celery root, heart and leaves into a soup paired with Oregon black truffles.

Cat Cora: It depends on the season. In summer, it’s tomatoes, cucumbers, corn and watermelon. In fall, it’s root vegetables and leafy greens like kale

and Swiss chard. In spring, it’s asparagus, artichokes, fava beans and baby beets. I’ll make a spring beet salad with roasted and quartered beets, arugula, red onions and tangerine vinaigrette with goat cheese crostini.

Jamie Gwen: Each season, I choose one type of produce and get the most out of it like spring artichokes. I’ll steam until tender in a flavored liquid like citrus juice or leftover black truffle vinegar or pomegranate molasses seasoned with Dijon mustard, black peppercorns and garlic. Then I’ll stuff them with a light quinoa salad or farro mushroom risotto.

Bradley Herron:

It’s difficult to say.

What’s fresh and local is what’s best. We’ve been getting incredible watermelon radishes and French breakfast radishes. I’ll use radish tops in pasta, soups and pizza. They have a pungent peppery flavor. It’s fun to use items others throw away and make something incredible.

Spike Mendelsohn: I’m a cabbage guy. I love making slaw because there are so many variations. People forget that cabbage can be fun.

Sara Moulton: What’s in season like asparagus in April. My favorite way to prepare asparagus is the way Julia Child first taught me. If the asparagus are more than one-third inch diameter, Julia would always peel them to make sure the stalk and tip would cook at the same rate. They soften in no time at all in boiled salted water. I’ll toss them with virgin olive oil, sea salt and black pepper.

Ben Pollinger: Seasonal fruits like exotic citrus. The flavor is interesting and the fact that they are not always available makes them interesting, too. So much is available year-round the specialness wears off; it’s like having Christmas every other week. These fruits pair well with fish. For example, we serve a Nantucket Bay Scallop Ceviche made with Cara Cara oranges, bergamot and Brazil nuts.

Jonathon Sawyer: What’s in season or just about to come in season. That’s what gets me excited. Right now it’s Yu Choy [a variety of Chinese greens]. Red Wagon Farm down the road grows it in hoop houses in the winter. We’ll use it in a stir-fry, along with adzuki beans, scallions and miso over sticky rice or add it to a citrus salad with local greens, fennel and toasted almonds.

Walter Scheib: That’s like asking what my favorite musical note is. My favorite is what is fresh, delicious and of the season, whether it’s one hour away or six hours away by jet from Europe.

Fabio Viviani: Tomatoes...in almost everything.

What trends do you see with regard to chefs using fresh produce?

James Asaro: Pickled watermelon radish. It’s got great flavor and color.

Richard Blais: Locally grown and seasonal will always be in style.

Jason Brzozowy: Older Heirloom varieties are becoming more mainstream. We deal with a lot of small farmers who are interested in maintaining Heirloom varieties and they encourage us to use them so they won’t become extinct. For example, Ozette potatoes are native to the Pacific Northwest. We’ll serve them mashed or roasted. Just the name on the menu sparks customers’ interest.

Cat Cora: I’m definitely seeing a lot more squash, like Pattypan, on restaurant menus. Also, more fruit like strawberries and grapes in salads. I’ve started to grill fava beans in their pods. It gives them a



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smoky flavor.

Jamie Gwen: I'm from Southern California and farm-to-fork is big. It's reflected in restaurant menus and concepts. If chefs can buy a sweet Ojai tangerine, they'll list it by name on the menu and the farm where it came from. I do the same when I talk about fresh produce on the radio. I think highlighting the origin of a fruit or vegetable benefits our community, our farmers and our taste buds.

Bradley Herron: Not so much an item, but a method. Sourcing locally. I've gone to farms and set up relationships with farmers to supply produce like lettuce, beets and corn. Now we're getting eggplant and a variety of squashes — Heirloom varieties that are sweeter, tastier and healthier.

Spike Mendelsohn: I think a big trend with chefs is trying to reintroduce fresh produce to diners in a straightforward way. We aren't looking to hide the fruits and vegetables in our dishes. There has been a real shift to highlight the flavors. I am hearing a lot about greens right now, which I love. They are so versatile.

Sara Moulton: Beets, Brussels sprouts, all kale varieties and cooking greens are hot. Also, Asian greens like Bok Choy and broccolini. It's the funkier, strong-flavored vegetables that are coming into favor. They are more available now; I think



"Chelsea Clinton became a vegetarian during my years in the White House. That provided an education for both of us. Thai Red Curry Sweet Potato Soup was one of her favorites, something much different than the sweet potatoes and marshmallows you usually see. Look at cultures where historically protein was the bit player — Asia, the Middle East, the Far East, India. That's where you'll find the tricks and techniques to turn pedestrian vegetables into a flavorful dish."

— *Water Scheib*

that's one reason. And

CSAs are helping, too. You've got to figure out how to cook what they give you or what's the point?

Ben Pollinger: Citrus is hot in the winter. Blood oranges, Meyer lemons, Kaffir limes. There's lots of fresh produce coming from Italy — fresh escarole, Tardive radicchio and Costo Franco. There's also been an explosion in Heirloom shelling beans. For example, we use fresh cranberry beans, rather than dried now in an Italian bean ragout.

Jonathon Sawyer: Wild ingredients are timely and coming to the forefront. I'm an avid forager. It's a good chance to take the kids and dogs for a walk and at the same time pick up spring onions, garlic mustard, ramps, dandelion greens and wild berries.

Walter Scheib: Beets have been around for a while, but today it's not the sliced jarred kind. I'd make a roasted beet salad Mrs. Bush loved. I'd also make a beet carpaccio, thinly sliced gold and red beets with fennel and citrus salad. It's the preparation method that brings out the intensity of the flavor.

Fabio Viviani: Is that a trend? I thought it was a law!

How do you stay informed of new produce items or varieties?

James Asaro: Purveyors and suppliers are our



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Avocados from Mexico partners with Corona® for a blockbuster Cinco

The only thing bigger than an *Avocados from Mexico* Cinco promotion is a cross-promotion event with the most popular Mexican beer in the world.

For Cinco de Mayo 2012, *Avocados from Mexico* is offering retailers a multi-department promotion in partnership with America's #1 selling imported beer. In the Produce section, Cinco-themed promotion displays will maximize incremental avocado sales. At the front of the store, Corona displays will spotlight the promotion and deliver 1.3 million coupons triggering avocado purchase. Twitter and Facebook promotions will energize Cinco lovers throughout America. To participate, retailers can contact their *Avocados from Mexico* importer or David Botsford at dbotsford@botsfordgroup.com.



Avocados hit the airwaves this spring

Avocados will be top-of-mind with target consumers throughout the spring, thanks to a 10-week period radio campaign that will generate 54.5 million impressions. Sixty-second radio spots will invite consumers to "add a little avocado" to jazz up the foods they already love and enjoy. Retail tags will direct listeners to participating stores to shop for fresh and ripe *Avocados from Mexico*. The spring radio campaign will end on May 7th.

To hear the radio spots, visit www.theamazingavocado.com.



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Avocados from Mexico is back on road this spring with twice the number of *Taste the WOW Tour* trucks. At the conclusion of 13 event stops, which include Atlanta, Chicago and Cincinnati, more than 400,000 people will have experienced fresh, new ways to enjoy avocados. Every taster will receive recipes, as well as tips on how to select, ripen and cut an avocado. A list of tour stops and dates is available at facebook.com/theamazingavocado. At some stops, visitors will meet Chef Suvir Saran and registered dietitian Cheryl Forberg. Consumers can also enter to win a personalized cooking and nutrition consultation with Suvir and Cheryl.





BANACOL:

Cultivating a Better Social Future

CORBANACOL (Banacol Social Foundation) *strives to better the lives of communities*



An important part of Banacol's Cultivating Wellbeing philosophy is its commitment to the social development of the communities where it has plantations. Through its social foundation, Corbanacol, it contributes directly to the sustainable development of these communities through community support along with its own social investment and management via cooperation with regional, national and international resources.

Corbanacol's programs are focused on three important pillars:

- Housing beyond walls: Promotion of dignified housing moving beyond just construction of walls, and promoting options that contribute to the quality of life and offer spaces for recreation, sports training, and cultural formation in a healthy environment
- Health promotion and prevention: A broad program encompassing various elements in favor of the physical and mental wellbeing of entire communities and family groups
- Education and preparation for life: Offering to children, youngsters, women and the community at large, the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills through

various programs that contribute to the effective management of free time. Sports, recreation, art and culture are part of the Corbanacol strategy for teaching values for life to children and youngsters.

Corbanacol looks to strengthen the family as integrator of the neighborhood to society, focused on the transmission of values, the consolidation of associative groups and the promotion of self-management. Strong family units are key contributors to the culture of peace and sustainability and play important roles in facilitating future goals.

Corbanacol was born on November 6, 1987, as a response to the unbalanced development of the banana regions of Antioquia, and the search to improve the life conditions of the communities they interact with. Currently Corbanacol is present in the regions of Colombia and Costa Rica, where Banacol Corporation has its banana and pineapple plantations.

VITAL STATISTICS HIGHLIGHTING BANACOL'S & CORBANACOL'S CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY:

- US\$46 million of social investment during the last 14 years in the different program areas of health, housing, and education and preparation developed by Corbanacol

- 3,565 housing improvements (Construction of new housing and improvements to existing housing) delivered by Corbanacol
- In the past 14 years, Banacol Corporation has approved 2,589 credit applications for housing assistance, with a value of US\$7 million
- 41,000 people received drinkable water thanks to the construction of 5 rural aqueducts in the region of Urabá, in alliance with other public and private organizations
- 1,741 children who benefit from Initiation and Formation Centers for sports, art and culture in Colombia and Costa Rica
- 976 children who benefit from nutrition programs where, in addition to medical check-ups and growth and development assessments, they receive a nutritional supplement of banana flour processed by Banacol in its Center for Research and Development
- Social partnership with 192 community organizations like youth groups, women's associations and community leaders, among others





- 3,843 recipient families of the program Healthy Housing developed under the methodology of the World Health Organization and adapted to the conditions of the region of Urab., with the objective of improving sanitary and hygiene conditions in the homes of company employees
- 2,000 small plantain producers benefitted in 2011 from cooperative business programs including technical assistance, improvements to housing and infrastructure, and sports and cultural programs
- 60 parks and sports complexes, and 110 school classrooms that were improved or constructed in Colombia and Costa Rica to enhance education and recreational conditions in the communities
- More than 7,600 jobs directly generated in 2011 in Colombia, Costa Rica and the U.S.
- 6,449 apprentices (student interns) in the last 4 years for whom Banacol Corporation has given the opportunity to strengthen their professional and technical knowledge
- An average earned salary rather above the minimum standard in Colombia for 4,190 operating employees on Banacol's Urab. farms
- 100% of employees of Banacol Corporation benefit from collective bargaining and agreements signed by unions and worker commissions in Colombia and Costa Rica
- 18,248 employees have benefitted from education and preparation programs that the company has advanced in the last 6 years
- 16 million kilos of organic compost are processed annually, taken from banana and pineapple waste, and utilized as fertilizer in the company's plantations
- 772.5 tons of plastic residue are recycled annually, to later be used as principal material for income-generating projects for mother-headed households
- 20 water recirculation plants in the company's banana packing facilities in Colombia that decrease water use by 60%

BANACOL'S SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS INCLUDE:

- Rainforest Alliance
- GlobalGap
- ISO 14001
- Tesco NS
- CAB-Corbana
- Enlace
- ETI
- SA8000
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- COSAP-Canapep
- BASC
- C-TPAT (Level 3)



friends. You can stay as updated as you want to be, but you have to put the effort in. Search out the information. Buy from them. Try out the new items.

Dan Barber: Jack Algieri, the vegetable grower at Stone Barns, is a great farmer, but a great eater too; he is always looking for new flavors. In the past few years, we've started collaborating with plant breeders at Cornell University to trial new vegetable varieties in the field. So our diners get to taste something new, like an unnamed tomato hybrid, and the breeders get feedback

on which varieties are the most successful on the farm, and in the restaurant.

Richard Blais: I read a lot. I shop. I travel the world and keep my eyes open.

Jason Brzozowy: Fresh sheets from wholesalers weekly or sometimes daily, depending on the season. Emails and phone calls from farmers. Walking the local farmer's market.

Cat Cora: I always talk to the local produce people and farmers. There's always something new and awesome. I also look at what my colleagues are doing and what's on their menus.

I eat out a lot.

Jamie Gwen:

I read a lot. I'll use the Internet to find information and resources. I'll also talk with my local distributor to find out and get the best of the season.

Bradley Herron: We're lucky to have a forager. He's about 30 minutes away in Homestead. He visits about 15 farms, meets the growers and makes the connections. That's how I get my information, through these direct relationships.

Spike Mendelsohn: I think I learn the most from my farmers' market. I like to take the time to talk with the farmers to see what they like and what's new.

Sara Moulton: I use online grocer Fresh Direct. I'll go first to the "What's New" on their website, then "Organic" and then "Local." Or, I'll look at the "President's Picks" to see what's available. There's always an explanation.

Ben Pollinger: From the network of vendors, farmers and people who supply me.

Jonathon Sawyer: We have a huge library of thousands of cookbooks and magazines at the restaurant, and that doesn't count the over 500 cookbooks I have at home. I also like to talk to the local farmers. We change one to two dishes on the menu weekly and doing this forces you to stay fresh.

Water Scheib: Two ways: reading — I own over 1,500 cookbooks, and travel. I'll stay and eat at 45 to 60 hotels, restaurants or clubs around the world every year.

Fabio Viviani: New produce items? Not much new coming out of the ground! I am not aware of any new vegetables.

What are the biggest challenges for restaurants to achieve the USDA's My Plate Initiative, which recommends half of our plates be filled with fruits and vegetables?

Dan Barber: For that initiative to succeed, there needs to be an effort on both the chefs' and the diners' parts to shift those expectations, and to do it deliciously.

Richard Blais: I think fresh produce separates a quality restaurant. I feature tons of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Jason Brzozowy: We offer vegetarian and vegan tasting menus. Even when we serve meat, it's with plenty of vegetables. For example, our Grilled Dakota Beef Hanger Steak is served over top of diced and pureed sweet potatoes and steamed collards.

Cat Cora: I'm opening up gourmet restaurants in airports where travelers in the past haven't been able to get fresh produce. For example, my Cobb Salad has all fresh produce — lettuce, tomato and avocado, turkey bacon for less fat with micro-

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greens on the side. You can add grilled-to-order shrimp or free-range chicken or eat it without the added meat.

Jamie Gwen: Getting more produce on the plate is a continued challenge for Americans. The key is not to hide it, but move it to the forefront. For me, I like to incorporate a combination of colors, flavors and textures. For example, a green salad with watercress or arugula topped with hazelnuts and goat cheese and then thin slices of Korean pear or fresh berries or thinly shaved fennel or radishes. It tastes better this way and increases consumption, too.

Bradley Herron: It's not a challenge, it's what I do. It's all about bountiful fresh ingredients like fruits and vegetables. Yesterday, we served porchetta di testa or rolled pig head, deboned, sliced and served it with pickled spring onions, thin sliced radishes, fresh arugula and fennel to balance the fattiness of the meat.

Spike Mendelsohn: The challenge is that sometimes certain fruits and vegetables are simply not in season. We all strive to give our diners the best ingredients possible. I want to buy my produce locally and produce dishes that make you say "wow, that's fresh!" but seasonality can be an obstacle in getting fruits and vegetables into everything.

Sara Moulton: It's all about time. The planning, shopping and cooking; prep time shouldn't be prohibitive. The idea is to have quick and easy vegetable dishes to put on the table fast. I like roasting vegetables. I'll use the grating disk on my food processor to grate beets, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, turnips and even Brussels sprouts. They cook faster that way and the heat caramelizes the natural sugars. When done, I'll toss them with olive oil, balsamic vinegar and toasted pine nuts.



"What I've found is that a produce dish needs to be bolder flavored than one with meat. We want the customer to say 'Wow,' not 'Where's the meat?' At Kouzzina in Disney World, my Spiced Briami is a robust produce heavy stew made with roasted vegetables, oregano and Mazithra cheese served over herbed orzo."

— *Cat Cora*

Ben Pollinger: Overcoming customers' general expectation that protein should be the star of the plate and that the amount of protein equates to the perception of value. Diners who pay \$35 for an entrée in New York City expect at least seven ounces of protein. There's a little overcoming of this at lunchtime. We'll get people eating with us three to four times a week and they'll go for a composed salad. Lunch yes, but you won't see this at dinner.

Jonathon Sawyer: It's really hard at our restaurant to eat less than 25 percent of your meal as produce. That said, I don't think it's the government's plan to modify what chefs make, but to change people's way of eating to try and eat as much as possible throughout the day. Not just focus on one big plate of produce.

Water Scheib: If it doesn't taste good, no one will eat it. Chefs are the culinary artists, and it's our job to use the different flavors, textures and colors in the 200 or 300 types of fruits and vegetables, compared to the seven or eight types of meats and poultry, to create new and unique preparation methods and dishes. In other words, play with the whole keyboard, not just the notes in the middle. In addition, we need to get away from compartmentalizing the protein and vegetables on the plate, but integrate them instead. I make a smoked beefsteak topped with a roasted corn, onion and chipotle sauce that provides a 1 1/2-oz. serving of corn just in the sauce. The rich flavor of the smoked beef means you can get away with a four- to five-oz. portion. I also take big chunks of pineapple, mango and papaya, stir-fry them, and serve them under the steak and garnish with one to two slices of fried plantain on top. It's not serving half a plate of broccoli, but the meal is over half produce.

Fabio Viviani: Getting the customers to follow the guidelines...Our menus provide healthy vegetables, but that does not mean they will be eaten!

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What motivates you to add fresh produce in unconventional ways in your cooking? How do you introduce new produce items to your clientele?

James Asaro: What motivates me is my customers. Last year, a customer with a farm brought us two cases of apples. We put together a whole tasting menu with them — glazed apples and blue cheese appetizer, pork and apples, apple biscuits and twice-baked apples for dessert.

Dan Barber: Mostly, I'm motivated by the farmers and by the desire to show off the incredible work they do.

Jason Brzozowy: The toys. We have a lot of cool kitchen equipment. For one, a combi oven that lets me sous-vide or dehydrate. Strawberry chips are a good example.

Cat Cora: What I've found is that a produce dish needs to be bolder flavored than one with meat. We want the customer to say "Wow," not "Where's the meat?" At Kouzzina in Disney World, my Spiced Briami is a robust produce heavy stew made with roasted vegetables, oregano and Mazithra cheese served over herbed orzo.

Jamie Gwen: I like to make sweet and savory dishes. Like mango with chicken or pork, or peach salsa over a grilled chicken breast. The enzymes in the fruit are a great tenderizer.

Bradley Herron: We got this huge tilefish in yesterday. It had still been swimming out in the ocean only a few hours before. I pan roasted it and paired it with a shaved fennel, orange and olive salad.

Spike Mendelsohn: I like to use produce with unusual pairings. I might throw something onto a pizza with some other ingredients that make you curious to try a slice. It's great to introduce produce to diners in a way that makes them wonder.

Sara Moulton: I've had great success with Asian ingredients like oyster sauce, ginger and toasted sesame oil. These ingredients have a depth of flavor, umami, which makes vegetables taste meatier.

Ben Pollinger: I'm an avid gardener. I worked at an Indian restaurant for five years. They'd give me these seeds to grow for some really interesting vegetables and seasonings. Now, I have a garden at home.

Jonathon Sawyer: Vegetarian isn't a restriction. Thirty percent of our customers are vegan or vegetarian. A plate of pasta topped with vegetables on the menu isn't enough anymore.

Water Scheib: Chelsea Clinton became a vegetarian during my years in the White House. That provided an education for both of us. Thai Red Curry Sweet Potato Soup was one of her favorites, something much different than the sweet potatoes and marshmallows you usually see. Look at cultures where historically protein was the bit player — Asia, the Middle East, the Far East, India. That's where you'll find the tricks and techniques to turn pedestrian vegetables into a flavorful dish.

Fabio Viviani: Nothing unconventional about me or my food...very simple, traditional Italian!

What are your preferences regarding produce grown locally versus organically versus imported or purchased through a distributor or



"In reality, exclusively local can't exist in a temperate climate. You can use only so much turnips, parsnips and cabbage in the winter. That's why in the winter we'll support local growers, but they'll be sourcing product from their farms in Florida. I also buy from wholesale produce dealers on items that have a secondary role and don't have to be the most expensive, like potatoes, onions and carrots. We'll also go further afield when it's something of quality or brings a distinctive taste like Italian lettuces."

— Ben Pollinger

prefer to buy U.S.-grown.

Jamie Gwen: I believe in organic. I like to support local farmers and shop farmer's markets. And, I buy from distributors that support local farmers and are quality driven.

Bradley Herron: My sourcing philosophy is local and seasonal.

Sara Moulton: First, I eat seasonally with a CSA. Second, local and seasonal. Third is organic, especially when it's affordable, and for the Dirty Dozen. Fourth, I eat more produce — period.

Ben Pollinger: In reality, exclusively local can't exist in a temperate climate. You can use only so much turnips, parsnips and cabbage in the winter. That's why in the winter we'll support local growers, but they'll be sourcing product from their farms in Florida. I also buy from wholesale produce dealers on items that have a secondary role and don't have to be the most expensive, like potatoes, onions and carrots. We'll also go further afield when it's something of quality or brings a distinctive taste like Italian lettuces.

Jonathon Sawyer: We have a purchasing pyramid. Our ideal goal is produce sourced from within 30 miles away, seasonal and organic. Next is 200 miles. Third is natural, organic and fairly grown. The fourth tier is something like lemons, that aren't local or regional, but you need them to run a restaurant.

Water Scheib: Organic is a soil certification. It can be organic and taste terrible if it isn't ripe. Organic doesn't guarantee flavor. Local is good if it means ripe. After that, if it tastes good, that's what is important.

Fabio Viviani: I always prefer local...what is grown in my back yard. However, we do use reliable sources for produce grown outside our locations. Wherever it is grown, it is local to that site!

local program?

James Asaro: Locally grown is the best. It's less traveled, more available and fresh. I love small farms. They're a great place for one-of-a-kind items. In a perfect world, these are the ingredients I'd love to get all the time.

Dan Barber: I don't know how to rank them, but I will say I lead with local. If it's local to the Northeast, there's generally some kind of good diversity happening. The climate dictates that — it's very hard to put all of your eggs in one basket around here. So we look for lots of diversity in a farm, both in vegetables and livestock, because that's the farm that's producing the best tasting products. And those tend to be organic, but not 100 percent.

Richard Blais: Most of the time, not all... you'll find that locally grown and organic stuff tastes better, so obviously we go after what tastes best!

Jason Brzozowy: First is organic; we are a certified organic restaurant. After that, local, many times it's one and the same. We might source further afield for special events. We imported black truffles from France for last Christmas and New Year.

Cat Cora: My priority is sustainable. Local farmers are at the top of my list, whether they are in San Francisco or Florida, Salt Lake City or Houston. I'm not a big fan of imports and

◆ Born and raised on the North Shore of Long Island, **James Asaro** started working in restaurants at the age of 14 and never looked back. Following his high school graduation, he became a student at the Culinary Institute of America and, while working through school, he went on to work at Gaia Restaurant in Greenwich, CT, under Chef Bjorn Van De Horst. The restaurant was awarded three stars from *The New York Times*. After one year in Greenwich, James returned to NYC to learn the ropes of the NYC restaurant industry, ultimately becoming an executive chef at the age of 25 at Ruby Foos. One year later, James became the sous chef at the Palm and within two years, he became the executive chef at The Palm West Side. James's career has brought him to many different places working with many different people, all of which have led to his style and culinary direction today.

◆ In May of 2000, **Dan Barber**, opened Blue Hill restaurant with family members David and Lauren Barber. Since then, his writings on food and agricultural policy have appeared in *The New York Times*, along with articles in *Gourmet*, *The Nation*, *Saveur* and *Food & Wine Magazine*. Barber's efforts to create a consciousness around our everyday food choices have led him to the World Economic Forum's 2010 annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, as well as to TED2010, where he looked toward a new ecological approach to cuisine. Appointed by President Barack Obama to serve on the President's Council on Physical Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, Barber continues the work that he began as a member of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture's board of directors: to blur the line between the dining experience and the educational, bringing the principles of good farming directly to the table. Dan has received the James Beard awards for Best Chef: New York City (2006) and for Outstanding Chef (2009). In 2009, he was named one of the world's most influential people in *Time's* annual "Time 100."

◆ Perhaps most recognizable as the recent winner of Bravo's *Top Chef All-Stars*, **Richard Blais** has played an influential role in hospitality for the past 15 years. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Richard has trained at French Laundry, Daniel, and el Bulli. Blais currently owns and operates Trail Blais, a forward-thinking culinary company that has consulted on, designed and operated some of Atlanta's most popular eateries including multiple outposts of Flip Burger Boutique and HD-1. He will be opening The Spence, a new restaurant concept in Midtown Atlanta, in spring 2012, and will publish his debut cookbook with Clarkson Potter in the coming year. Blais has appeared several times on Food Network, Discovery Science and CNN and in numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *InStyle* and *Food & Wine Magazine*.

◆ **Jason Brzozowy** grew up in Milwaukee, WI, and his interest in food began at a young age from watching Jacques Pepin, Julia Child, and *Great Chefs*, *Great Cities* on PBS. He attended the University of Wisconsin briefly until realizing that he would rather pursue a career as a chef, and decided to study culinary arts in Chicago, IL. After working in Chicago for several years, he moved to Seattle in 2007, and started at Tilth shortly afterward. In 2010, he was promoted to chef de cuisine.

◆ Since making television history in 2005 as the first and only female Iron

Chef on Food Network's *Iron Chef America*, **Cat Cora** has become one of the largest names in the culinary community. In May, 2012, Cora will be expanding her repertoire to host, in Bravo's new reality series *Around the World in 80 Plates*, which follows 12 chefs competing in a culinary race across 10 countries in 44 days. Beyond her television credits, Cora is also a contributing food & lifestyle editor for *O, The Oprah Magazine*. To date, Cora has successfully launched several unique restaurant concepts, including Cat Cora's Que (CCQ), a casual barbeque restaurant featuring her favorite takes on global BBQ; Kouzinna by Cat Cora at Disney's Board Walk Resort; and Cat Cora's Kitchen, a sophisticated dining option for airport travelers with locations in the Virgin Terminal 2 at San Francisco International Airport and the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, TX. Cora is also the author of three top-selling cookbooks. Outside of the kitchen, Cora is an avid philanthropist, and in 2004, she founded Chefs for Humanity in response to the tsunami disaster in Indonesia. Her charity is dedicated to preventing hunger, reducing obesity and providing help to those in emergency conditions.

◆ As a chef, food correspondent, sommelier and lifestyle expert, **Jamie Gwen** shares recipes, resources and tips to help make everyday more delicious. Her weekly 2-hour Live Radio Show entitled *Food & Wine with Chef Jamie Gwen* can be heard every Sunday on KFWB NEWS TALK 980 throughout Southern California and live worldwide on the Internet and on iTunes. You can also catch Chef Jamie stirring up something scrumptious on Martha Stewart Living Radio on Sirius/XM as a frequent culinary contributor. Gwen brings her culinary expertise to *Riviera Magazine* and *Taste Magazine*. She is a Certified Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers and a five-time cookbook author. Infused with the joy of cooking from a very young age, Jamie graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in New York, then continued to pursue her career under the tutelage of many world-renowned chefs.

◆ **Bradley Herron** began his career at the age of 13 in his hometown of Laguna Beach, CA, in a taco shop, where he prepped and washed dishes. Three years later, with all the gusto of a 16-year old, he took a job as a line cook at Claes Restaurant, overlooking the Pacific in the prestigious Hotel Laguna and discovered he had a lot to learn. Herron returned to the kitchen at Joe's Restaurant in Venice Beach, after having graduated in 2003 from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Pasadena. He was quickly promoted to Sous Chef, and shortly thereafter, the restaurant received a Michelin star. He went on to work in a few other restaurants in the Los Angeles area before moving to Miami in search of a kitchen where the menu was ingredient-driven. Herron worked on the line at Michael's Genuine Food & Drink for five months before being promoted to his current title of Chef de Cuisine. Basing his dishes around what is local and/or seasonal, Herron has refined his style to simple, thought out, and visually balanced food. After learning about the Florida seasons, which are reversed compared to the rest of the country, he uses what he can get his hands on and lets the product do the work.

◆ Chef **Spike Mendelsohn** was a contestant on Bravo's *Top Chef Chicago*, and is the chef and owner of the popular Capitol Hill award-winning burger joint

Good Stuff Eatery, which opened in 2008, and has been frequented by the First Family. It was inspired by his vision of a place where people can enjoy the nostalgia of eating the best of their American favorites: handcrafted burgers, hand-cut fries and handspun shakes made with the highest quality farm-fresh ingredients. Before moving to Washington, D.C., Spike worked as the chef de cuisine at NYC hotspot restaurant, Mai House, which was named as one of *The New York Times'* Top Ten best restaurants during his tenure. To begin his cooking career, he attended the Culinary Institute of America where he received the school's highest award, The Francis Roth Leadership Award.

◆ One of the most trusted names in the food biz, **Sara Moulton's** credibility rests on her expertise and experience. She graduated with high honors from the Culinary Institute of America in 1977 (and was named the CIA's Chef of the Year in 2001), spent seven years working in restaurants in New York and Boston, and taught at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School (now known as The Institute of Culinary Education). The Food Editor of ABC-TV's *Good Morning America* since 1997, Sara was a founding personality at the Food Network as host of *Cooking Live*, *Cooking Live Primetime*, and *Sara's Secrets* between 1996 and 2005. In 2008, she created *Sara's Weeknight Meals* for public television, which began its second season on public television. On the print side, Sara was *Gourmet* magazine's executive chef from 1987 until the magazine folded in October of 2009. She is also the author of *Sara's Secrets for Weeknight Meals*, *Sara Moulton Cooks at Home* and *Sara's Everyday Family Dinners*, which won a 2011 IACP Cookbook Award in the category of Children, Youth and Family. In December of 2011, she launched *Sara's Kitchen*, an iPhone app featuring 60 recipes, 60 photos and 10 videos. In 1982 Sara co-founded the New York Women's Culinary Alliance, an "old girls network" for women in the culinary industry.

◆ Executive Chef of NYC's Oceana restaurant, **Ben Pollinger** blends the finest seafood with the best ingredients from a global pantry. Under his watch, Oceana has earned a Michelin star from 2007-2012, and Pollinger has received praise from *New York Post's* Steve Cuozzo and *Crain's* Gael Greene. Other accolades include a three-star review in *The New York Times* and *Esquire's* "Rising Star Chef." Pollinger graduated from the Culinary Institute of America and moved to Monte Carlo to work at Le Louis XV under Chef Alain Ducasse; he has also worked at Les Celebrites, Lespinasse, Union Square Café and Tabla.

◆ A Cleveland native, **Jonathon Sawyer** first learned to cook at the age of 13. He attended the University of Dayton and graduated from the Pennsylvania Institute of Culinary Arts. His post-graduate career started at The Biltmore Hotel in Miami, and continued alongside renowned chef Charlie Palmer in New York at Kitchen 22. Following his work with Charlie Palmer, Jonathon moved back to his hometown to open Lolita as Chef de Cuisine for his friend and colleague, Michael Symon. This relationship fostered many new opportunities for Jonathon and eventually led him back to New York City to open another Michael Symon venture, Parea. In 2007, Jonathon moved back to his hometown and opened Bar Cento, a modern Roman enoteca in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood. In April of

2009, Jonathon opened The Greenhouse Tavern on Cleveland's East 4th Street — a French and seasonally inspired gastropub and Ohio's first "green" restaurant, as certified by the Green Restaurant Association. The Greenhouse Tavern was recently named one of the Top Ten Best New Restaurants in the United States by *Bon Appetit* as well as Best New Restaurant by *Cleveland Magazine*. Last year, Jonathon was honored as one of *Food & Wine Magazine's* Best New Chefs. He has made several national television appearances on programs such as *Dinner Impossible*, *Iron Chef America* and *Best Thing I Ever Ate*. His most recent endeavor, Noodlecats, was born in July, 2011. Sawyer is also behind the first pop up restaurant group in Cleveland, Brick & Mortar Popups.

◆ In April, 1994, following a lengthy application and screening process, **Walter Scheib** became the chef to America's chief executive and the First Family. First Lady Hillary Clinton personally hired Scheib. For 11 years, he prepared everything from simple family meals to elaborate and formal State Dinners. A highlight of Scheib's White House achievement was his creation of a distinctly American repertoire for the nation's First House. Since he returned to private life, Scheib has founded The American Chef, the company through which he shares his knowledge of the development of American cuisine at the White House, as well as White House remembrances, with audiences across the country. Scheib discovered his mother's pots and pans early in life. He attended the Culinary Institute of America, from which he graduated with high honors in 1979. Immediately thereafter, Scheib started as a Rounds Cook at a premier Washington, D.C. hotel, and within three years was promoted to executive chef. Before arriving at the White House, he served as executive chef at other major hotels and resorts such as the Boca Raton Resort and Club. Television appearances include the *Early Show*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *Good Morning America*, *Weekend Today in New York*, *Nightline* and *Iron Chef*. Newspaper and magazine stories and interviews about his company and his food have been seen in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The U.S. News and World Report*, in addition to other articles. He is the co-author of the newly published *White House Chef: Eleven Years, Two Presidents, One Kitchen*, which was released in January 2007.

◆ Chef **Fabio Viviani** is executive chef and owner of Café Firenze, Italian Restaurant and Martini Bar in Moorpark, CA, and Firenze Osteria, Italian Restaurant and Martini Bar, in Toluca Lake, CA. He made his first appearance on television in the hit show, *Top Chef* Season 5, making it all the way to the finals and was voted Fan Favorite. Viviani also appeared on *Top Chef*, *Season 8 All Stars*. His first cookbook, *Café Firenze Cookbook, Mangia e Bevi*, has been a huge hit with rave reviews. He has also released 3 E-books including: *Did I Really Make Breakfast*, *Did I Really Make Breakfast Volume II*, *The Skinny Country*, *We the Soup*, & *I Would Love to Meat You* on Amazon.com. He is currently the spokesperson for a number of high profile products including Bertolli Olive Oil, Bertolli Frozen Soups, Match.com, San Pellegrino, Bialetti, Domino's Pizza, Yahoo.com, and Santa Margherita Wines. He is currently working on a signature line of food products.



Tropical fruit and white asparagus are two items growing in popularity in Canadian produce departments.

Subtle Differences: Canadian Produce Departments

Regionally specific preferences and a growing ethnic community prove the differences between the United States and our neighbors to the north are only noticeable with a fine-tooth comb.

BY PAULA HENDRICKSON

On the surface, there aren't many obvious differences between supermarket produce departments in Canada and the United States. And while Canadians have historically consumed more fresh fruits and vegetables than their U.S. counterparts, Ron Lemaire, president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, says that gap is beginning to shrink. "I left the produce industry for almost three years," he says, but upon his return last year he noticed a subtle shift in Canadian habits. "Our consumption patterns are a little higher [than the United States], and a big part of that does have a cultural element to it. Is it a European influence? Is it a lifestyle influence? I think there's a range of components that are influencing factors. The challenge we have now in Canada is that the difference we saw five years ago is narrowing."

Lemaire theorizes that the globalization of the market is beginning to impact consumer patterns and behaviors. Just as it is in the United States, obesity is becoming an issue throughout Canada, something Lemaire feels may be linked to the influence of American media and pop

culture, among other things. "All of these pieces come together, so when you look at comparatives between Canada and the United States, those comparatives are starting to narrow just because of our North American global environment," he explains.

That gap may be showing signs of shrinking, but it's not closed yet. Canadians still eat more fresh fruits and vegetables than people in the United States. "I believe this is due to cultural differences," says Chloe Varennes, marketing and packaging administrator at Los Angeles, CA-based Gourmet Trading Co. "Eastern Canada, specifically Quebec, has strong French and European influences. This can be seen in our sales of white asparagus, which is very popular in Europe."

Varennes maintains the legacy of that European culinary influence is that people are open to trying different kinds of foods and recipes. "The French Canadian demographic is very knowledgeable about the produce they are purchasing," she says. "They are aware of where their produce is coming from, and about the company that distributes it."

"The statistics do indicate that Canadians eat

more fruits and vegetables than Americans, though across America, there are definite peaks and valleys with respect to consumption," says James Milne, director of business development and marketing, and avocado and citrus category director for The Oppenheimer Group, in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. "Canada has fewer food deserts than we see in the United States, though we have seen increased attention to these areas, and noteworthy strides have been made in recent years." Milne credits the support of Canada's social system with providing the nation's at-risk population with better access to produce and other nutritious foods.

Non-traditional food retailers, such as drug stores and convenience stores, are already beginning to fill "food deserts" in some communities. "Even one of our major hardware stores, Canadian Tire, now sells food, and will, from what we understand, introduce some core produce items," Lemaire reports.

Price is another key factor in encouraging more produce consumption. "Produce in Canada often has a lower price point than in the United States, and promotional programs such as air miles and store loyalty cards help

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keep produce attractively priced,” Milne says.

Virginia Zimm, president of Faye Clack Communications Inc., located in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, says Canadian’s love of fresh produce is about access as much, if not more than, heritage. “Canadians have more SKUs in their produce sections than most other countries in the world, including the United States,” she remarks. “I think at last count there was somewhere in the vicinity of over 1,000 SKUs in the A-size stores, which typically house a 100,000-square-ft. footprint on average.”

In Canada, anyway, more selections, more space and lower prices add up to more sales. “Generally, Canadian supermarkets offer a wider selection of produce than American grocery stores,” Varennes says. “With more room on the shelves, produce managers are more likely to add unique vegetables such as white asparagus to store shelves.” Varennes also notes a slight difference in how many Canadian supermarkets are merchandised. “It is common for the fresh produce department to be close to the cheese and/or dairy in Quebec supermarkets. This is great for increasing sales of fruits and vegetables that pair well with cheese,” she says, such as blackberries and mascarpone, or asparagus and Brie, for instance.

Changing Habits, Growing Trends

Everything from immigration policies to agricultural technology has altered the Canadian produce industry in recent years. “At Longo’s, we have noticed that different stores have different demands,” says John Fiorino, produce category manager at Longo’s, a 24-unit chain in the greater Toronto area, headquartered in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada. “For example, some of our stores have a more globally diverse clientele, so we cater to them by offering a broader array of ethnic choices.”

While U.S. grocers are seeing an increased demand for Latin foods — as evidenced by the Midwestern chain, Schnucks, rolling out in-store “*mercados*” in some markets — their Canadian counterparts are accommodating a growing Asian demographic. “We’re seeing an Asian influence, especially on the West Coast and central areas,” reveals CPMA’s Lemaire. “For example, you would not have seen dragon fruit for sale in Alberta five years ago, but now, with a well-established Vietnamese community, it’s a commodity that’s widely available for retail in Alberta, and across the country.”

Fiorino agrees, noting exotic fruits have become more popular over the past five to 10 years. “There was a time when fruits such as

mango or dragon fruit were hit-or-miss in stores, but now they’re a regular part of our line up.” He adds golden pineapple and star fruit have also become quite popular. Other recent additions to the market include items not previously common to the Canadian diet, such as yam, gingerroot, kale and Bok choy. In fact, volume demand for Bok choy is so high that Lemaire reports it is now being grown domestically.

Hothouses Change The Climate Game

Canada’s colder climate has always challenged the produce industry, but it has also spurred innovation. “Since we do have a shorter growing season than our friends to the south, more and more of our fruits and vegetables are grown in greenhouses,” says Faye Clack’s Zimm. “Typically, in the southernmost regions of Canada, in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, which accounts for 95 percent of greenhouse production, a total sales value of \$2.5 billion in 2010 is up 3 percent from 2009, according to Statistics Canada. Ontario alone accounts for 61 percent of that production.”

Lemaire says, “The biggest challenge is how to blend that so your domestic season thrives, grows and develops, and your import products work effectively with the shoulder season and

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not domestic seasons.”

That shoulder season is shrinking, now that modern agricultural technology and high-tech hothouse facilities are helping Canadian growers expand local growing seasons for many popular items. Zimm reports many facilities are capable of growing cucumbers, capsicum peppers and tomatoes 10 months out of the year, and production is expanding to include berries, sprouts, and a few growers are even experimenting with sub-tropical crops.

“As far as Canadian producers are concerned, we’re nearly all in high-tech because of our climate,” says Jim DiMenna, president of Jem-D International Partners LP, based in Kingsville, Ontario, Canada. “The consumption, the demand and the volume out of our company have increased quite a bit over the past few years, and it’s because the product is grown in a controlled environment, it has a longer shelf-life and has better flavor than field-grown products. That has helped increase consumption of those products.” DiMenna says hothouse growers are testing different varieties and specialty-type tomatoes, constantly looking for new ways to grow and improve on popular items.

Lemaire anticipates a big bump in Canada’s tomato industry for 2012. “Hothouse tomatoes were really successful in the past couple of years because field crops ran into some challenges,” he explains. “But now that the field market is strong again and the hothouse industry is ramped up, we’ll have two markets converging in a strong market environment. That’s a lot of product coming into Canada — and even into the United States.” Selling Canadian tomatoes in the United States is a big deal, considering Canada is often viewed as a “spillover market” for produce from Mexico and the United States.

Berry crops are also benefiting from hothouse technology. “Canadian growers are now applying new production techniques as well as new varieties that produce a much bigger, more shelf-stable product, and they’ve extended their local production season much longer,” says LeMaire. But that’s not to say California or Mexican production that we bring in on the shoulder seasons and winter season don’t have a market here as well.”

Import Restrictions And Labeling Regulations

“We don’t grow produce year-round in Canada, so the line between import and domestic is fundamental to consumption, and Canadian consumers enjoy the balance of local and imported products so they can have fresh fruit and vegetables year-round,” Lemaire says.

While Canadians are extremely loyal to

locally grown produce, Faye Clack’s Zimm says they understand and appreciate the need for imported fruit and vegetables to keep produce departments fully stocked year-round. “In terms of availability and variety, I believe the produce sections in most Canadian retail stores are some of the best-stocked shelves I’ve witnessed globally,” Zimm says. “I think if you spoke with any of our wholesale and retail buyers, they would tell you they take great pride in sourcing the very best produce from all over the world so there is always consistent supply, quality and pricing for their patrons all year long.”

Gourmet Trading is one such supplier. “We fill the off-season with fresh asparagus and blueberries from the United States of America, Mexico and South America,” reports Julia Inestroza, the company’s marketing and merchandising manager. “We know the Canadian customer wants local produce when it’s available, but we are pleased to offer other fresh imported produce the remainder of the year.”

Imports are an area where Canada has an edge over the United States. The ability to import a wider array of produce from foreign markets means Canadian consumers have access to great variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. “There are fewer [import] restrictions here, compared with the United States,” says Oppenheimer’s Milne. “This largely relates to the fact that few tropical fruits can grow here due to our climate. Likewise with citrus. As such, the risk of a pest problem spreading from an imported item to the domestic production is very small,” he explains. “While some imported produce requires hot or cold treatments before entering the United States, we don’t have those protocols here. It’s a benefit to Canadian retailers and consumers because untreated fruit often enjoys a longer shelf-life and, some say, a better flavor.”

That’s not to say Canada is without import restriction. “We have standard requirements for importing exotics, and if there’s produce coming in from an area that could impact [Canadian] plant health, documentation is necessary,” Lemaire says. He adds that Canada’s strict labeling requirements are more likely to cause imported produce to be rejected. “We don’t have the same flexibility the United States has with labeling. Our nutritional box or fact panel is different than the United States.” Labels must be in English and French, even with stickers. “The PLU code also must follow Canadian labeling guidelines. To put any type of health message on that label would trigger [the attention of] Canadian labeling regulators, who could potentially not allow that product in,” he maintains.

Current And Future Consumers

While Canadian consumers still prefer buying fruits and vegetables in bulk rather than packaged or value-added produce, bagged salads and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables are playing an increasing role in Canadian produce sales. "They're an important part of the store and continue to see growth," CPMA's Lemaire says. "But bulk is still a fundamental component of the produce department in Canada."

Jem-D's DiMenna says the United States and Canada are similar in that when it comes to

choosing bulk over packaged, it's more of a region-specific preference than it is a country-specific preference. But as in the United States, convenience is perhaps the biggest factor when consumers opt for packaged produce over bulk.

Milne of Oppenheimer contends packaging trends do differ a bit in Canada, though, because the main focus remains on bulk produce, noting, "While we are seeing more convenience options coming into the picture as the demographic bulge shifts to a younger generation, the Canadian supermarket of today is characterized by less packaging than its

American counterparts."

As that younger generation grows, many expect sales of packaged goods to rise. "We're looking at a societal shift around the application of ready-to-eat and convenience foods," Lemaire says. From bagged salads and single serving portions to specially packaged blueberries to put in your child's lunch bag, convenience and value-added packaging are making it easier for people — and especially kids — to consume more fruits and vegetables.

"We know in Canada that only 49 percent of youth eat the recommended five or more servings of fruit and vegetables per day," Lemaire reports, noting that figure is probably considerably lower in the United States, but poor nutrition is a problem threatening national health in both countries. "You're seeing it in the United States; we're seeing it in Canada. So our targeted approach is to try to instill change in tomorrow's consumers — the kids — and trying to teach them that fresh produce is an important part of their diet."

While the CPMA's *Fruits and Veggies Mix it Up* initiative educates all consumers about the benefits of healthy eating, its *Freggie Tales* campaign — in which mascot Freggie encourages school-age children to eat five to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables per day — is a long-term approach that stands to increase demand for fresh produce well into the next generation.

As a nation, Canada's effort to encourage sound nutritional choices extends even further — even into the classroom. "With respect to snacking, Canadian school systems are quite proactive about bringing fruits and vegetables into the classroom and helping kids understand why choosing them for meals — and in between meals — is essential to good health," Oppenheimer's Milne says. He cites British Columbia's *Agriculture in the Classroom* program and *Freggie Tales* initiative as compelling ways of reaching the next generation. "If you can get them eating more produce they will pass the habit on to their children in the future, and their parents today."

Despite a few cultural, economic and climatic differences, Canada and the United States share more common traits and challenges than one might expect. "The good thing for us, as neighbors to the north — and partners in a lot of ways with United States retailers and the country — is that we are a lot alike," says DiMenna. "Our consumptions are a lot alike. How we go to market is quite similar. I really don't see a lot of difference between the two countries — and that's not a bad thing."

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The meteoric rise in popularity of prepared guacamole can be compared to packaged salads 10 years ago.

The Growing Popularity Of Guacamole

Produce departments can take advantage of the increasing popularity of fresh guacamole by expanding selections, cross-merchandising and sampling. **BY LISA WHITE**

The growing Hispanic population in the United States has reached a new milestone, topping 50 million, or 16.3 percent of the nation, officially solidifying its position as the country's second-largest group, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. population will soar to 438 million by 2050 and the Hispanic population will triple, according to recent projections by the Pew Research Center.

This is good news for produce departments selling prepared guacamole, which appeals to a broad demographic. Retailers who have not yet jumped on this bandwagon should reconsider, as there will be increasing profit potential in the years ahead.

Total fresh guacamole sales sold from the deli department in 2011 were \$8.8 million, or 1.5 million pounds in the 52-week time period ending January 29, 2011, according to FreshLook Marketing, a market research firm based in Hoffman Estates, IL. Los Angeles, CA-based Yucatan Foods estimates U.S. retail fresh guacamole annual sales is near \$100 million, including non-reporting retailers and club stores. The average price for these products was

approximately \$5.88 and the distribution increase was 13 percent from 2010 to 2011. Guacamole represents 15 percent of sales of total fresh dips and sauces.

The Fresh Trend

Prepared guacamole is a value-added product, and its rise in popularity can be compared to the prepared salad category 10 years ago. "Looking at the market and what's happening, what I see across the entire category is a variety of packaging sizes and products designed to fit the needs of certain consumers," says Steve Martin, director of business development at Mission Produce Inc., in Oxnard, CA. In particular, there has been product innovation for the snacking segment. In addition to larger, party sizes, Mission Produce offers easy-peel guacamole trays that are designed to serve one to two people. The company also has launched a new 12-oz. size.

Saginaw, TX-based Fresherized Foods, recently introduced a snack-size, 100-calorie guacamole line.

The goal of guacamole manufacturers has been to set their products apart in a growing sea

of prepared dips. "We look at how we can differentiate our products from the rest of the market," Martin says. As a result of this effort, Mission Produce has developed a chunkier guacamole that contains more large avocado pieces. The company also offers spicy and mild varieties. "We've tried to create product that is closer to homemade," he adds. "All guacamole lines on the market from major suppliers today are quality products that taste good. Despite the fact that this is a manufactured item, prepared guacamole is a better product than people expect." Nonetheless, consumers on the West Coast and Southwest tend to be more discerning when it comes to guacamole quality.

"Another trend we see around the entire country is the continued Hispanic influence," says Michael Lippold, director of strategic development, mergers and acquisitions at Calavo Growers Inc., in Santa Paula, CA. "Avocados have always been popular on the West Coast, but consumption hasn't been there for other parts of the country until recently. Now, there are more restaurants like Chipotle that are popping up around the country [helping to fuel guacamole's popularity]." As the reach and



The majority of consumers who purchase dry guacamole mix, such as the one by Concord Foods, also purchase avocados.

“HPP guacamole tastes just like fresh product, but the process allows us to ship it. As avocado prices continue to rise, guacamole is a good alternative for consumers to get more avocado for their dollar.”

— Michael Lippold, Calavo Growers Inc.

consensus among guacamole suppliers is that this is the year of the avocado. “The past four years were about getting people to understand good and bad fat, and getting into people’s consideration sets,” explains Tracey Altman, vice president of marketing at Fresherized Foods, which was recently purchased by Megamex, a Hormel company. “The past couple of years were spent laying the groundwork for these products. Then, last year, we began seeing more restaurants adding guacamole to salads and sandwiches. From everything we’re seeing, this will be a stellar year for prepared guacamole.”

These products have transitioned from a party dip to a sandwich topping and ingredient. Consequently, these usage changes are driving sales in the produce department. The higher price point means the typical demographic for prepared guacamole is those between 35 and 45 years with an income of \$100,000 and above. “We are seeing progress in attracting those in the \$75,000 to \$100,000

income bracket and also retirees,” Altman reports. “Also, younger consumers in their mid-20s who are entertaining instead of going out to eat are now looking for these products.”

Giving this category an extra boost is the added attention to the healthful qualities of avocados, which are a good source of potassium and magnesium, while also having low saturated fat.

It was less than 10 years ago that the only guacamole available was pre-prepared with preservatives. This is because, in less than a day, fresh guacamole turns brown. But with the advent of high-pressure pasteurization (HPP), fresh and raw avocados can now be utilized to prepare preservative-free guacamole that has a shelf-life of between 70 to 80 days from when it is manufactured. This process utilizes approximately 87,000 pounds-per-square-inch of pressure on all sides of the packaging to kill dangerous bacteria, such as listeria.

“HPP guacamole tastes just like fresh product, but the process allows us to ship it,” Lippold says. “As avocado prices continue to rise, guacamole is a good alternative for consumers to get more avocado for their dollar.”

The popularity of fresh guacamole has resulted in convenience products, such as a dry mix from Concord Foods that can be added to avocados. “Our target customers are moms who want to use fresh ingredients and prepare dips quickly and easily for their busy families,” says Samantha McCaul, marketing assistant at the Brockton, MA-based company. The guacamole mix is prepared using two ripe avocados. “We have found that 90 percent of consumers that purchase dry guacamole mixes also purchase avocados.”

Effective Merchandising

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México

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TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT MEXICO'S FOOD SAFETY

As food safety continues to top the list of priorities for sourcing product, Mexico's producers and government continue to invest in top-notch food safety programs to

ensure their product meets the highest standards. As a major supplier to the U.S., Mexico has long taken very seriously its responsibility to prove safe, flavorful and

healthy produce. A closer look at Mexico's many comprehensive food safety and product quality programs will bring added assurance to buyers.

COMPARABLE GOVERNMENT STANDARDS

Like the United States, Mexico has a comprehensive food safety/phytosanitary regulatory regime. It includes nearly 250 mandatory compliance regulations covering a wide range of agriculture production activities, including animal feed, organics, additives, packaging, insects/pesticides, processing, and transportation. There are a

number of federal agencies with responsibility over food safety, including the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA); the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT); and Health (SS).

Many Mexican growers have voluntarily implemented Good Agricultural Practices

(GAP), and Mexican processors have implemented Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPS). In 2007, the Mexican Congress enacted an initiative strengthening the authority of Mexico's Agriculture Ministry to further enhance compliance with GAPs and to ensure the safety of food products grown in Mexico.

INDUSTRY-GENERATED PROGRAMS

The Mexican private sector is also diligent in harnessing food safety programs for specific needs.

Some producers are going beyond the government organized efforts and implementing even more specific programs. The Mexican Association of Protected Agriculture AMHPAC (Mexico's National Association

of Protected Horticulture) represents 200 growers with members involved in production, packaging, distribution and marketing of fresh produce grown under greenhouses and other covered structures. They are currently aggressively working a project based on the SQF Program (the food safety and quality certification system endorsed

by the Food Marketing Institute). In the case of avocados, APEAM (Growers and Exporters of Avocados from Michoacán) has undertaken the commitment that all exporters associated with their organization will be certified by MexicoGAP (Global-GAP) in two years.



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Luis Cruz

VIEW FROM MEXICO – ELEVEN RIVERS RAISES BAR

Interview with Fernando A. Mariscal, cooperative representative for Eleven Rivers Growers in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico, & Luis Alberto Cruz, director general for AVQ Consultoría Integral in S.C. Irapuato, Guanajuato, México

Q: What is Eleven Rivers?

MARISCAL: Eleven Rivers is a high performance program that aligns fresh produce growers to deliver reliable, healthy and fine fresh vegetables and fruits. It is managed by a cooperative which determines standards, designs continuous control mechanisms and manages the brand. Eleven Rivers does not buy or sell products nor earn profits. It also does not certify. The program supports and demands the highest performance of each participant (producers and independent auditing organizations) and promotes brand positioning and recognition. The program started in 2009 and beginning in the 2010/2011 winter season, the program began shipping with participating producers using its pallet label.

CRUZ: Eleven Rivers has made an alliance with AVQ Consulting, a Mexican food safety firm who represents the SQF Program. The SQF Program is an integrated HACCP-based food safety and quality management system endorsed by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and provides field-proven guidance and tools to attain a greater level of assurance. Since SQF is the standard of choice for retailers in the U.S. and Canada it makes perfect sense for Eleven Rivers to choose SQF as the framework for their initiative.

Q: What are Eleven Rivers' objectives?

MARISCAL: We want to deliver the highest fresh produce reliably to the market. We also want to reinforce the offering competitiveness of participating members and support members' compliance with the highest standards. One of the Eleven Rivers objectives is to constantly improve the performance of its participants. Eleven Rivers is expanding its operations to have a year-round presence through summer season production by including high performing producers from other states of Mexico.

CRUZ: Like other similar efforts from growers and organizations, Eleven Rivers wants to increase confidence and prove Mexico's produce is reliable. Produce is no longer a commodity but is being seen as a value added product. Greater value can be achieved through the use of a label recognized by the market.

Q: What are the major steps Eleven Rivers takes to ensure the food safety and quality of its product?

CRUZ: Eleven Rivers takes advantage of the effort made by participating companies. It recognizes the programs implemented by its members and provides guidance about components that may be missed when establishing a food safety program. Food safety is a major component, but other issues like ethical sourcing, traceability, food defense and quality are other key components in this strategy.

MARISCAL: Eleven Rivers main focus is on sustainable food safety, which is the capacity to continuously provide fresh produce with vital value for the consumer. Sustainable food safety represents an enduring and continuous achievement based on health, security, social and ecological standards, within an economic performance frame.

Q: How does Eleven Rivers demonstrate the commitment of Mexican producers to food safety?

MARISCAL: The participating producers have been supplying most of North America for four generations. They have been leading the U.S. market by updating their production with the highest technology and commitment to provide healthy and fine fresh vegetables and fruits. The Eleven Rivers label represents the commitment and compliance of each producer with food safety, point-to-point traceability, risk reduction management, management process systems and labor, social and ecological responsibility.

CRUZ: In the beginning, Eleven Rivers started with the "basic package". Good Agricultural Practices and Good Manufacturing Practices, traceability and quality based on U.S. standards and Mexican regulations. The second phase was to align those requirements to initiatives like the Tomato Metrics and PTI. Right now, Eleven Rivers is moving towards schemes aligned to the Global Food Safety Initiative — standards at the highest level of recognition.

Q: How is the Eleven Rivers program different from any other programs or certifications in Mexico?

MARISCAL: Eleven Rivers does not certify, audit or validate. Eleven Rivers sets the highest standards and continuous performance guidelines for all participants, producers and independent auditing organizations. Each seasonal certification, weekly auditing verifications and monthly auditing process validations are executed by recognized third party organizations. Only producers who comply each week with Eleven Rivers' standards have the right to use the brand label. The uniqueness of the Eleven Rivers Program is its commitment to sustainable food safety based on its external weekly verification audits.

CRUZ: Eleven Rivers is moving toward alignment to a GFSI recognized standard, like the SQF Program. It won't mean that Eleven Rivers is equivalent to SQF, but it does mean that Eleven Rivers is raising the bar from just purely good agricultural and manufacturing practices to require their members to implement GFSI recognized integrated food safety and quality management systems.

Q: What should U.S. buyers know about Eleven Rivers?

CRUZ: It is an achievable way to meet their expectations. Not only with regard to food safety but to other topics of interest like ethical sourcing, food defense, traceability and quality, through its alignment with the SQF Program. Eleven Rivers members, instead of waiting for customer initiative, provide a feasible and marketable resource covering several topics of interest and taking the very best of every field.

MARISCAL: Eleven Rivers is neither organic nor conventional, it is a new premium fresh produce category in the U.S. market, Certified: Fresh & Reliable. Eleven Rivers is delivering a wide portfolio of fresh produce that comes from producers who are continuously certified and reliable.

For more information on Eleven Rivers: www.11rivers.net, Tel: 888-365-5108



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Seeing is believing, and Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture offers an easy way to check out the commitment of Mexican producers first-hand. Several trade missions in 2012 will focus on improving and building business with Mexican suppliers. These custom-made missions include all logistics and itinerary planning and participants receive reimbursement for hotel and travel costs. For more information contact the Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESHERIZED FOODS

The rise of value-added guacamole has led to many creative recipes, causing consumers to see the product in a new light.

boost sales of fresh guacamole in produce departments. Due to the versatility of this product, there are a number of usage alternatives. These items can be positioned as a dip, adjacent to carrots or cherry tomatoes. Retailers also can merchandise guacamole as a topping, spread or ingredient.

“The product can be difficult in terms of

shelf placement,” admits Mission’s Martin. “A typical store has it in the plan-o-gram. It may be placed next to other dips in the produce department, but from a merchandising standpoint, chips are the best product with which to pair it.”

It can be a challenge increasing the visibility

of fresh guacamole in the produce department. Sampling is an effective method for attracting new and repeat customers.

“In some stores, we’ve had our greatest success with private label products,” Martin says. “This way, retailers have a vested interest in generating more sales.”

Fresherized Foods recently partnered with Jennie-O to promote its guacamole line with turkey burgers. This included a recipe and coupon. The company also joined forces with NatureSweet Tomatoes, promoting its guacamole with tomatoes for inclusion in taco salads. “The good news is that guacamole goes with almost everything,” says the company’s Altman.

Although tortilla chips are not a typical produce department item, when positioned alongside guacamole displays, the visibility and selling potential of both items can increase.

One of the biggest challenges in selling this product amongst fresh produce is that the packaging can be misleading. “Due to the HPP process, which has provided us with the ability to provide all-natural guacamole, the most economical way to deliver this item is a bag in a box,” Altman explains. When Fresherized Foods’ Wholly Guacamole launched four years ago, a window was incorporated in the packaging to

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“Looking at the market and what’s happening, what I see across the entire category is a variety of packaging sizes and products to fit the needs of certain consumers.”

— Steve Martin, Mission Produce Inc.

reveal its contents. “There are some containers where you can’t see in, and we didn’t want any surprises,” she notes. “There also is this misnomer that it is everything or nothing, [in terms of pre-prepared or homemade guacamole]. Our product can also be used as a base.”

To counter this, retailers can cross-merchandise additional ingredients for customers who want to customize fresh guacamole. This may include avocados, cilantro, tomatoes and lime.

Calavo Growers also owns Renaissance Food Group, which produces fresh pico de gallo. It promotes combining the pico with guacamole to create a dip or topping.

“Retailers are starting to do a good job in talking about other ways to utilize these products as well,” Altman acknowledges. “They are also giving it more prominence in terms of merchandising with more than one SKU or facing.” Instead of one brand or variety, produce departments are expanding these offerings to include a wider selection. This has helped increase the visibility of these products and the awareness of the category as a whole. “This has allowed us to better communicate with consumers and build awareness,” Altman says. “It is advantageous for everyone in this segment to make sure consumers know about all of the guacamole options.”

Social media also has contributed to the popularity of this product, with consumers sharing usage ideas on Facebook and Twitter. “It’s a dialogue we’ve never had before,” Altman says. “Although guacamole is not an everyday item yet, we can communicate with consumers to help drive sales and get them to think outside of the box.”

For areas where avocados and guacamole are not as entrenched, such as the Eastern states, it’s even more important to run promotions, include products in circulars and sample at the store level.

“As produce departments have evolved,

you’re seeing different types of products on display,” Calavo’s Lippold says. “Today, consumers are looking to these sections for premium dips that are fresh.”

Building prominent displays and focusing on key entertaining holidays can be effective in selling these products. Super Bowl, Memorial Day and Fourth of July are examples of occasions where guacamole sales are strong. Still, shelf-life and refrigeration requirements are a factor for fresh guacamole and need to be considered.

This is not the case with Concord Foods, which provides floor displays for its mixes.

“These are pre-filled with 144 units of guacamole mix and should be displayed next to avocado displays,” describes McCaul. “Clip strips are another merchandising option with our lines. They can be displayed down the side of avocado bins.”

The versatility of guacamole makes this product an asset to produce departments. With fresh lines, cross-merchandising and proper positioning are key to increasing sales. As consumers continue to focus on healthful eating, the profit potential of these products will continue to grow in the years ahead. **pb**

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Be it bulk or packaged, retailers should offer shoppers a full variety of SKUs.

Ten Ways To Sell More Tomatoes

With plenty of SKUs to choose from, retailers must look closely at store demographics. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

One are days when a tomato was just a tomato, when Romas or Plums were only purchased by Italian or Latin shoppers and when the grape tomato had yet to be introduced to the global market from its native Southeast Asia. Today, the tomato category offers customers more than 30 SKUs in assorted shapes, sizes, colors and flavors. In turn, this sweet selection has boosted the ring in produce, where tomatoes collectively contributed 6.2 percent of total produce dollar sales in 2011, according to Nielsen Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based fresh food consulting firm.

Victor Savanello, produce category manager for Allegiance Retail Services LLC, an Iselin, NJ-based co-op serving 66 Foodtowns, 15 D'Agostino Supermarkets, and other independent retailers in the New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania tri-state region, remarks, "The tomato category has grown, thanks to a consistent availability of all varieties year-round, whether it's from multiple growing regions or the steady availability of greenhouse-grown product. In turn, today's consumers purchase tomatoes at a high rate. They're a shopping list staple."

The goal today isn't simply to sell tomatoes, but to sell a volume and variety of these fruit. Here's how!

1. Make Field Tomatoes The Foundation

While SKUs in the tomato category are popping up faster than grass after a rainstorm, only three types of tomatoes — tomatoes-on-the-vine (TOVs), snack-size and field-grown tomatoes — made up 74.1 percent of category dollars last year, according to data provided by Nielsen Perishables Group. Add Romas, and these four tomato types add up to 89 percent of category dollar sales.

Randy Bohaty, produce director for B&R Stores, a 17-unit chain headquartered in Lincoln, NE, operating under the Super Saver and Russ' Market banners, shares, "The category basics for us are the 4x5 field-grown slicers and Romas."

Field-grown tomatoes represented 15.9 percent of tomato category dollar sales in 2011, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group, while Roma tomatoes contributed 14.9 percent.

"Field-grown tomatoes provide a solid foundation contributing to the growth and strength of the tomato category," says Samantha

Winters-Daves, director of education and promotion for the Maitland-based Florida Tomato Committee (FTC). "They are a back-to-basics value for the consumer that can be used in many menu options."

The allocation of up to 50 percent more space in a tomato display for the field-grown variety can drive overall category performance, according to the FTC's 2012-released report, *Ten Steps to Grow Your Tomato Category Sales*.

Romas are second only to TOVs in sales at Demoulas Market Basket, a 65-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, according to produce director, Mike Maguire. "It's the traditional cooking tomato for sauce, but because it's nice and meaty, consumers like it for salads, too."

Mark Munger, vice president of marketing for Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce, headquartered in San Diego, CA, says, "The flavor and versatility of the Roma has captured today's consumer. It's a variety that has become one of the workhorses of the category."

2. Add Mainstream Must-Haves

"TOVs, beefsteak and grape tomatoes are the mainstream varieties in the category," reports Munger.

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“Our displays are built off refrigeration toward the middle of the department in a visually high-traffic area. Bulk and packaged are segmented, with grape tomatoes on one end, bulk in the middle, and the artisan products together. We don’t scatter the tomatoes throughout the department and use them as color breaks. We keep them together in one destination.”

— Randy Bohaty, B&R Stores

Market Basket is the TOV, and it continues to rise in popularity,” says Maguire.

TOVs represented the largest share of dollar sales in the tomato category in 2011, at 32.5 percent, according to data provided by Nielsen Perishables Group.

Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce North America Inc., in Coral Gables, FL, says, “TOVs have a consistent appearance, quality and flavor profile that appeal to customers.”

Mastronardi Produce Ltd., in Kingsville, Ontario, Canada, introduced its new TOV variety, the Delano, last fall, says president and CEO Paul Mastronardi. “Delano tomatoes on the vine have the flavor that we found was missing in traditional vine tomatoes.”

In addition to TOVs, hot house round tomatoes contributed 11 percent of tomato category sales in 2011, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data.

Leading retailers are aware that greenhouse varieties are addressing the growing demand for blemish-free, premium quality produce grown in a sustainable environment. Christou adds, “Another attractive feature is the high level of food safety due to the protected nature of the growing environment within the greenhouses.”

Consistent near year-round availability is another plus for greenhouse-grown tomatoes, points out Alberto Maldonado, general manager of Nogales, AZ-based Apache Produce Co. Inc., which distributes its tomatoes under the Plain Jane label. “We grow tomatoes out of southern Mexico in Nayarit from September to January, and out of Culiacan to the north from December to June,” he details.

“There’s a good niche for beefsteak tomatoes,” adds Mark Cassius, vice president of sales for Eurofresh Farms, in Wilcox, AZ, “especially in the summer for hamburgers, sandwiches and Caprese salads.” Eurofresh plans to introduce a vine-ripe, hand-picked, hand-packed beefsteak tomato in May.

3. Create A Snack Sub-Category

Jim DiMenna, president of Jem-D International Partners LP, in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, points out, “While TOVs hold the largest share of dollar volume contributions in the tomato category, specialty and snacking varieties are firmly in second place in regards to dollars.”

Snacking tomatoes — grape, cherry and bite-sized specialty tomatoes like teardrops — contributed 25.7 percent of dollar sales in the tomato category in 2011, according to data provided by Nielsen Perishables Group.

Bryant Ambelang, vice president of sales and marketing for San Antonio, TX-based NatureSweet Ltd., growers and marketers of NatureSweet brand tomatoes, says, “While snacking tomatoes only represent 25 percent of the category in dollars, focus group research tells us consumers want a small tomato for use on salads or snacking 75 percent of the time.”

“The future of the category is in snacking tomatoes,” maintains Andrew & Williamson’s Munger. “They are sweet, convenient and a lot of seed companies are focused on developing new and innovative varieties. That’s why we’re seeing a huge expansion of varieties. For example, we now grow a golden grape tomato. It has a vibrant color and eats like a piece of candy.”

“Yellow grapes and pink cherry tomatoes offer a spin on specialty snack-size tomatoes,” says BC Hot House’s Batt.

4. Answer The Call For ‘What’s New’

Tomatoes are a signature category at B&R Stores. Bohaty details, “We’ve expanded the number of varieties we carry and regularly add new products so customers always have something different to try. For example, we’ve brought in yellow grape tomatoes, and now they are a standard offering. The same is true for artisan and Heirloom varieties.”

Similarly, tomato offerings at Demoulas Market Basket include premium products. Maguire specifies, “We carry the orange and yellow cluster tomatoes, as well as the

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Peter Kroner, director of business development for Eli & Ali Organic & Specialty Produce LLC, in Brooklyn, NY, says, “Color is a big deal now. Yellow and orange tomato varieties introduced in the past two years have an exceptionally high Brix. I think we’ll see more purple tomato varieties as well as smaller sized specialties like mini mixed Heirloom and mini Romas on the vine,” he predicts.

There have been several introductions of new tomato varieties to the market over the past year. For example, Eatontown, NJ-based Village Farms LP introduced its Heavenly Villagio Marzano, a mini San Marzano Plum tomato. BC Hot House presented its Blusher Pink Cherry tomato, a cocktail tomato with pinkish hue, low acid and high sugar content. Jem-D Farms introduced its Artisan line of tomatoes, which includes Farmhouse Heritage Beefs, a Rosado Pink Tomato and Chef’s Collection of seven mini snacking tomato varieties. In March, Jem-

D added two more SKUs to its Artisan Series: a dark brown variety called Cocoa and a sweet mini San Marzano tomato named Delicasee.

5. Offer Organic

Organic is the one key trend Andrew & Williamson’s Munger noticed at last year’s Produce Marketing Association’s Fresh Summit. “Almost every retailer asked us if we had organics,” he shares. “We’ve seen our organic tomato sales grow even through the recession, and I think this solid growth will be matched by tremendous potential in the future. As a result, we’ll add to our organic Roma and grape tomatoes with the introduction of an organic beefsteak tomato this spring.”

“The trend for organically grown tomatoes is definitely growing,” agrees Fried De Schouwer, president of Greenhouse Produce Co. LLC, in Vero Beach, FL, “especially for beefsteak and grape tomatoes.”

BC Hot House’s Batt adds, “All retailers continue to offer organics as there continues to be consumers who look for organically grown. Heirloom rounds, TOVs and grape tomatoes tend to dominate the organic tomato category.”

It’s not just mainstream tomato varieties available in organic, either. Kroner notes, “Mini mixed Heirlooms, mini Romas on vine — we offer all of these in conventional as well as organic. Organic is no longer a niche, but part of the main deal.”

6. Choose Packaging That Sells

Tomatoes were once sold loose in bulk, but Munger notes, “Today, there’s been an explosion in packaging. Small snack tomatoes lend themselves to packaging. In addition, packaging provides a platform to deliver information to the consumer, such as a description of the tomato, nutrition and serving suggestions. Packaging also offers color and interest. Clamshells and bags, for example, can be used as color breaks and improve the appearance of a tomato display,” he adds.

In 2011, 29.5 percent of tomato dollar sales were represented by packaged product, according to data provided by Nielsen Perishables Group.

Clamshells are the most popular pack type. Their advantage is a rigidity that protects tomatoes from bruising and allows for stacking. However, Eric Janke, vice president and chief operating officer of Dallas, TX-based DiMare Fresh Inc., contends, “Bags are a trend. We’re starting to see more clusters in a bag.”

“Vexar or net bags protects the products, yet still allows customers to feel the ripeness of the fruit,” notes adds Eurofresh’s Cassius.

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“In addition,” says Andrew & Williamson’s Munger, “bags have 80 percent less materials than clamshells and are more sustainable.”

Mastronardi Produce’s Mastronardi adds, “Retailers and consumers are looking for reusable, eco-friendly packaging that protects and extends the shelf-life of products.”

Jem-D’s DiMenna agrees, noting, “Recently, we’ve seen a trend back to recycled cardboard trays and flow-wrapped tomatoes. However, we’ve found that collaboration with retail partners is required to ensure success rates of new packaged SKUs. Sometimes, you can develop innovative packing that looks great, but falls flat at store level due to merchandising shortcomings or limitations of a certain pack style.”

Retail merchandising and consumer functionality are two selling points of packaging. Informative labels with grower information and QR codes that lead consumers to websites detailing more product information and recipes will dominate packaging, according to BC Hot House’s Batt. “Private label is also gaining momentum within the category as more retailers look to get specific with a variety of tomato that can be offered at one EDLP (everyday low price) and another ad price,” he adds.

On the functionality front, NatureSweet, for example, packs its Sunburst yellow bite-sized tomatoes in a 10.5-oz. resealable container for easy snacking. Similarly, Mastronardi Produce markets its Zima orange grape tomato in a clamshell container that doubles as a colander.

7. Handle Correctly

Temperature mismanagement is the biggest handling mistake with tomatoes, says Del Monte’s Christou. “Tomatoes are best when stored at temperatures between 55 and 60°F, and it is important to promptly place them in unrefrigerated displays or storage to avoid extreme temperatures,” he details. “It is important that retailers educate and train their produce department employees in order to prevent and correct mistakes.”

Organic tomatoes are most likely to be inadvertently displayed on a refrigerated rack. Munger acknowledges, “Many retailers build a refrigerated organic set and put everything there, including the tomatoes.”

Mastronardi Produce’s Mastronardi explains, “Too cold or too warm temperatures will affect the flavors and cause the fruit to break down.”

“Since 60 percent of consumers currently store tomatoes in the refrigerator, a sign on the display instructing not to refrigerate will go a

long way in maintaining product quality and repeat purchases,” says the FTC’s Winters-Daves.

In addition to maintaining proper temperatures, Tim Cunniff, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Madison, ME-based Backyard Farms LLC, warns, “Don’t stack TOVs because the pressure can cause punctures.”

“Also, practice proper rotation,” advises DiMenna’s Janke. “It’s not necessarily about first in-first out, especially if new product is riper than what is on display. One bad tomato can turn customers off from the entire display.”

8. Create A Destination Display

All tomato products are merchandised together in one location at B&R Stores. Bohaty details, “Our displays are built off refrigeration toward the middle of the department in a visually high-traffic area. Bulk and packaged are segmented, with grape tomatoes on one end, bulk in the middle, and the artisan products together. We don’t scatter the tomatoes throughout the department and use them as color breaks. We keep them together in one destination.”

Allegiance Retail Services’ Savanello doesn’t think there is any need to bring in other produce items to use as color blocks in the tomato display. “The category has a variety of colors itself with the reds, oranges and yellows, all different sizes and shapes, and both packaged and bulk, to make an eye-catching display.”

Consumers consider visual appeal to be an important part of a quality produce department. “Therefore, retailers should remember to keep their tomato displays full, clean and well organized at all times,” maintains Del Monte’s Christou.

Andrew & Williamson’s Munger suggests displaying tomatoes with a tiered approach. “Place value tomatoes like rounds and Romas at the base of the display,” he states. “Then, place mainstream varieties such as TOVs, grapes and beefsteaks one tier up. Finally, place premium higher value varieties like Heirlooms and organics on the next shelf up, at eye level, so consumers can easily see them and be tempted to buy.”

Christou adds, “Point-of-sale material will enhance the display as well. Retailers may place small signage around the product describing the health benefits, nutritional informational and proper handling instructions,” he suggests. “We also encourage retailers to use information brochures, price cards and recipe cards to their full potential in order to attract and educate consumers.”



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TOMATOES GONE WILD: CALLING FOR CONSOLIDATION?

Call it what you want — SKU consolidation, SKU rationalization or SKU justification — but retailers are making cuts to their tomato category, even in the face of rampant new product introductions. “There are so many selections in the tomato category that consumers get mixed up and don’t know where or how to shop,” says Peter Kroner, director of business development for Eli & Ali Organic & Specialty Produce LLC, in Brooklyn, NY. “The category needs to be cut back.”

Eric Janke, vice president and chief operating officer of DiMare Fresh Inc., headquartered in Dallas, TX, agrees, “Too many items lead to cannibalization, rather than incremental sales. To improve overall category performance, many retailers are undergoing SKU consolidation. They are carrying the basics, then drilling down by store, state and region to calculate a further reduction or expansion based on their demographics, and then finally deciding by season or theme what they carry as well,” he explains. “For example, you want to carry Romas for Cinco de Mayo. I don’t think most chains will cut back to only five or six SKUs, but I don’t think we’ll see as many carrying up to 27 SKUs either.”

“We have a basic menu of the best-sellers for our cooperative members to choose from,” notes Victor Savanello, produce category manager for Allegiance Retail Services LLC, an Iselin, NJ-based

co-op serving 66 Foodtowns, 15 D’Agostino Supermarkets, and other independent retailers in the New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania tri-state region. “However, we still try to have a good assortment. For example, our members with a Whole Foods or Wegmans or Shop-Rite across the street need to be able to compete. Also, there needs to be consideration as to where the store is located. You’ll sell something different in New Jersey, where its predominantly TOVs, vine ripe and grapes, then in an inner city borough in New York, where plum tomatoes rule. There’s only so much room in the produce department, and if you add something new you need to take something away. That’s why we rely on category management.”

“When streamlining the category don’t leave out the volume tomatoes: field, Romas, grape, TOVs and beefsteaks,” reminds Rick Feighery, director of organic sales for Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., in Philadelphia, PA, “These represent over 80 percent of all sales.”

Douglas Kling, senior vice president of sales, marketing and fulfillment for Village Farms LP, in Eatontown, NJ, prefers to think of this process as SKU justification. “For example, rather than just focusing on core items, think about how a new variety meets consumers’ needs in terms of flavor, appearance and usage. Consider what will build the category rather than erode it.” **pb**

Space matters when it comes to the most profitable size of a tomato display. According to the FTC’s 2012-released report, *Ten Steps to Grow Your Tomato Category Sales*, top performing stores averaged 34.9 feet, compared to bottom stores at 30.5-feet. In addition, nearly half of the in-store audits in top performing stores revealed the use of a strong secondary tomato display.

“The interesting point to this report,” adds FTC’s Winters-Daves, “is that it’s not where secondary displays are located, but the importance of having a secondary location. Retailers can, for example, accomplish this by adding a secondary display of field tomatoes next to complementary items such as packaged salad or meat to enhance sales.”

Labor and logistical constraints can prove

challenging for tomato displays out of the produce department. But Munger advises, “Snack tomatoes can be merchandised by the cash register and vine-ripe or beefsteaks in grocery next to the olive oil to provide meal solutions and impulse sales.”

9. Suggest A Tomato For Each Usage Occasion

“The best way to sell tomatoes, especially a specialty type, is to sample it out and suggest usages so consumers can see the value of it,” recommends B&R Store’s Bohaty. “For example, we’ll slice an Heirloom beefsteak and sample it with mozzarella cheese and olive oil.”

Many consumers want to recreate a restaurant experience at home. “In order to capitalize

on this, educate consumers on the different tomato varieties offered by providing information on the flavor profile and listing recipes that are best for the different varieties,” advises Del Monte’s Christou. “This will increase consumer usage.”

Jem-D’s DiMenna agrees and adds, “Customized point-of-sale (POS) and recipe cards that provide application suggestions specific to each variety are critical to the success of the tomato category. For example, we offer tomato varieties that are enjoyed best in salads, used in burgers or sandwiches, large tomato varieties that are ideal for stuffing or roasting, and smaller varieties for snacking or tossing with pasta. QR codes, informative labeling and in-store signage providing pairing and/or application suggestions is very important to the sales success of tomatoes.”

Grower/shippers are aiding in this effort via informational packaging. For example, Eurofresh Farms pictures spaghetti on its packaged Romas and a school-aged boy snacking on its grape tomatoes.

Retailers can further encourage consumers to purchase multiple tomatoes per trip by cross-merchandising. Christou recommends cross-merchandising tomatoes with avocados, onions and peppers, packaged salads, fresh basil, garlic and dressings. “It can also be effective to cross-merchandise tomatoes outside the produce department with non-produce items like sandwich items, pastas, deli meats and cheeses such as mozzarella,” he details.

Seasonal holidays are a ripe occasion to cross-merchandise, as well. Allegiance Retail Services’ Savanello remarks, “We tied Plum tomatoes in with avocados, red onions, garlic and Concord seasoning mixes to make a salsa and guacamole destination for Super Bowl. We also ran these items in a themed ad in our circular. It puts a recipe idea right into shoppers’ minds.”

DiMenna adds, “BLT ads, Italian/Spanish themed menus, and recipe-driven ads featuring all ingredients merchandised together are gaining momentum across the United States and Canada.”

To make cross-merchandising easier, NatureSweet offers sturdy metal wire racks for its products. Ambelang recommends, “Set racks of our Cherubs next to the salad case, Sunbursts in the nut or snack item aisle, and cherry tomatoes adjacent to meats, cheeses or pastas for cooking. This way, cross-merchandising provides a ready meal or snack solution.”

10. Promote Creatively

Some type of tomato is featured weekly in

“Top-performing chains were more likely to use front-page ads to promote the tomato category. Florida field tomatoes also performed well when featured prominently on the back of feature ads, resulting in a 16 percent lift.”

— Samantha Winters-Daves,
Florida Tomato Committee

the ad circular at Demoulas Market Basket. Maguire remarks, “We rotate through the category. For example, it might be a Roma, round or beefsteak, or we’ll also cycle in a TOV, Cherub or Zima into the mix.”

It’s important not to promote the same variety week in and out. Savanello explains, “You won’t make the same dollars on a tear drop or Campari as you will on a round or Roma, but variety in the ads keeps the entire category alive and healthy.”

Too low of a promotional price can cheapen the whole category, warns NatureSweet’s Ambeland. “If you advertise a Roma or TOV for 99-cents per pound and Cherubs for \$2.49, it makes the Cherubs look too expensive. Better to advertise the Romas or TOVs for \$1.49 and customers may be more likely to buy both or trade up.”

Encourage sales of premium tomatoes via verbiage in ads or in-store, recommends Andrew & Williamson’s Munger. “For example, ‘super sweet’ or ‘unique variety’ gives consumers permission to purchase,” he says.

Jem-D Farms has found an effective way to launch its Artisan Series has been with customized POS, demos and “mix-and-match” ads featuring items in this line at 2-for-\$5 or 3-for-\$7 to encourage consumers to try any or all of these products.

Mastronardi Produce’s Mastronardi adds, “Multiple variety ads let consumers know they have choices, whether they are looking for a sandwich tomato, like the beefsteak, or a snacking tomato. We suggest two or more items featured at the same price or as multiples, such as 2-for-\$5.”

The optimum discount level for field-grown

tomatoes is 31 to 40 percent, according to the FTC. Discount ranges of 41 to 50 percent should be used sparingly, as regular deep discount promotions can result in lower category dollars. Winters-Daves adds, “Top-performing chains were more likely to use front-page ads to promote the tomato category. Florida field tomatoes also performed well when featured prominently on the back of feature ads, resulting in a 16 percent lift.”

Del Monte’s Christou remarks, “Because tomatoes are grown in different regions,

consumers have access to most varieties on a year-round basis. However, there are times during the year when certain varieties are in greater demand than others. For example, Roma tomatoes are more popular around Cinco de Mayo for salsa-making because of the growing Latin consumer segment in the United States. Slicing tomatoes, on the other hand, tend to be more popular during summer holidays like the Fourth of July when it is high-season for grilling hamburgers and barbeques. **pb**

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The advertisement is a vertical rectangular image with a white background. At the top, the text "Garden Fresh Flavor" is written in a large, yellow, sans-serif font. Below it, the phrase "just like you remember" is written in a smaller, brown, cursive font. The central part of the ad features a photograph of a young child with short brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt, smiling and holding a large, red, sliced tomato in their right hand. The background of the photo is a soft-focus green garden. At the bottom of the ad, there is a green rectangular box containing the "Village farms" logo in white, with "Village" in a script font and "farms" in a sans-serif font. Below the logo, the words "Greenhouse Grown" are written in a green, sans-serif font. At the very bottom, there are three pieces of contact information: "www.villagefarms.com", "sales@villagefarms.com", and "877-777-7718", all in a small, black, sans-serif font.



Displays should be large, and include as many varieties as possible.

Retail Guide To Spring Grapes

Bring excitement and freshness to the produce department with Spring grapes. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Spring grapes offer a unique opportunity for retailers to build excitement and profits in the produce department. “There is excitement when you get into the desert deal,” says Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets Inc., in Reading, PA, with 40 stores. “Everybody waits for them, and grapes are such an important part of the produce department. Whenever you can promote grapes your tonnage and sales go up. It’s a key commodity to have front-and-center.”

“Grapes are a strong sales driver and a great tonnage item,” agrees Steve Oates, director of produce procurement for Sunflower Farmers Market in Phoenix, AZ, with 35 stores.

Spring grapes are particularly advantageous in positioning a new “fresh” look for the department. “Spring is when shoppers start focusing on fresh produce as opposed to canned, frozen or other grocery items that may have filled up their baskets the previous months,” says Steve Yubeta, vice president of sales for Farmer’s Best International LLC, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ. “Grapes make the transition to fresh easy.”

The Spring Grape deal is defined by a short six- to eight-week time frame beginning in

mid-May. Prospects for quality, promotable product this year are good. “So far, the weather has been favorable, and if everything continues on the same path, we will have a good crop with good quality fruit,” says Miguel Suarez, president and sales manager of MAS Melons & Grapes LLC, out of Rio Rico, AZ.

“The Mexico (Sonora) grape season is slated to begin early May” adds Yubeta. “To date, the weather has been cooperative and we are looking at plentiful supplies with many opportunities for promotions.”

Quality and flavor are crucial factors for a successful deal. “Make sure you stay consistent with quality,” advises Stiles. “The flavor of the grapes is what keeps customers coming back. Once they eat a good grape, they’ll have grapes on their next shopping list. A sour grape turns them off for the whole deal.”

“The growers and vendors have invested a lot of time and money during the past seven to eight months to produce some of the finest product in the world,” explains John Harley, vice president of sales and marketing for Anthony Vineyards Inc., headquartered in Bakersfield, CA. “A successful buyer will treat the product and display in the same fashion, making sure the rotation of the grapes is kept up and that margins are right.”

A few simple tips can help retailers make the most of this year’s short but sweet deal.

Follow The Season

While no one can predict Mother Nature, all factors so far point to an abundant, healthy season. “It looks like a normal size crop in Coachella,” reports Harley. “There should be an increase in green seedless grapes — mainly the Sugraone variety — due to better growing conditions. The Flame seedless, or red seedless, looks like a normal crop and there should be plenty of availability. The Chilean imported grape deal should be completed by the middle of May, due to their early start and the increase in volume in early shipments,” he details.

For greatest profits, retailers should parallel promotions with the available volume of the different varieties. “First arrivals are expected for shipment the first week in May and heaviest production will take place the last week in May through the first two weeks in June,” estimates Megan Schulz, West Coast business development manager for The Giumarra Companies, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. “The deal will begin with green seedless, followed immediately by Flame seedless. Black seedless varieties are scheduled to begin shipping at the end of May, and Red Globes in

mid-June. It is a good possibility there will be strong enough volume for Memorial Day and Fourth of July holiday promotions.”

The majority of the season consists of both green and red varieties. “The most promotable varieties are green seedless and Flame seedless in the red seedless category because these are the two biggest varieties grown in Coachella,” explains Harley.

“Red seedless varieties will continue to constitute 50 percent of all varieties with green varieties comprising 35 to 40 percent of table grapes packed from both Mexico and Coachella,” says Jim Llano, sales manager at Delano, CA-based Castle Rock Vineyards. “This has been the trend, with the balance in black varieties.”

Add Variety

Profitable promotions will utilize the full scope of the varieties available. “With reds constituting over 50 percent of all production, they should be emphasized with Flame Seedless and increasingly Scarlet Royal as the major varieties,” states Llano. “Sugraone has now become the major green variety, long ago surpassing Thompson Seedless. Black varieties that should be emphasized include Summer Royal, which offers a crisp, sweet flavor and is a good shipper.”

“Our research shows that promoting five or more varieties of grapes will have the largest lift on category volume sales,” reveals Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the Fresno-based California Table Grape Commission.

Retailers can build incremental sales by introducing customers to newer varieties, especially the black seedless. “Black seedless varieties are gaining more acceptance with consumers as they become more familiar through trial and sampling,” says Schulz. “This variety does well when promoted alongside red and green seedless. We also find that some consumers prefer Red Globes for their large size.”

Growers continue to experiment with newer varieties for future markets. “There are some new varieties on both green and red,” reports Suarez of MAS Melons & Grapes. “However, the volume isn’t very significant yet out of Mexico, but it will keep growing.”

“We are seeing a lot more Scarlet Royal being planted in Coachella,” adds Harley. “However, we’re probably at least two years away from having enough volume for the retailers to promote it.”

Get Ready Now

Discussions and flexible planning should begin in April to achieve the most potential.

“Usually by late April, the Chilean production starts winding down, especially on green grape varieties,” reports Suarez. “By at least early that same month, conversations should already be occurring among retailers and distributors of Coachella and Mexican grapes in order to place promotions.”

“Retailers should use April as an opportunity to plan out promotions for late May through late June including holiday promotional opportunities for Memorial Day and possibly Fourth of July,” advises Giumarra’s

Schulz. “Planning in advance with one’s suppliers will help ensure ample volume is available for scheduled ads.”

“April is a time when suppliers have a much better handle on crop volumes, harvest timing, and quality,” agrees Llano of Castle Rock. “They’ll be setting up logistics. It’s a great time to be discussing programs and volumes by color.”

Adequate planning can garner a store the reputation as having the first and best of the new spring crop. “You want to make sure to begin this deal strong when you’re planning

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“There is excitement when you get into the desert deal. Everybody waits for them, and grapes are such an important part of the produce department. Whenever you can promote grapes your tonnage and sales go up. It’s a key commodity to have front-and-center.”

— Dick Stiles, Redner’s Markets Inc.

ad promotion,” says Redner’s Stiles. “We always make a big deal of it because it will yield great results.”

“Retailers should get ready for the opportunity to be one of the first to offer the new crop of California grapes,” suggests Anthony Vineyards’ Harley. “They should be discussing with their vendor/suppliers when would be the best time to promote California table grapes, which should be the first week of June.”

Include Packaging Options

Currently, most shippers and customers prefer the traditional bag. “Clamshells, especially two-pounders, have been popular the past two or three years,” states Suarez of MAS Melons & Grapes. “There are also some new types of bags being used. But for the most part, the majority of the volume is still packed in 18-lb. cases with slider bags.”

However, considering your demographics’ potential for additional packaging options can add incremental sales. “We are doing a lot more clamshell and fixed weight bags than we ever have in the past,” reports Harley.

“I’m interested in the family-pack clamshell and the combo clamshell,” acknowledges Stiles. “Those are nice packages, and we see potential to add them as incremental or special-value products.”

Newer packaging options can also aid in making an attractive display. “While club stores will continue with clampacks, many traditional retailers have been eyeing the stand-up bag, which began to garner attention in 2011,” says Llano. “These bags seem to display the grapes better through less opaque plastic, and are displayed in one tier, rather than bunching bags upon each other, creating a better overall display.”

“The stand-up bags, with or without graphics, are starting to replace the clamshells at many retailers as we have seen in other products,” says John Pandol, director of special projects for Pandol Bros. Inc., located in Delano, CA. “On the shipping side, although the 5-down or euro footprint [24 x 16 boxes] is being abandoned in other products, for some reason, the Sonora and California grape deal

sticks with it. Technically the 6-down 16 x 20 lidded carton is the best. However, we are seeing increased weight requested in the 5-down boxes — instead of 18 pounds, we’re seeing 19, 20, 22 and even 24 pounders.”

Have The Right Information

Because of the short time frame, having the right information can make or break the deal. “It behooves retailers to work closely with their vendor/suppliers to figure out the best time to promote based on the supplier volume,” suggests Harley of Anthony Vineyards. “It’s all about communication between the vendors and their customers.”

“In general, retailers do a great job displaying the fruit in their stores according to their market needs,” states Suarez of MAS Melons & Grapes. “It’s crucial to ensure excellent communication between distributors and retailers pertaining to the kind of fruit available at the time, and whether or not it would work given the retailer’s needs.”

Trust and confidence in the source of the information is also vital. “Retailers should do business with companies that are able to give them reliable information and stand on their commitments,” says Suarez. “Many times, retailers get their information and commitments from companies that do not necessarily have any control of the production and availability of fruit. This causes unfulfilled commitments and leads to a generalized misconception of the Mexican grape deal.”

“It is crucial for retailers to be well informed by their distributors as to when the volume of each variety will really be available for promotion,” continues Suarez. “Often, there is a great deal of pressure by the retailers to promote fruit at a time when the available volume does not really justify or support a promotion. It’s very important to get the right information from the right sources.”

In addition to varietal availability, buyers should be discussing quality as well. “It’s important for buyers to verify when size and Brix will meet their minimum receiving specs,” says Oates of Sunflowers Farmers Market.

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PROMOTING GRAPES AND HEALTH

Study shows grapes to be beneficial in preventing debilitating eye conditions. Results from a new study published in *Free Radical Biology and Medicine* suggest that eating grapes may slow or help prevent the onset of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). According to information from the Fresno-based California Table Grape Commission, the study compared the impact of an antioxidant-rich diet on vision using mice prone to developing retinal damage in old age in much the same way as humans do. Mice either received a grape-enriched diet, a diet with added lutein, or a normal diet.

Kathleen Nave, president of the California Table Grape Commission, explains, “The results showed grapes proved to offer dramatic protection: the grape-enriched diet protected against oxidative damage of the retina and prevented blindness in those mice consuming grapes. While lutein was also effective, grapes were found to offer significantly more protection.”

“The protective effect of the grapes in this study was remarkable, offering a benefit for vision at old age even if grapes were consumed only at a young age,” said principal investigator Silvia Finnemann, PhD, department of biological sciences at Fordham University in New York, NY.

Dr. Finnemann noted that results from her study also suggest that age-related vision loss is a result of cumulative, oxidative damage over time. “A lifelong diet enriched in natural antioxidants, such as those in grapes, appears to be directly beneficial for retinal health and function.”

Age-related macular degeneration is a progressive eye condition, leading to the deterioration of the center of the retina, called the macula, and is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly. “Preserving eye health is a key concern as we age and this study shows that grapes may play a critical role in achieving this,” says Nave. “This is good news for consumers of all ages who enjoy grapes, and adds to the growing body of evidence that grapes offer an array of health benefits.”

According to the commission, grapes have numerous healthful attributes that retailers can share with their customers. “Grapes of all colors — red, green and blue-black — are a natural source of antioxidants, which neutralize harmful free radicals that can damage cells and stress the body,” states Nave. “It turns out that in addition to great taste, grapes are good for us in ways we couldn’t have imagined as little as 10 years ago.” **pb**

suppliers prior to and during the season will help retailers plan and execute successful, profitable promotions,” adds Giumarra’s Schulz. “After the season, a timely review can be very beneficial to planning for the following season.”

Promote A Fresh Season

Perhaps one of the most advantageous selling points of the spring grape crop is that of freshness. “One of the key things we tell our customers is that Sonora equals fresh,” explains Farmer’s Best Yubeta. “After a long winter of fruit shipped across oceans, the first new crop their customers will be getting in May — in some cases from mere miles down the road — arrives super fresh, and customers can tell the difference. Retailers also tell us some customers miss the larger fruit sizes that are hard to find during the winter and that the Sonora season can deliver.”

“Since the seasons overlap it is important to call out the new crop, as this puts the idea of freshness in consumers’ thoughts,” agrees Oates.

The seasonal nature of the fruit can be tagged to consumers’ desire for local produce. “People say they want ‘local,’ but for the most part, what they really want is seasonal,” says Pandol of Pandol Bros. “When Sonora is in season, the grapes are really good.”

“An important element to a good display is to identify where the product is coming from (for example, the country or state) and promote it accordingly as a new crop,” adds Harley of Anthony Vineyards. “Promotional content should be based on the fact that these

grapes are from a new growing region and should be merchandised in that fashion.”

“Promoting the seasonality can be a way to help the department introduce something new and fresh in categories that are now available year-round,” states Redner’s Stiles.

Display Big

Big, attractive displays are profit generators. “Fresh and full well-signed displays with plenty of variety sell,” says Oates.

“Ideally, the grape display should be located at the front of the produce department, especially if they are being advertised,” adds Schulz.

Stores must be sure to pay close attention to the condition of displays so as not to detract from the quality of the product. “A key pointer we stress is for displays to be rotated well and cleaned out in early May to get rid of the ‘old’ fruit and make as clean and fresh an impression as possible,” advises Yubeta. “This season we will also continue to push ‘grape & go’-type promotions to generate impulse sales, such as secondary displays, multi-color packages, as well as providing usage ideas beyond just snacking. Demos are a great way to do that. Healthier eating is important to promote.”

“Grapes can be a great impulse item if the display is abundant, refreshed frequently, and in a prime location in the produce department,” says Plummer of the CA Table Grape Commission.

The various colors serve as a great asset in building eye-catching displays. “Offering a display of all colors always enhances the display

and increases impulse buying,” notes Castle Rock’s Llano. “Also, grapes are now considered a staple fruit purchase and are on the customers’ shopping lists, so increasing the sale through multiple varietal and color offerings will increase overall sales.”

“Displays should be large, frequently rotated and stocked with as many varieties as possible: green seedless, red seedless, black seedless and Red Globe,” concurs Giumarra’s Schulz. “This offers consumers different options. Single-color staggered with multi-color grape ads generate great sales figures and give the produce department a lift. Supporting POS materials including flavor, nutrition and recipe information may also be appropriate depending on store format.”

Be Aggressive

Aggressive planning and merchandising will pay off. “Don’t give the desert deal away,” recommends Redner’s Stiles. “They’re going to sell if you promote them, if you have eye-catching displays front-and-center. If you put a good value on them, consumers will buy. So don’t undersell on price.”

Being flexible and adjusting margins during this short yet variable deal will also benefit sales. “Size of display should be based on retailers’ FOB price,” suggests Anthony Vineyard’s Harley. “A store can try to keep margins low at first and then increase them as the season progresses.”

Above all, don’t be afraid to promote. “Our research shows that promoting grapes five times per month will generate the largest volume lift,” says Plummer. **pb**



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF ZESPRI



Australian Navels and kiwifruit from New Zealand are two favorite picks from the Southern Hemisphere.

Australian/New Zealand Fruit Shines

Retailers increasingly look to the lands down under for an ample supply of sweet, succulent fruit. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

The southwestern Pacific island country of New Zealand, with its spectacular glaciers, rolling hillsides, subtropical forest, volcanic plateau, and miles of sandy beaches, is considered one of the most stunning places in the world. Thanks to its mild and temperate maritime climate, the country is also rapidly becoming one of the most respected growers of produce. New Zealand's free-draining volcanic soils, clean air and naturally abundant rainfall make it an ideal location for growing kiwifruit, mangos, apples and pears, according to Steve Woodyear-Smith, kiwifruit and mango category director at The Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada.

Over 80 percent of New Zealand fruit is grown in one geographic region, which boasts the greatest number of sunlight hours in the country. But unlike California, where the mercury can reach over 100° F and droughts threaten crops, New Zealand does not experience such extremes of temperature or lack of rainfall. What's more, the country boasts an adequate number of chill hours, providing the perfect setting in which to grow world-class produce. "Each night, owing to the amount of ocean surrounding New Zealand, the temperature drops, allowing the apples to color up

nicely," says David Nelly, category director for apples, pears and pineapples at The Oppenheimer Group.

Nelly also points to the relative newness of the country's agriculture business, offering rich soil that has not been over-farmed and water so unadulterated that laboratory tests have found it to be just as pure as the finest brands of bottled water. The outcome is fruit so prized, some retailers prefer it over all others, even when cheaper options are available.

"New Zealand kiwifruit is really the standard by which others are judged," says Woodyear-Smith. "Other producing nations are trying to elevate their game, particularly those that compete head-on with New Zealand, but they've got a long way to go."

Branded a "hidden gem" by another industry trade, kiwifruit is often the forgotten tree fruit, overshadowed by apples, oranges and other perennial favorites. Yet, interest in this mysterious fruit continues to grow among the trade and consumers, as people learn of its "great taste, ease of cut-and-scoop and great nutrition," according to Michele Hoard, senior marketing manager at Redwood City, CA-based Zespri North America.

In Australia, meanwhile, citrus is the primary crop and growers have "perfected the art of growing navels," according to Stu

Monaghan, national marketing manager at DNE World Fruit Sales, a Ft. Pierce, FL-based citrus category marketer focusing on citrus from across the globe. "The growers in Australia know when to add fertilizer, when to add water, how to treat the fruit after it's picked and how to ship the fruit here in a way that it gets to the consumer still looking beautiful," says Monaghan.

Australian citrus primarily serves as a counter-seasonal fill-in for U.S. retailers, beginning with Clementines in mid-May and continuing with Navel oranges in early July. "Increasingly," says Monaghan, "retailers are looking upon Southern Hemisphere citrus as a means of increasing produce revenues during the summer. Australia has responded to this increased demand, producing 4.1 million Navels this past season. That's up from 3.1 million just five years prior.

Surprisingly, Monaghan reports less than enthusiastic response to Australian organic citrus, leading DNE to stop carrying it. He says the blemishes that are often present on fruit which has not had the "advantage of protection from bugs" made organic Australian citrus unacceptable to many retailers. That's not to suggest U.S. retailers have closed the door to imported organic citrus. Both Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Market and Parsippany,

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“We are looking for the highest quality. If we could get storage fruit that was as high a quality [as Southern Hemisphere imports], we would certainly go that route. That said, I’m not going to bring in a mealy apple just because it is Washington-grown when I can get a fresh New Zealand apple.”

— Brent Demarest, Whole Foods Market

NJ-based Kings Supermarkets proudly sell imported organic produce.

In fact, Whole Foods actually engages in less conventional importing because there’s usually a “good amount of storage crop” of conventional product available, making it less necessary to rely on imports, even during the off-season, according to Brent Demarest, produce purchasing team leader for Whole Foods Market South Region, in Braselton, GA.

From Stand-In To Standalone

While most retailers rely on Southern Hemisphere fruit to satisfy counter-seasonal demand, growers from “down under” are increasingly breeding proprietary varieties that make their harvests desirable on a whole different level. New Zealand-grown Envy and Jazz apples continue to build a strong following, while the Honey Belle pear has also garnered good growth, according to Oppenheimer’s Nelley.

“New Zealand has led the world in introducing new varieties, creating a new generation of apples,” says Nelley. “Growers are very progressive in terms of planting and developing new varieties that are being developed for taste.”

Oppenheimer has significantly expanded its range of new varieties, so much that the company now has the ability to fill the demand for something new and different for literally months on end. “If a retailer has one slot open for new apple varieties, we can fill that from April right through until the Envy apples start again out of Washington state in October,” notes Nelley.

In Los Angeles, CA, The Giumarra Companies reports steady growth on its proprietary apples from New Zealand, including Tentation, a Grifer-Golden Delicious hybrid, according to Erika Salazar, East Coast business development manager, based in Boston, MA.

Despite the plethora of tasty produce emerging from Australia and New Zealand, Southern Hemisphere imports don't always garner prime display space. At Whole Foods, for example, Demarest says apple and citrus sets tend to be smaller by the time imported product arrives, simply because it's no longer peak season.

When it comes to kiwifruit, there's another dynamic at play. Retailers aren't always ready and willing to dedicate a huge amount of space



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP

New Zealand's volcanic soils, clean air and abundant rainfall make it an ideal climate to grow produce.

to a product that is not likely to rack up a significant amount of sales.

Admittedly, kiwifruit remains a mystery to

many consumers, despite being a prized treasure to others. Therefore, Oppenheimer, working in




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PHOTO COURTESY OF ONE WORLD FRUIT SALES

Australian citrus generally serves as a counter-seasonal fill-in for U.S. retailers from Mid-May to early July.

conjunction with Zespri, has embarked on a mission to bring kiwifruit out of hiding and into the light. Together, they encourage

retailers to increase their displays of kiwifruit, offer value-added packages, engage in cross-

merchandising and move their displays to more visible areas of the department. Zespri also plans to expand its award-winning Kiwifruit for Kids campaign.

Likewise, Giumarra provides marketing tools to help retailers promote the apples, kiwifruit, pears, citrus and stone fruit it imports from New Zealand. According to Salazar, demos and sampling can be particularly effective in driving sales.

For some retailers, it can be cost-prohibitive to carry imported kiwifruit, which admittedly carries a premium price tag. Oppenheimer's Woodyear-Smith defends the higher pricing, stating, "You cannot expect to buy a Mercedes-Benz at Toyota prices." Increasingly, however, retailers are turning to



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“Usually, the Chilean fruit is the cheapest because it has the least miles to go,” points out Whole Foods’ Demarest. “Quality is our No. 1 concern, but food miles are a concern as well. All that freight puts extra costs on a product.”

According to Woodyear-Smith, Zespri is looking to counter the high price of kiwifruit by working toward the goal of building a “brand family” in order to offer a “value proposition” option. That said, he concedes

that New Zealand fruit is “never going to be the cheapest product in the marketplace,” adding, “We just have to work around that.”

Storage Fruit vs. Imports

Whole Foods’ earth-conscious consumers might harbor concerns about the number of food miles on Southern Hemisphere imports, but Demarest says that won’t keep him from buying such fruit when it is the higher quality product. “We are looking for the highest quality,” he says, point blank. “If we could get

“Competition makes everybody look at their operations and their quality and say, ‘I really need to be there.’ It could be the imports looking at the domestic fruit or the domestic people looking at the imports. In the end, consumers win.”

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Supermarkets

storage fruit that was as high a quality [as Southern Hemisphere imports], we would certainly go that route. That said, I’m not going to bring in a mealy apple just because it is Washington-grown when I can get a fresh New Zealand apple.”

Clearly, there have been concerns that Southern Hemisphere fruit could be perceived as cannibalizing sales of local growers who have stored the fruit year-round. However, Paul Kneeland, produce and floral director for Kings, says the demographics of the customer base will dictate whether the origins of the fruit are considered a selling point or simply a matter of necessity.

Kneeland doesn’t shy away from the fact that his stores import produce in an effort to “carry the best out of every season.” In fact, Kneeland says his stores’ high-end consumers look upon imported product as high quality and desirable, leading them to tout Southern Hemisphere fruit as just that. “As with cheeses, imported produce has a higher value to it,” he acknowledges. “Imported cheeses from France, Denmark and Holland — that’s what our customers want. We try to ride that coattail a little bit.”

Furthermore, Kneeland subscribes to the belief that a little hearty competition never hurt anyone. In fact, he believes if North American growers feel the breath of Southern Hemisphere growers down their necks — and vice versa — it will be a good thing for everyone involved. “Competition makes everybody look at their operations and their quality and say, ‘I really need to be there,’” he says. “It could be the imports looking at the domestic fruit or the domestic people looking at the imports. In the end, consumers win.” **pb**



The poster for Agritrade 2013 features a green and white color scheme. At the top, the Agritrade logo is displayed with the tagline "Growing business together" and "Expo & Conference 2013 • Antigua Guatemala". The main event dates, "March 14-15, 2013 • ANTIGUA GUATEMALA", are prominently shown in red and black. Below this, the text reads "THE MOST IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL INTERNATIONAL TRADE SHOW OF CENTRAL AMERICA". A list of product categories includes Vegetables, Fruits, Processed Products, Ornamental Plants, Foliages, Flowers, and Differentiated Products. The event features an Exhibition Floor, Networking, and Conferences. A section titled "Meet the TOP PLAYERS in Agritrade 2013:" lists three key players: No. 1 World's provider of cardamom, No. 1 US's provider of snow peas and poinsettias, and No. 5 World's provider of banana. Contact information for information and sales is provided, including phone numbers (502) 2422-3559 and (502) 2422-3415, the email agritrade@agexport.org.gt, and the website www.agritradecentralamerica.org. The poster is organized by AGEXPORT, the 30th anniversary of the Guatemala Exporters Association, and includes a Facebook icon and a collage of various agricultural products like fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

Restaurants Rely On Mushrooms On The Menu

Whether they are being served at fine dining, quickservice, or colleges and universities across the country, mushrooms earn a foodservice star thanks to their wide variety, economic attributes and nutritious stats. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL

Restaurants have been exploring the concept of blending meat and mushrooms together in dishes such as Mushroom Tacos with Salsa Verde.

The fresh mushroom has developed a new aura. Chefs and diners everywhere are enjoying its versatility, flavor and texture variations and health attributes. “More appetizers and bar foods include fresh mushrooms. Restaurants are trying to become more globally authentic, and mushrooms play a major role in those worldly cuisines. Asian, European, Mediterranean and some Latin cuisines use mushrooms as typical ingredients. “Mushroom sales are growing as interest in these ethnic concepts grows,” states Anthony “Tony” D’Amico, president of To-Jo Mushrooms Inc., in Avondale, PA.

Mushroom Varieties Offer Something For Everyone

“Each year, the National Restaurant Association conducts a survey with professional chefs to find out what the hot trends for restaurant menus will be. In the produce category of the *What’s Hot in 2012* survey, Asian mushrooms, such as Shiitake, Enoki, Maitake and Beech, were seen as a hot trend by 44 percent of respondents,” reports Bill Litvin, vice president of sales and national account manager at Temple, PA-based Giorgi Foods Inc.

Most of the mushroom varieties are not really new, but awareness of them has increased dramatically. Mushroom suppliers seem to agree that the Portobello is still extremely popular. The baby Bella, with its flavor and texture, has expanded the entire Portobello category. Interestingly, the Portobello is actually a fully matured Cremini variety, as is the baby Bella.

“Portobellos are still as popular as ever,” according to Alan Kleinman, a salesman at Gourmet’s Finest, an Avondale, PA-based mushroom grower and distributor. “We offer any mushroom that is grown conventionally and specialties that are foraged on a seasonal basis. I don’t see anything on the horizon that will even come close to the wide spread popularity of the Portobello.”

Fred Recchiuti, general manager of Basciani Foods Inc., headquartered in Avondale, PA, remarks. “Portobellos are still tops in our business. More and more, we are destemming the mushrooms for our foodservice customers. The chefs use them primarily for stuffing and they get many more servings in a container this way,” he explains. “Plus, it is labor-saving.”

“Guests at Black Angus Steakhouse [a 46-unit chain based in Los Altos, CA] appreciate

contemporary twists to the classic steakhouse menu items they love,” acknowledges Stacy Schulist, the restaurant’s director of marketing. “A natural pairing with beef, we use mushrooms in steak ‘toppers’ and appetizers. Guests’ demand and understanding of mushroom varieties have really increased during the past several years. The addition and popularity of Portobellos in several menu items at Black Angus, such as our seasonal Crispy Baby Portobello Mushroom appetizer, is a great example.”

The white or Button mushroom is gaining in popularity, especially because it’s been found to contain more health benefits. “The Shiitake mushroom, originally a white table cloth restaurant item, is becoming big in foodservice, appearing in more casual restaurants such as P.F. Chang’s,” says Gary Schroeder, president at Kennett Square, PA-based Oakshire Mushroom Farm Inc., the exclusive marketer and distributor of Dole mushrooms.

The most popular mushroom varieties depend on the customer base, cost constraints and flavor targets of the restaurant. Overall, white mushrooms have seen a tremendous growth. Brown mushrooms, such as Portobellos, have a strong following by chefs who

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appreciate their flavor and texture. Shiitakes are popular for more unusual, expensive dishes. Litvin of Giorgio Foods notes, "The beauty of mushrooms is that they complement dishes at every price point."

Many restaurants try to establish a point of differentiation, so they continue to explore mushroom varieties such as Enoki and Maitake. They still use significantly more whites, then Portobellos and baby Bellas, but they are using them in different ways. "Because of food costs and what the consumer is willing to pay, many top restaurants, such as Ortanique on the Mile [in Coral Gables, FL,] use Shiitakes instead of some of the more expensive wild varieties. They still provide the exotic feel and a great cachet, while at a lower price," suggests D'Amico of To-Jo Mushrooms.

"The Maitake is wonderful, but expensive to cultivate," admits Schroeder of Oakshire. "It has a profile similar to the Shiitake, which is less expensive, so many chefs are substituting with Shiitakes in their dishes."

Wild mushrooms are the primary restaurant business of Ponderosa Mushrooms and Specialty Foods, located in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. The mushrooms are seasonal, and chefs tend to follow the seasons and concentrate their menus on what is in peak supply, the best quality and value for that particular time of year. "We are in the peak season for fresh Hedgehogs, fresh Yellow Foot Chanterelles and fresh Black Trumpet mushrooms," details Joe V. Salvo, president of Ponderosa.

"More restaurant chefs are using a wider variety of the specialty cultivated mushrooms we carry. Good examples are Pioppini, Abalone, Maitake, King Oyster and Shimeji mushrooms."

Other less familiar mushroom varieties include Cauliflower, Lobster, Nameko or Cinnamon Cap, Pom pom, Porcini, Wood ear, Gamboni, Morels, and Fairy-ring. Many of these can be expensive with limited availability. However, they offer chefs opportunities to include mushrooms that provide more unusual flavors and textures for creative dishes.

"Shiitake is the largest specialty mushroom by volume, but Oyster, Maitake, Chanterelle, and others are showing up more in 'wild mushroom' blends," says Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms Inc., in Watsonville, CA.

New Mushroom Presentations Change Foodservice Menus

Not only is the foodservice use of mushrooms increasing, but how mushrooms appear in menus has changed. "Restaurants are using mushrooms in appetizers, soups, sides and entrees, as well as salads," says Harvey Mitchler,

Mushroom Council Emphasizes Usage With Meat

The Mushroom Council, in San Jose, CA, represents the mushroom industry, fosters relationships and shares information with foodservice operators through many avenues. One way it accomplishes this is via conceptual and menu development to show operators exactly how mushrooms fit into new and existing menus. The Council provides continued education around applied usage ideas. It also conducts promotions, in which it works with an operator or chain to develop and feature unique mushroom ideas and dishes.

More chefs are exploring the concept of mushroom and meat combinations. The Council began this idea with the Culinary Institute of America, and has since tested and developed new recipes to showcase the application. Mushrooms add bulk and volume, generating more servings and stretch recipes into more portions. The steps are simply to finely dice up mushrooms so they're the consistency of ground beef, turkey, or pork; cook and season the mushrooms the way you'd cook the meat; and combine the mushrooms and meat to complete the recipe. Some examples of blended recipes include: Cremini and Pork Meatballs, Crab and Mushroom Cakes, Mushroom Burger Wrap and Mushroom Tacos with Salsa Verde.

As they investigate new ways to use fresh mushrooms in their menus, more chefs are also turning to the value-added products. They are looking at pre-sliced, blanched, sautéed, marinated or flavored mushrooms. Pre-stuffed Portobello caps are also available.

"An exciting chain restaurant development is using heavy television media schedules to promote mushroom menu options," reports Litvin of Giorgio Foods. "Applebee's, Burger King, Olive Garden, Sonic and other restaurants have created television commercials that prominently feature mushrooms. This gives them high visibility in mainstream media. In addition, chains have mushroom menu items featured in the main and low-calorie sections of their websites."

pb

“Each year, the National Restaurant Association conducts a survey with professional chefs to find out what the hot trends for restaurant menus will be. In the produce category... Asian mushrooms, such as Shiitake, Enoki, Maitake and Beech, were seen as a hot trend by 44 percent of respondents.”

— Bill Litvin, *Giorgio Foods Inc.*

director of sales and marketing at Champ’s Mushrooms Inc., located in Aldergrove, British Columbia, Canada.

“Mushrooms are a perfect fit for my breakfast and brunch menus,” says chef Debbie Sharpe, of Feast Restaurant + Bar, in Chicago, IL. “Whether my customers are looking for something light or decadent, mushrooms fill the role and allow diners to leave happy knowing that they’ve just eaten something flavorful, yet good for them.”

Basciani Foods’ Recchiuti asserts, “Mushrooms are no longer a specialty in foodservice; they are a staple. For example, Outback Steakhouse, [a Tampa, FL-based chain with more than 1,200 locations] has held the promotion, Mushrooms, Perfect Mate for your Steak.” The restaurant is now featuring on its website a Wood-Fire Grilled Tuscan Ribeye, topped with sautéed mushrooms.

“Restaurant chefs commonly used mushrooms as side dishes or meat topping,” relates Caldwell of Monterey Mushrooms. “Now the mushrooms are part of fajitas and quesadillas. Mushrooms may have been used as an appetizer, but now they are part of the meatloaf, lasagna and tacos. They are being used to offset some of the higher cost meat prices, while enhancing flavor and customer satisfaction.”

Restaurant chains focused on the Italian dining experience are heavy users of mushrooms as well. The menu selections at The Olive Garden, in Orange County, FL, with more than 730 global locations, include stuffed mushrooms; mushroom-topped chicken dishes and Portobello risotto, according to Litvin of Giorgio Foods.

Mushrooms are rich in *umami*, which creates a sense of gustatory completeness of balanced flavor. It presents a full-bodied taste, aroma and mouth-feel that are immediately discernable. In addition, “Mushrooms enhance the overall visual appeal of whatever food with which they are paired,” asserts Robert Okura, vice president of culinary development and corporate executive chef at the Cheesecake Factory, a 165-unit chain based in Calabasas

Hill, CA. “In doing so, they increase the inherent level of ‘craveability’ of the dish.”

“The newest way restaurants are using mushrooms is a means to extend protein, where costs continue to rise,” discloses D’Amico of To-Jo Mushrooms. “With the *umami* quality, operators are looking at ways to mix meat and mushrooms. One national chain just introduced a turkey burger that has mushrooms mixed in, rather than used as a topping. It creates a moist turkey burger that delivers lower calories and could even save money.”

“Meatless Mondays are being featured in more restaurants, and mushrooms are being used as an entrée on many menus,” says Ponderosa’s Salvo.

Mushroom Health Benefits Build Sales

One of the important aspects of the mushroom, in addition to its flavor and texture, is the health benefits it provides. “While many consumers of foodservice aren’t shopping with nutrition in mind, corporate chefs certainly are more in tune with nutritional properties as they search for new ways to reduce sodium without reducing flavor and consumer acceptance,” acknowledges Caldwell of Monterey Mushroom. “Mushrooms are a great answer to this difficult challenge,” he affirms.

“The mushroom’s versatility and unmatched health profile means more use, less waste and greater cost-savings for foodservice,” adds Bart Minor, president and CEO of the San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Council. “When customers come into the restaurant looking for healthful options, but don’t want to compromise on taste or spend more, mushrooms are the solution. Operators are using mushrooms for many reasons. They can reduce sodium, lower costs and increase nutritional values.”

The United States Department of Agriculture has new dietary guidelines, referred to as My Plate, which recommends filling half your plate fruits and vegetables. Mushrooms bring another serving of vegetables to the plate.



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Replacing mushrooms for a portion of the meat in a recipe can save calories, cholesterol, fat and sodium.

“As the health benefits and medicinal properties of many mushrooms become more common knowledge, this will be one of the main selling features of using and eating mushrooms,” adds Salvo of Ponderosa Mushrooms.

“The fact that mushrooms can reduce calories and increase satisfaction is important,” comments D’Amico of To-Jo Mushrooms. “With calorie counts becoming mandatory on

chain menus, everyone is trying to keep their customers happy, but still offer healthful options. Looking at the burger chains and casual restaurants, you’ll see that when they use fresh mushrooms the nutritional values normally have reduced calories and, in many cases, lower sodium.”

The Cheesecake Factory uses fresh mushrooms extensively in its menus. It recently introduced the Skinnylicious Menu, providing calorie counts for various dishes, many of which include mushrooms. “Our menus



Mushrooms can be used as a low-cost, high-flavor way to stretch the protein in a meal further, such as in these Cremini and Pork Meatballs.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL

change every six months,” reports Andrew Sarinana, senior manager and service manager for an Arcadia, CA, location of the restaurant. “They always contain a nice selection of mushrooms, including Cremini, Shiitake, Portobello and Button. Our customers are health-conscious and enjoy the lighter items we offer on the Skinnylicious Menu. It makes us feel good, too, because we know the dishes are better for our guests.”

Mushrooms naturally produce vitamin D, and the vegetable stands out as the only source of vitamin D in the produce aisle. Oakshire Mushroom Farms has a vitamin D mushroom now available in retail stores, and it could be available to foodservice customers, according to Schroeder.

Colleges & Universities Building Mushroom Sales

Chefs and managers of foodservice venues other than restaurants are taking a new look at mushrooms, especially in light of the public’s recent emphasis on health. “We worked with the Mushroom Council to showcase home-grown cultivated mushrooms in our dining halls,” states Martin Breslin, director of culinary operations at Harvard University, in Cambridge, MA. “Oyster, Shiitake, Portobello, Cremini, Maitaki and white mushrooms were featured. This was very popular with our students. They learned about the health benefits and tasted firsthand some varieties with which they were unfamiliar. The collaboration sparked feedback from students, asking us to

“The mushroom’s versatility and unmatched health profile means more use, less waste and greater cost-savings for foodservice. When customers come into the restaurant looking for healthful options, but don’t want to compromise on taste or spend more, mushrooms are the solution.”

— Bart Minor, *The Mushroom Council*

put more mushrooms on the menu. We now serve mushrooms in noodle bowls, as a side, on pizza, in salads, at breakfast in frittatas and in many sauces as part of entrees. Overall mushroom consumption has significantly increased.”

Monterey Mushrooms’ Caldwell reports, “Colleges and universities specifically have targeted improved quality of service and nutritious choices to match the demand of their customers. There has been a tremendous sales increase in this specific area. We expect more hospitals and nursing homes to join in as the nutritional properties of mushrooms, especially vitamin D, become more commonly known. We are working on specific solutions to increase mushroom use in school lunch programs, but this has been slower to develop,” he admits.

“In Western Canada, it seems that all the cafeterias and campus restaurants have several menu items with mushrooms, including some vegetarian dishes,” points out Salvo of Ponderosa Mushrooms. “We know the demand is there from students and staff alike. The challenge is getting them to use a variety of mushrooms that still fit within their budgets.”

Foodservice Operators Receive Industry Support

To help foodservice operators in their use of fresh mushrooms, the Mushroom Council and mushroom suppliers offer many forms of assistance. The Council develops a wide range of collateral, including sell sheets, case studies, brochures and recipes. It also conducts cost and nutritional comparisons of mushroom and

non-mushrooms dishes to demonstrate the value mushrooms can bring to the menu.

D’Amico of To-Jo Mushrooms shares, “Currently we work closely with our foodservice customers, providing educational materials and nutrition information. We also offer menu analysis, concept development and recipe building to chain operator customers. Many chain operators have reduced R & D staffing in this economy, so we’ve been able to assist in this area. Our goal is to show cost-saving, unique and distinctive recipes incorporating mush-

rooms into their menus.”

One benefit of working with Giorgio Mushrooms is that it has a fully staffed R & D department to provide new ideas and applications of mushrooms to chains for their menus.

Dole has a large foodservice educational program, as well, and Oakshire Mushroom Farms is an integrated part of Dole’s extensive program. Schroeder details, “We helped a chain develop a Portobello burger, which was used in their programs and included in their newsletter.”

pb

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more mushrooms

Seven Ways To Sell More Sweet Onions

With proper signage, a variety of bulk and bagged product and eye-catching displays, sweet onions will provide excellent register rings. **CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



Well-maintained displays will encourage shoppers to buy sweet onions, even if sweet onions aren't regularly on their shopping list.

Onions' fiery flavor has sometimes cost them a place at the table. Today, however, that is no longer the case, with the prevalence and popularity of sweet onions.

Among retailers who suggest the variety can reap a cool increase in profits, Mike Maguire, produce director at Demoulas Market Basket, a 65-store chain, in Tewksbury, MA, acknowledges, "Sweet onions are huge business."

Consumer interest in sweet onions is growing, agrees Michael Purvis, director of merchandising for Harvey's Supermarkets, a 71-store chain based in Nashville, GA. "We see demand and sales of sweet onions continuing to increase."

The numbers tell the tale. Sweet onions represented 29.8 percent of total onion dollar sales for the 52 weeks ending December 31, 2011, and 1.2 percent of total produce dollars last year, according to the Nielsen Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based fresh food consulting firm.

1. Follow The Trends

"Over the past three to four years, sweet

onions have been driving onion category growth," says Marty Kamer, northeast sales manager for Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc., in Greencastle, PA.

Derrell Kelso, Jr., owner and president of Onions Etc. Inc., in Stockton, CA, estimates this growth "from 5 to 7 percent annually."

What is fueling sales of sweet onions? According to David DeBerry, director of category management for onions at Crescent Fruit & Vegetable LLC, in Edinburg, TX, "Sweet onions today are a much better product than a decade or two ago."

Richard Pazderski, director of sales and marketing at Bland Farms LLC, in Glenville, GA, agrees. "A great deal of money is going into research and development and larger shippers are getting involved," he says. "Additionally, companies are vertically integrating with seed providers to develop their products."

"Consumers enjoy the versatility of sweet onions," says John Shuman, president and director of sales at Reidsville, GA-based Shuman Produce Inc. "They can be cooked and they are mild enough to eat raw, too."

"In spite of the growth in demand, sweet

onions are a niche in the onion category, but a major niche," recognizes Margret DeBruyn, CEO of DeBruyn Produce Co. Inc., in Zeeland, MI.

The sales opportunity for sweet onions is not as a replacement for 'hotter' onions, but as an incremental sales generator. Matthew Curry, president of Curry & Co., in Brooks, OR, comments, "I doubt sweet onions will ever overtake hot onion sales. I think the gap will close some, but the efficiencies and demand for hot onions will continue to drive them as the volume leader. That said, there are stores and regions in the United States where sweet onions make up a substantially larger piece of the onion category."

"Going forward," says Keystone's Kamer, "one of the biggest challenges for the industry is to meet consumer expectations. Even if the year-round sweet onions have become a mainstay, there continues to be a lot of imposters, or onions that are labeled sweet and fail to meet consumer expectations. These imposter onions destroy consumer confidence, and ultimately slow sales and profits for everyone. Being able to ensure a consistent sweet onion flavor profile is an important element for repeat sales."

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Harvey's Supermarket's Purvis says, "We always order certified sweet onions."

2. Source Year-Round

"Vidalias were once the only sweet onion, and only available in the spring," remarks

Demoulas' Maguire. "Now, there are sweet onions out of Texas, Mexico and Peru. We're able to carry them year-round and in multiple SKUs."

There no longer appears to be any seasonality in sweet onion demand. In fact, sales represented 0.3 percent of total sweet onion

dollar contribution during each quarter of 2011, according to data supplied by the Nielsen Perishables Group. Supplies from multiple growing regions make this possible.

Curry explains, "If Mother Nature operates under standard procedure, there is essentially year-round availability. There is also a combination of additional acreage and the lengthening of seasons, plus technologies continue to improve, increasing the time sweet onions can be stored. Newer varieties, such as the Hermiston Sweet variety that we offer, are available into December. This used to be a time when only imports were available. I know other companies also have their own domestic varieties stretching into these time frames."

Barry Rogers, president of Melbourne, FL-based Sweet Onion Trading Corp., says, "We have double availability most of the year, meaning we try to cover all our crops with backup crops in alternate locations. This ensures availability, even when weather, fuel costs or other issues affect shipments."

The sweet onion year begins with imports from Chile and Mexico. Crescent Fruit & Vegetable's DeBerry says, "We'll start out of Mexico with our Tampico Sweets around January 10th. We've doubled sales of these onions in the



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“We can sell more units with better pricing with bags. Bags typically contain a smaller onion. This is perfect for the customer who is going to chop it anyway and wants to save 20 to 30 cents a pound.”

— Mike Maguire, Demoulas Market Basket

past three years. Then in late February or early March we move into Texas 1015s and continue with them through the end of June.”

Georgia-grown Vidalia onions overlap in supply, starting harvest in April and available out of controlled-atmosphere storage into September. Wendy Brannen, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), in Vidalia, GA, reports, “Numbers from our third-party survey conducted in 2011 indicate that four out of five consumers list Vidalia as their

favorite sweet onion.”

Across the nation, Walla Walla sweet onions begin harvest in June. Kathy Fry, director of marketing for the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee, in Walla Walla, WA, details, “Our season runs 12 weeks, or June, July and August. We will ship to the East Coast, but Vidalias pretty much dominate, so the bulk of our sales are West of the Mississippi. Retailers often complain they can only get one shipment a season. If they order early, it’s possible to get two to three shipments.”

Out of family farms in Nevada and California, Peri & Sons Farms Inc., in Yerington, NV, grows and markets its Sweetie Sweet onion from mid-August to December, according to Jessica Peri, retail sales manager. “We’re seeing imported Peruvian sweets take a stronger market share during this time, but many retailers prefer to stay with and support a domestically grown sweet onion,” she says.

Peru ships sweet onions to the United States from September into February. Bland Farm’s Pazderski says, “We do plan to increase our Peruvian program by about 20 percent next year.”

3. Handle With Care

Sweet onions are more perishable than



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Is The Economy Giving A Boost Or Bust To Sweet Onions?

Sweet onions are a premium product. Matthew Curry, president of Curry & Company, in Brooks, OR, says, "Sweet onions are a more expensive crop to produce, are seasonal in nature and have a shorter shelf-life."

"Demand has sometimes struggled with the economy," says Margret DeBruyn, CEO at DeBruyn Produce Co. Inc., headquartered in La Villa, TX. "This is exacerbated when supplies run short due to weather. In addition, add to this a 25-cent per unit cost to have the onions certified as sweet and this adds to the price."

Yet, Michael Purvis, director of merchandising for Harvey's Supermarkets, a 71-store chain based in Nashville, GA, acknowledges, "We're seeing good sales of sweet onions. On one hand, people going out to restaurants are seeing sweet onions used in a variety of ways. On the other hand, people are staying home and cooking more now and they're buying more sweet onions as a result."

Sweet onions will continue to do well, predicts Curry. "We do see some monthly swings in purchase patterns, and for 2011 we noticed that sales at the beginning of the month tended to be stronger than those throughout the rest of the month. There are multiple reports on the economy driving more people to stay home and eat versus going out. We think some of those shoppers cooking at home more will splurge a bit and treat themselves to this sweet onion." **pb**

storage onions due to their greater water content. Sweet Onion Trading's Rogers says, "Sweet onions should be kept dry with good air circulation and minimal light, if possible. If produce managers find their sweet onions are cold and wet, they can lay them out in a single layer on newspaper or something absorbent until they dry and come to room temperature. After the sweet onions are completely dry, they can be replaced in their original containers."

The VOC's Brannen warns, "Don't stack the

onions high because they can bruise easily. Rotation is important. One bad onion can spoil the display."

"Sweet onions sometimes get ragged," says Rogers. "A quick peel of the unruly outer layer of onion skins can dramatically improve the appearance of the display. When stacking loose onions, make sure they are all root-end up, or stem-end up (one or the other; not both). This also lends an orderly and appealing appearance to the display."

4. Offer Bulk And Bagged

Jumbo bulk sweets are a perennial favorite in the produce department. Consider, too, adding an SKU of bagged sweet onions. Market Basket's Maguire says, "We can sell more units with better pricing with bags. Bags typically contain a smaller onion. This is perfect for the customer who is going to chop it anyway and wants to save 20 to 30 cents a pound."

"Since bagged sweets are seen as a value," adds Curry & Co.'s Curry, "they can be used to

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Vidalia Sweet Onions Rely On Focused Marketing Meeting Consumer Demands

BY BILL MARTIN

Vidalia sweet onions may be the most recognizable name on the planet when it comes to the onion category, and it didn't happen that way by accident. This not only happens through the unique soil conditions and climate of Southeastern Georgia, but due to growing techniques and many other factors. Yet, Vidalia sets the standard in sweet onions because of focused marketing and growers providing consumers what they want. For example, smaller families have led to smaller consumer packs, a trend that has existed for a number of years. Yet, Vidalia shippers seek new ways to offer more attractive, convenient and practical packaging.

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce Inc., based in Reidsville, GA, notes his company was a finalist in the PMA Impact Awards last year, sponsored

by the Produce Marketing Association. "Our new pack is very consumer-friendly and has a lot of information on it. It has storage tips for sweet onions, recipes, health benefits and a QR code that directly links consumers to our website, plus there is more information about the product," he notes.

Mark Shuman, general manager for Shuman Produce, points out the packaging "provides a consistent image throughout our onion category."

At Ray Farms Inc., based in Glennville, GA, principal Danny Ray says 2- and 3-lb. consumer packs seem to be the trend. "Last year we packed more 2-lb. bags than anything," he adds.

Building the Vidalia sweet onion name at Bland Farms LLC involves "...working to strengthen relationships with our customer base by creating unique sales and grow opportunities within the sweet onion category," states Greg Smith, marketing communications manager for the Glennville,

introduce sweet onions to a new customer who doesn't want to pay a premium price."

In 2011, 69.7 percent of sweet onions were sold in some type of packaging, compared to 29.6 percent sold as random weight bulk, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group.

Shuman Produce's Shuman says, "Bagged sales for us have grown from 20 to 25 percent a decade ago to last year, when 45 percent of our total annual sales were in bags from two to five pounds in size. Not only do consumers like the convenience of picking up a bag of sweet onions, packaging enables us to provide information such as nutrition, usage, handling tips and rotating recipes."

Some shippers, like the Sweet Onion Trading Company, have opted to use more header bags and wineglass-shaped bags than the poly-ribbon with mesh bags that became popular a couple of years ago, notes Rogers. "Those bags are very attractive, but they are expensive and not very green," he says. "Some material vendors are starting to offer biodegradable poly-ribbon/mesh bags, and we may look to those materials if we produce any more of that particular bag in the future."

Grower/shippers such as Crescent Fruit & Vegetable have started to cater more to retailers'

specific and customized packaging requests. DeBerry reveals, "Last year, we shipped 48 different SKUs, everything from 40-lb. boxes to 2- and 3-lb. bags."

5. Build 'Sweet' Displays

Onions are a destination category at Demoulas Market Basket. Maguire shares, "We'll display all the onions together with signage to let customers know the different types. In addition, we'll often highlight the sweet onions by putting them on an end cap."

At Harvey's Supermarkets, sweet onions are displayed close by, but not right next to other onions. Purvis explains, "We don't put a 3-lb. bag of sweets and a 3-lb. bag of storage onions side by side because customers might only look at the price rather than the product and go for what's cheaper. Instead, we'll set the sweet onions apart and let customers know what makes them different. You need to sell the difference to get customers to trade up."

Curry & Co.'s Curry, says, "We like to see yellow onions on the left, sweets on the right and the red and yellow onions splitting the two."

"Go big," recommends Keystone's Kamer. "Nothing says, 'Buy Me' quite like a large, prominent display of sweet onions. End-caps, stand-alones, value-added product offerings,

GA based grower/shipper. "The success we had with our customers last year has prompted us to increase the availability of these unique retail solutions. These products are created by the retail sweet onion experts at our farm in collaboration with merchandising professionals specific to meet our customers' needs."

Promoting Vidalia's signature crop comes in many forms, and it was 10 years ago that Produce for Kids was created by Shuman. Since its formation, \$3.7 million has been raised, and its founder expresses confidence that this year, donations will break the \$4 million milestone. Nineteen retailers and over 65 produce companies are participating in the program, designed to raise money for the Children's Miracle Network. "We are very blessed Produce for Kids continues to gain momentum and grow," he says. "It's a true testament to the produce industry and its support of the program," Shuman relates. He adds the PFK promotion falls right into the heart of the Vidalia sweet onion season.

"We've got some very innovative buying promotions we run each year. It's a

recipe-based buying promotion we do every year in May," Shuman says.

Georgia sweet onion growers and shippers are continuing to find new ways to better position themselves in the marketplace, whether it's through personnel, or structural improvements and expansions. At Roberson Onion Co., based in Hazlehurst, GA, president Steve Roberson says Brent Bryson joined his staff in sales in June, 2011, during the Vidalia sweet onion season. Bryson spent 24 years with Wal-Mart, with the past seven years managing the Wal-Mart Supercenter in Hazlehurst. He also worked seven-and-a-half years as a food merchandiser for Wal-Mart Supercenters.

Last year was the second for Roberson to be involved in a year-round sweet onion deal involving product not only from Vidalia, but Peru, Chile, Mexico and Texas. "Our year-round sweet onion involvement certainly helps us to stay in contact with our customers," Roberson says.

Some changes have occurred with Lyons, GA-based L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms Inc. John Williams, who was the company's warehouse manager for two years, recently moved to

Charlotte, NC, with his family, but will remain with Herndon, opening a sales office there. During his last year in Lyons, Williams says there was a new grading line installed at the company so more product can be moved. A concrete platform also was added allowing more stacking of bins and "to work the product." A new loading dock also is now in place so sweet potatoes can be loaded while sweet onions being hauled in from the fields are being unloaded.

At Shuman Produce, Mark Shuman relates the company and its growers have combined to increase acreage this season and should have 1,800 to 2,000 acres of sweet onions in production. This should increase its volume to about 1.2 million 40-lb. cartons. To handle greater volume, Shuman notes it has increased its total storage to about 700,000 units. Last year, there was a little over 500,000 units.

On the personnel front at Bland Farms, Smith says, Sarah Seebran was recently promoted to director of marketing and Smith has been named to Seebran's previous post as marketing communications manager. **pb**



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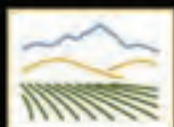
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multi-size strategies and bulk and bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure incremental sales lift.” Kamer continues, “Establish secondary display areas, especially during promotional periods, to increase sales and consumer awareness. Effective point-of-purchase materials and signage also help to showcase the nutritional benefits and flavor of sweet onions.”

Use packaging to sell more sweet onions, suggests Sweet Onion Trading’s Rogers. “Stacking 40-lb. cartons against a produce display table to produce a colorful and eye-catching waterfall of onions is very effective. Buyers should take advantage of bins, which make terrific displays. Colorful bins and toppers, especially those for Vidalia sweet onions, are very attractive.”

Use displays to call out seasonal excitement, advises Curry. “An effective display alerts the customer that you have sweet onions available now to purchase. Square-footage varies depending on the season. If you’re in the heart of Vidalia onion country and it’s the peak of the season, you can run multiple displays with fun seasonal themes. I love when retailers identify that sweet onions are something special and celebrate them as they would cherries and blueberries. Those retailers see large increases in their sweet onions sales.”

“Get sweet onions out in front,” says Michael Valpredo, president of Country Sweet Produce Inc., in Bakersfield, CA. “Customers, especially on the West Coast, aren’t as familiar with sweet onions. That means retailers need to

build their displays out front so customers will know the product is available.”

6. Use Recipe Ideas To Sell

Sweet onions are cross-merchandised with tomatoes and avocados at Demoulas Market Basket. Maguire says, “It makes a colorful display and puts the idea of salsa or guacamole into consumers’ minds.”

Similarly, at Harvey’s Supermarkets, sweet onions are displayed adjacent to the bagged salad case in produce and in the meat department next to steaks. Purvis details, “We’ll use a lot of bins and mini-bins throughout the store when sweet onions are plentiful. For example, by the front door we’ll create a huge lobby display or in the summer by the charcoal and drinks and along with foil and bouillon cubes so that customers can make a whole grilled onion.”

“Educating consumers about the different types of onions and their various uses is important,” says Sarah Seebran, director of marketing for Bland Farms. “The majority of consumers think an onion is an onion. To maximize sales, it’s always a great idea for retailers to make information available for consumers to educate them on the best uses for each type of onion. That information can be very useful and should help consumers decide which onion is best for their purposes.”

“Build ingredient items into a display of sweet onions,” recommends Kelso of Onions Etc. “Our 3-lb. consumer bag of Red Italian Sweets has a recipe for and photo of a tropical fruit salad. This sells the sweet onion, and at the

same time increases the produce ring.”

The Walla Walla Sweet Onion Committee offers a packet of 14 different recipes printed on 3x5-inch cards. Fry details, “These include preparation methods consumers might not think of such as sweet onion and beet salad, sweet onion and watermelon salad, and sweet onion with bacon slices.”

“In addition to ingredients,” says Sweet Onion Trading’s Rogers, “Cross-merchandise sweet onions with gadgets such as small plastic ‘sweet onion microwave cookers,’ onion blossom kits or onion choppers.”

7. Promote By Price And Themes

“Sweet onions are promoted at Demoulas Market Basket twice a month year-round,” says Maguire.

Rogers adds, “Advertising and promotions must be kept fresh and new. Customers can be stimulated in many ways.”

Price, seasonal changes and/or locally grown and marketing efforts by sweet onion organizations offer profitable promotional themes. Onions Etc.’s Kelso says, “Big displays with a 99-cent per pound price tag sell sweet onions any time of the year.”

Capitalize on seasonality with a three-prong approach, recommends Curry & Co.’s Curry. “Announce that sweet onions are here,” he says. “For example, ‘Vidalia Sweet onions are here now! Great for the BBQ!’ Then, celebrate the season. ‘It’s peak flavor for Vidalia Sweet Onions. Bring some home today!’ Finally, create an urgency to buy during the end of the season. ‘Get your Vidalia Sweet Onions today before the season is over!’”

Vidalias are a signature item at Harvey’s Supermarkets that tie into the chain’s locally grown program. Purvis remarks, “Our produce managers get aggressive with eye-catching and sale-able displays. In fact, two of our stores were among the top winners in last year’s Vidalia Onion Committee display contest.”

New this year is a first-time couponing program, organized by the VOC. Brannen explains, “I used to say it was recipes that were most popular with consumers; today I’d say it is coupons. Shows like TLC’s *Extreme Couponing* have created a buzz with the average American.” Consumers will be directed via on-pack information and via advertising and radio to a social media delivery vehicle for the coupon promotion. Specifically, when consumers ‘like’ the VOC’s Facebook page, they will have a one-time opportunity to print out a coupon for Vidalia onions. The coupon can be used to purchase either bulk loose or bagged Vidalia onions at their local supermarket. **pb**

Melons: Merchandising By The Calendar

Staying attuned to the holidays, as well as seasonal trends, will make melons even more popular throughout the year. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



Be sure to include a variety of melons in your displays so all consumers' tastes are represented.

Melon sales roll upward, due largely to the happy news that these sweet treats are not just good but good for you. And they come in sizes, colors and tastes to please everyone.

The classic large watermelon — that Fourth of July indispensable — has been joined by its smaller brethren: minis and cut melons. These smaller edibles are prized by weight-watchers looking for help with their New Year's resolutions. "The consumption of watermelons early in the year tracks with people joining the gym and working out in January," says Gordon Hunt, director of marketing and communications for the Orlando, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB). "We remind retailers that in January, there is a great deal of attention placed on eating healthfully and starting a new fitness regime."

Today's melons are not your grandmother's melons. Seedless and mini varieties have stepped to the forefront of the watermelon category. Canary, Casabas and other varieties offer the connoisseur myriad juicy flavor choices.

Recent development of a reliable, steady

supply of all major melon varieties has spurred sales growth. "The volume of watermelons is increasing every year," reports Hunt. "Most of that increase is because of the availability. Around 95 percent of winter watermelons are from Mexico. Most of the increase is the fresh-cut and the minis."

Other melon varieties are now available year-round, and the expanding market has inspired producers to develop varieties with sweeter flavor, richer color and longer shelf-life. "Cantaloupes, honeydews and watermelons are available year-round, and frequent promotion will help sales, but that's true of any commodity, not just melons," says Wes Liefer, CEO of Pura Vida Farms LLC, located in Scottsdale, AZ.

The category is growing, but finding the right strategy for maxing out melons is tricky because good merchandising depends on the time of year and the demographics of the store's customer base. "Each retailer has a different consumer profile they market and sell to so their mix of melon offerings can vary," explains Monique McLaws, marketing director at Dulcinea Farms LLC, headquartered in Ladera Ranch, CA. "Seasonality can also play a

big role in the product assortment. For example in the winter and fall seasons, consumers might find more mini versus conventional seedless watermelons."

Even if the best merchandising plan is a shifting target, some basic principles can guide decisions.

Month-to-Month Melons

As the calendar changes, the question becomes: which melons to feature and how to market them? Supply and demand for melons peak in spring and summer. But the emerging early-in-the-year melon market drives most of the annual sales increase. February follows January, when "it's Heart Health month, and watermelons fit well with that," says Hunt. "After that, it's time to prepare for spring, summer, and consumers who want to be bathing-suit-ready."

Consumers who buy melons early in the year are usually looking for either mini melons or fresh-cut melons. The smaller melon products are popular early in the year partly because they help compensate for the higher prices caused by lower supply. "The second half of November, December and the first half of



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

The National Watermelon Promotion Board encourages stores to use large eye-catching displays when watermelon season is in prime time.

January the supply is low, so the pricing is higher, and not many people try to promote them," explains Leifer. "Once you get into February there is good supply of cantaloupes. From February through April you have imported melons, and in June, the U.S. supply picks up. From June through August you've got an opportunity to promote a variety of melons from the United States."

Another reason consumers gravitate toward smaller or cut melons in the winter is that big watermelons have long been linked to outdoor social gatherings. "In the winter, people don't want to take a 16- to 20-lb. watermelon home with them," says Hunt. "Big watermelons are associated with eating outside. In the cold weather, you will not see many whole watermelons on the floor. It's usually the minis and the cut."

Some stores are doing well with melons cut into chunks. "Minis are becoming a little more prevalent, and the sliced products are, too," reports Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral at Martin's Supermarkets, located in South Bend, IN. "But the real growth has been in the chunked product." Martin's displays the inch to inch-and-a-half chunks in 16-oz. and larger containers. "Prominent placement is important, along with putting out enough product," Osowski adds.

Highlight Minis And Fresh-Cuts

The minis and the fresh-cut melons are driving category growth and reign supreme in the winter. There are tricks worth learning to highlight these smaller products. "Fresh-cut fruit is typically an impulse buy, so it must comply with consumer's attraction to unique products and location," says Dionysios Christou, vice president for marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce North America, based in Coral Gables, FL. "We also recommend pairing fresh-cut fruit with other convenient food products, such as in the lunch and deli departments for the on-the-go consumer. Retailers should feature fresh-cut melons to ensure that their dedicated melon consumers can find their product."

There's nothing more refreshing than fresh-cut melon, so stage fruit to visually accent this natural appeal. "It's always best to show melons cut in half and wrapped so the customer can see the internal quality of the melon," describes Stephen Martori, managing member at Martori Farms, headquartered in Scottsdale, AZ.

The mini watermelons are also available year-round. "We offer a 52-week supply of mini watermelons so retailers always have the opportunity to carry and promote our watermelons," says McLaws of Dulcinea.

Quality, however, is key to merchandising the mini melons. "There is inconsistency in the quality of the minis, but it is getting better," acknowledges Lou Kertesz, vice president of Plantation, FL-based Fresh Quest.

Promote Around The Holidays

Once the cold weather passes, melons can be promoted often and heavily. "You start in the spring — in April — and it will go all the way into October with good numbers from different sources," says Brent Harrison, president of Al Harrison Co. Distributors, in Nogales, AZ.

The highest volume supply corresponds to the months when the major U.S. growing regions have melons available. Hunt details, "It starts in the springtime with the first product from Florida, Texas and Southern California. Then it follows the sun north up to Maryland and Delaware on the East Coast, up to Oklahoma, Illinois and Indiana, and from California up to the Canadian border. May through September are high production months, and July is the peak."

Three melon-centric holidays mark those calendar pages that combine fabulous picnic weather with abundant melon supply. "Memorial Day is typically a watermelon holiday," remarks Pura Vida's Leifer. "Then comes the

“Minis are becoming a little more prevalent, and the sliced products are, too. But the real growth has been in the chunked product. Prominent placement is important, along with putting out enough product.”

— Ed Osowski, *Martin's Supermarkets*

Fourth of July, and Labor Day is usually the last big hurrah for U.S. melons. You can go with Melon Mania promotional displays on the sidewalk, or at the store entry.”

Memorial Day to Labor Day is the prime season for displaying large bins of full-sized melons. “Many retailers promote melons by the each or by the pound for the holidays, but you can promote melons outside of the holidays, too,” reminds Harrison. “Quality and pricing are the keys to merchandising melons.”

This is the time to go a little crazy with Melon Mania displays that reach consumers even before they are in the store. “In the summer, you can typically find large multiple case displays at the front entrance of the store or in high-traffic areas, as well as outdoors from June through August, the peak melon season,” says Dulcinea’s McLaws. “There’s a lot of volume, so melons are frequently on promotion.”

Whatever the season, “The best way to merchandise or promote melons is to coordinate with suppliers pre-season so that volumes can be planted to meet critical ad periods,” says Martori of Martori Farms. “Then, during the season, additional promotional opportunities can supplement the program when peak volumes occur.”

Melons Of Many Colors

Distinct changes in melon preferences now apply countrywide. Mini watermelons and fresh-cut melon products have assumed ever-greater importance within the category, while the king of melons remains the full-sized seedless variety. “Seedless watermelon is always a great commodity because it is so diverse,” says Kertesz of Fresh Quest. “You can cube, chunk or slice it in the winter when prices are high because the supply is low.”

There are different varieties of large seedless watermelons, but the varieties are suited to different growing conditions, and do not really differ on the consumer level. “We all grow different varieties for different areas, but they all fall under the same PLU,” says Harrison of Al Harrison.

Although these are the major trends in melon products, it’s a good idea to get help

from your supplier in tailoring the product mix to suit your customer base. For example, there are large consumer groups who buck the general trend and do not prefer seedless watermelons. “Seedless seems to have stabilized; it’s about 80 percent seedless right now,” says NWPB’s Hunt. “Seeded is for traditionalists. We’ve seen seeded make something of a comeback in the South and with Hispanics, and many people are convinced the taste of seeded is better.”

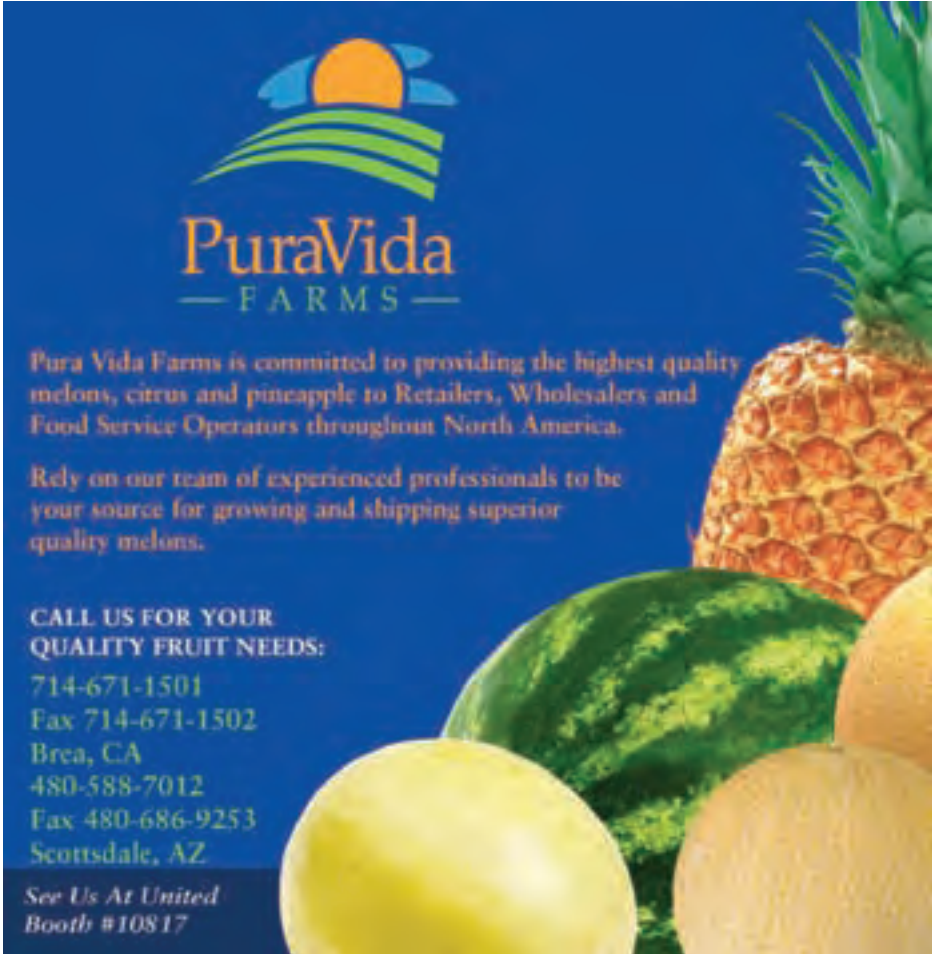
According to Del Monte’s Christou, “Successful retailers focus on addressing the preferences and tastes of consumers in their particular market. Retailers should understand their customer demographics in order to stock the melon varieties and format that are in demand in their region and showcase the

products effectively. If the retailer finds the need to offer more on-the-go options for their customers, then their melon fresh-cut sales will be greater. Del Monte uses sophisticated category management tools to help retailers ensure optimal product mix and to make customized recommendations that fit each individual store’s consumer profile.”

Some stores have customers who are more than willing to experiment with a wide range of relatively unfamiliar melons. “I’m selling a lot less honeydew; it’s hard to get any movement on honeydew” admits Dave Erickson, produce merchandiser at Rosauers Supermarkets, a 21-unit chain headquartered in Spokane, WA. “Customers are looking for the specialty cantaloupe varieties instead.”

Erickson is finding strong customer demand for Dulcinea’s cantaloupe varieties. The company specializes in Tuscan-style cantaloupes. These extra sweet cantaloupes have stripes that change color as the melon ripens — the fruit is sweet and firm when the stripes are green, extra sweet when they are light green, and full-flavored with a rich aroma when the stripes turn golden.

“There’s a pretty good demand for the Juan Canary melon. It’s a seasonal melon that



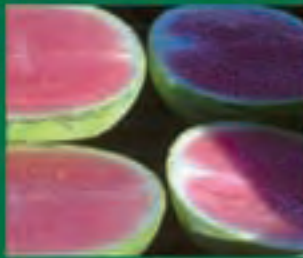
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Grower Alliance, LLC partners with a variety of Mexican fruit and vegetable growers to import a wide variety of top-notch products for retailers, foodservice, wholesalers, distributors, and brokers in the U.S. and Canada. The group was formed by Jorge Quintero (sales), Luis

Caballero (head of Mexican operations), and two growers in Mexico in August of 2007.

At the heart of the Grower Alliance organization are more than 14 growers who make up the partnership. By partnering with a variety of growers, the compa-

ny provides a wide range of products throughout the entire year. In this, their fifth, season they project close to 3 million packages.

Look for the following highlighted products during the upcoming seasons to help stimulate sales.

Steady Spring Supply

Start priming customers for the bounty of summer with a wealth of spring items. Grower Alliance's spring crops offer customers a steady supply of core items

including watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, ree bell peppers. Besides these core items

they'll also ship hot peppers (jalapeno, Caribe, Anaheim, pasilla, serrano). These items are available late March through the 4th of July.

Summer Tomatoes

An innovative partnership with a greenhouse grower in Michoacán allows Grower Alliance to offer around 350,000 packages

of quality beefsteak tomatoes this summer. The new deal also includes high quality greenhouse-grown Roma tomatoes.

Tomatoes are available through Nogales or McAllen beginning around June 20 through early Fall.

Early Fall

Keep enthusiastic produce customers interested at the end of summer with the introduction of a line of flavorful products from a new growing region. During this early-Fall shipping period, Grower Alliance

offers a broad line including watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, green beans, cucumbers/euro cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, eggplant, and green bell peppers, hot peppers

(jalapeno, Caribe, Anaheim, pasilla, serrano), carrots, pickles, snap peas, sweet corn, and fava beans. These items are available starting late September through mid-December.

Grower Alliance, LLC

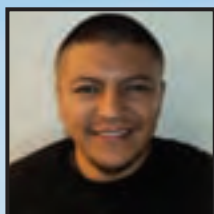
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KEY PEOPLE TO KNOW

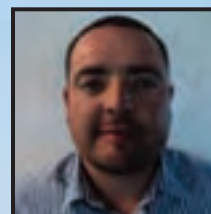
Following are the key people involved with
Grower Alliance who can be an asset to your business:



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



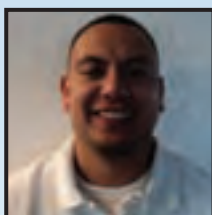
Jorge Quintero, Sr.
Sales Manager, Managing Member
(marketing director, daily sales)



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



Jaime Martinez
Head accountant & grower relations



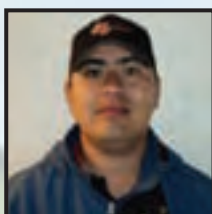
Frank Hernandez II
Sales Assistant



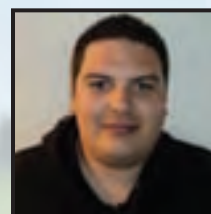
Saul Gonzalez
Sales



Maritza Guevara
Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable



Armando Robles
Warehouse Foreman



Jose Villareal
Dispatcher



“I’m selling a lot less honeydew; it’s hard to get any movement on honeydew. Customers are looking for the specialty cantaloupe varieties instead.”

— Dave Erickson, Rosauers Supermarkets

is only available early in the year,” says Pura Vida’s Liefer. The Juan Canary is an oval, smooth-skinned melon that is named after its bright canary yellow color. The flesh is pale green to white, and the flavor sweet but tangy, and reminiscent of cantaloupes. Juan Canary is one of the important varietal melon category that also includes Crenshaw, Casaba, Orange flesh, Galia and Golden honeydew. However, if retailers are promoting relatively unfamiliar melon products, sampling and signage are an important part of the equation.

“We introduced a cantaloupe called Melorange,” recalls Fresh Quest’s Kertesz. “It was so sweet; it tasted so good. But the size wasn’t quite as big and the color wasn’t as good. Unless consumers are told they won’t know about new items. Retailers need to educate the consumers through sampling and signage.”

Another relatively new cantaloupe is the Harper melon. Kertesz remarks, “The Harper melon has a longer shelf-life, is sweeter and has more consistent sizing. The Harper has become the standard cantaloupe in the winter.”

Retailers can even experiment with high-tech approaches to pique consumer interest. “An off-the-wall idea that could help sales is by having an interactive display,” suggests Del Monte’s Christou. “Featuring quick response codes that link to recipes or websites could be fun for people of all ages. Also, featuring your product in a unique way, such as in Del Monte boxes instead of the traditional product bins, could be appealing.”

Because the mix of melon products changes from store to store, and from month to month, ask your supplier for help in designing a program suited for a particular store. “Del Monte works closely with its retail partners to develop promotional and merchandising activities that support retail sales,” notes Christou. “Co-operative advertising campaigns, product displays, POP material, demo kits and creative recipe cards are some examples of tools used to promote the Del Monte melons with our retail partners. We are also continuously introducing new and innovative whole and fresh-cut products, improved packaging solutions and new marketing support tools

that allow us to keep up with the changing consumer demand and preferences.”

Tailor To Fit

Just as there is no one best mix of melon products, there is no one best way to display them. Mixing specialty melons with more familiar stand-bys can add visual pop. If you are in serious watermelon country, it can help to have bins full of large watermelons of different colors on the sidewalk outside the store or featured prominently in the store. Walk by an H-E-B store in Texas in the summer, for example, and you can see bins of seeded, seedless, yellow and orange flesh, and that’s before you even enter the store. But if you have bins of different full-sized melon varieties, you must be sure to label them accordingly, as the difference may not be obvious until you cut into the melon.

“Besides cantaloupe, honeydew and watermelons, two or three additional variety melons help to create a more appealing melon display,” says Martori of Martori Farms.

This depends, however, on whether the store has the demographics to support the variety melons. “The optimal size for a melon display will depend on the retailer and its customers’ socio-demographic profiles,” details Del Monte’s Christou. “The bigger the display, the more attractive it is visually. Typically, when melons are on ad or if there is a promotion, the display will be larger. Also, summer is traditionally a period that consumers associate with an abundance of melons so retailers should carry at least the three basic melon categories: cantaloupe, watermelon and honeydew. Specialty items can be added during the summer, depending on the demographics of the customers.”

Rosauers Supermarkets carries nine or 10 melon products in July, according to Erickson, and displays them prominently both in front of the store and on end-caps in high-traffic areas.

It is customary to display all the relatively small melon varieties together, and show the full-sized melons in bins. “Usually the different melons are not all stacked together,” expresses the NWPB’s Hunt. “You can have cantaloupe,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

honeydew and minis next to each other because they are around the same size, but the whole watermelons are usually in bins.”

Some of the newer varieties take the shrink risk out of going with larger displays. “With the longer shelf-life varieties that are now available, displays can be larger without the associated shrink,” remarks Martori. “Of course, the larger the display the greater the sales.”

Creative placement and recipes invite melon consumers to also purchase higher-priced protein products. “It helps to have recipes that include proteins such as salmon or beef, because the proteins are a much better ring than melons,” says Hunt.

Melons are usually an impulse buy so show them off, especially during promotions. “Pricing and placement are critical factors to a successful promotion,” asserts Dulcinea’s McLaws.

That means displaying melons in busy areas during promotions. “The ideal placement for melons is in high-traffic, end-cap areas in the produce department,” says Christou. “The use of secondary displays is also a great way to market melons and increase impulse purchases.”

Less obvious spots can work, too. “During peak promotions, displaying melons in bins allows for multiple distribution points in the store such as store entrance, check out areas, or even where the ice cream cases are located,” says Martori.

pb

The Proof Is In The Packaging

Fresh-cut packaging comes of age as retailers and consumers alike demand convenience and value-added opportunities.



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF CLEAR LAM PACKAGING INC.
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF TEMKIN INTERNATIONAL INC.



Ready-to-eat fresh-cut produce is a healthful snack solution for on-the-go consumers.

COMPILED BY JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER

These days, convenience is king. Having fresh-cut fruit and vegetables available is no longer enough. Consumers want quick fixes for their on-the-go lives, which require advanced packaging that not only prolongs shelf-life, but also offers quick cooking options, inventive combinations of produce and protein, a multitude of flavor options and, of course, the ability to consider healthful and nutritious choices all at the same time. PRODUCE BUSINESS gathered responses from five of the top fresh-cut packaging companies in the business to investigate what customers and retailers need, as well as where the industry is headed. Our panel included: **Joe Bradford**, sales manager at Temkin International Inc., in Payson, UT; **Kari Dawson-Ekeland**, director of marketing for produce at Sealed Air Corp., in Elmwood Park, NJ; **Roman Forowycz**, chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL; **Tom Gautreaux**, national sales director at Maxwell Chase Technologies LLC, in Atlanta, GA; and **Herb Knutson**, director of marketing at Inline Plastics Corp., in Shelton, CT.

What new developments have you seen in the fresh-cut packaging industry?

Joe Bradford: The print and production styles of fresh-cut packaging are becoming more custom-tailored to the retailer and merchandising real estate of each store. Fresh-cut packaging is made to meet the differing price points of consumers at individual retail outlets as well as the budget of the retailer, grower, packer and marketer of the item. Consumer appeal is also no longer just about price. With consumers demanding convenience, fresh-cut packaging more frequently features handles, zippers, hangholes and tear notches as well as enhanced visual appeal through anti-fog packaging and extended shelf-life through laser micro-perforation. The branding of the farms and products is becoming more prevalent as well. A generic one-style, one-size-fits-all bag is a thing of the past.

Kari Dawson-Ekeland: Engineered films that have optimized properties that extend product life and thus improve sustainability [are gaining popularity]. The ability to have films that are customized to meet the respiration needs of the produce will also enable more types of

produce to be fresh-cut and consumer-friendly. Portion packaging is expanding in the fresh-cut produce area as it enables portability, which is a key factor to healthful eating choices. Also continuing to drive packaging development is the consumer desire for convenience. In response to this, we recently launched Cryovac Simple Steps packaging, a groundbreaking, award-winning heat-and-serve, microwavable package with a distinctive self-venting technology that makes preparation convenient and safe. These products enable fresh or frozen produce to be steam-cooked in the microwave in less time and using less energy than boiling water, making it a convenient and healthful meal solution.

Roman Forowycz: The demand for single-serve fresh-cut items continues to grow along with multi-serve fruits and vegetables delivered in easy-open-and-close packaging. We are seeing a lot of activity in the development of parfait cups that incorporate fresh-cut items. Some of these items also incorporate utensils that make it very easy for consumers to enjoy the items on the go. There is also a movement to replace bulky rigid lids and unfriendly shrink bands on plastic trays with lidding films that incorporate intuitive peel/reseal features. Consumers are seeing more and



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF SEALED AIR CORP.
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS CORP.



Retailers are looking for fresh-cut items with increased shelf-life and tamper-resistant containers.

more of these types of peel-and-reseal systems in other food categories such as baked snacks and meat and cheese items. Apio, for example, launched an innovative peel-reseal lidding film for their squash product line in late 2011.

Tom Gatreux: On the fresh-cut fruit side, some processors intentionally target under-ripe fruit, for instance, to cut because it purges less and has slightly longer shelf-life. Maxwell Chase allows the processors to target riper, better tasting fruit to cut, thereby giving the consumer an excellent eating experience and wanting to buy the pack of fresh-cut fruit again. Working

with some processors, we developed our new Fruit Pop Pouches to offer a cost-effective way to deliver longer shelf life in a grab-n-go package. We are also working with a company that is bringing overall improved flavor and greater nutritional value into the fresh-cut fruit arena. Combining Maxwell Chase absorbent packaging along with better tasting fruit is a winner. We see these new pouches as perfect for vending machines in hospitals, schools, colleges and convenience stores as well.

Herb Knutson: We are seeing larger package sizes for fresh-cut produce, especially in club

stores, as consumers seek fresh produce in family-size packs. Another trend is the rise of fresh-cut produce being sold at convenience stores and other alternative store formats, especially in grab-and-go packaging. Because of the perishable contents, retailers are seeking increased shelf-life and tamper-resistant containers. Packaging produced from sustainable materials is also becoming more desirable.

How will these developments impact store-level merchandising of fresh-cut produce?

Joe Bradford: Packaging fresh-cut produce in a customized bag with CAP [controlled atmosphere packaging] technology means reduced shrink or product loss and increased ticket numbers. With extended shelf-life, stores can offer a better variety and more exotic items year-round, stocking is made easier, and with fewer exposed fruits and vegetables, the retail area stays cleaner. Additionally, there is less risk of human transferred bacteria since the produce cannot be individually handled. Fresh-cut packaging is also beginning to include more education and health benefit information, as consumers are demanding to know more about what they are eating. Pre-packaged produce is a win-win solution for everyone involved.

Kari Dawson-Ekeland: Portion packaging will enable displays to be placed at various refrigerated locations in the store to meet the consumers' shopping patterns. As the selection options expand, it will be important for consumers to readily identify the products. This means that the graphic requirements will expand as well, looking to packaging to enable more consumer-friendly displays. A prime example of this trend is the evolution of salad kits to meal kits. These applications require

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multiple types of film to ensure the components stay fresh. This also ties into the ability to display produce in non-traditional areas so that it is convenient for consumers to pick up the protein to make the complete meal. The aforementioned Cryovac Simple Steps packaging is a great example of how new innovations impact merchandising. These products offer attractive display characteristics, extended shelf-life and consumer-desired heat-and-serve convenience.

Roman Forowycz: The new category of

parfait cups can be offered in produce departments as well as in deli departments along with pre-made salads and sandwiches. The parfaits can complement a meal or they can be offered as a stand-alone healthy snack. The new generation of multi-serve containers that incorporate the new peel-reseal lidding film technology eliminate leaks that are fairly common in the industry. The peel-reseal systems also can work in conjunction with modified atmosphere packaging to help extend the freshness of the product being packaged.



Fruit Pop Pouches offer long shelf-life in a grab-and-go package.

PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF MAXWELL CHASE TECHNOLOGIES LLC

Tom Gatreux: We see the fresh-cut fruit category as growing over the coming years. As consumers become more conscious of eating healthier, they are looking for added convenience in items such as fresh-cut fruit. Consumers seem to be willing to pay slightly higher prices not only for added convenience, but also for an improved taste profile. As seed companies and growers bring new varieties into the marketplace that have improved taste and greater nutritional value, the consumers will want these value-added items.

Herb Knutson: The increase in convenience and grab-and-go applications for fresh-cut produce has spurred development of unique packaging containers. For instance, Inline Plastics has introduced a line of tamper-resistant grab-and-go containers for fresh-cut produce, candy and snacks that fit in a car cup holder. Unique features of this container are: a highly leak-resistant Safe-T-Gard seal that prevents spills and locks in freshness with a tear-strip on the container, which must be removed in order for the consumer to access the contents.

Another unique design influenced by convenience store retailers is clamshell containers, which hang, preserving limited shelf-space. For these applications, Inline has developed the Hangables line of containers that include a hang-tab that pops up when the container is closed, enabling the product to be merchandised on racks and pegboards. It provides better protection of its contents than flexible or paper packaging. The Hangables line also has the patent Inline Safe-T-Gard lock for tamper resistance.

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Walnuts: More Than A Holiday Item

Get walnuts out of the holiday rut and increase profits by focusing on health, taste and convenience. **BY JANEL LEITNER**



Shelled walnuts are easily consumed out-of-hand, making them a healthful and delicious snack choice.

Walnuts are becoming a more versatile addition to everyday eating, whether snacking or as a tasty ingredient. “Our research tells us consumers now use walnuts in a wide variety of ways, including in baking, to top salads or pastas and for snacking,” explains Jennifer Olmstead, domestic marketing director for the Folsom-based California Walnut Commission. “In addition, 41 percent of consumers who buy walnuts say they do so because they’re a healthy addition to their diet.”

Increasing sales from 2010 to 2011 reinforces how walnuts are becoming more in demand. “Over the years, the acreage of walnuts has gone up exponentially and sales of walnuts has increased,” explains Richard Wilbur, chief operations officer of Wilbur Packing Co. Inc., located in Yuba City, CA.

“Walnuts are just under \$100 million sales in the produce section and growing at five percent,” reports Brendan Honan, director of marketing for Elgin, IL-based Orchard Valley Harvest/John B. Sanfilippo & Sons Inc. “They represent more than nine percent of the total nut sales in produce, which is similar to pecans and smaller than pistachios and almonds.”

“The bottom line is all about satisfying consumer demand,” asserts Ken Berger,

national trade director for Faye Clack Communications Inc., headquartered in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. “In 2011, California exported approximately three million pounds of in-shell walnuts to Canada, all of which were sold through retail produce departments. This represented a 32 percent increase compared to 2010. Also in 2011, California exported more than 15 million pounds of shelled walnuts to Canada, with approximately 75 percent targeting the retail channels,” he adds. “This represented a 13 percent increase compared to 2010. These figures, and the anticipated growth in demand year-over-year, represent enormous sales potential for retailers.”

Get Creative

Retailers can tap multiple creative ways to promote sales year-round. Keith Cox, produce category manager for K-VA-T Food Stores, based in Abingdon, VA, notes, “Cross-merchandising walnuts with items such as grapes and apples will always improve units and sales.”

“Retailers can capitalize on mainstream events embracing multiple demographics,” says Berger. “They can feature in-shell walnuts in weekly flyers and merchandise them front-and-center during targeted snacking occasions, such as the Super Bowl or hockey, basketball and baseball playoffs.”

Leveraging health or charity attributes is another great tool. “The American Heart Association Heart-Check mark is the most widely recognized front-of-pack mark and has been shown to increase purchase intent,” adds the Walnut Commission’s Olmstead.

“Walnuts should be part of a broader produce nut assortment that creates relevance for the consumer and provides scale and visibility,” says Honan. “Leveraging strong brand names with a unique consumer message can draw consumers into the produce section to buy nuts.”

Capture Shoppers’ Attention

Location is important for capturing the shopper’s attention when selling at non-holiday times. “Generally, after the holidays, consumers tend to forget about walnuts and other nuts,” acknowledges K-VA-T’s Cox. “To avoid this, have a plan in place for displaying right after the holidays. This way, the stores will not have inventory dollars sitting in the backroom, not to mention lost sales.”

Combining versatility and visibility will spur sales, and in turn, will attract the impulse shopper. “Walnuts should be merchandised on-shelf and supported with a shipper program around key drive periods, creating impulse purchases,” suggests Honan of Sanfilippo & Sons.

Cox agrees, and adds, “Walnuts should be

merchandised year-round in a high traffic locations to capture impulse sales because customers may have them on the shopping list, but they may not think about purchasing them from the produce department.”

Optimum space and display are also key factors when merchandising walnuts. “A good representation is needed for impulse sales depending on the square footage of the department,” explains Cox.

Ed Corvelo, senior category merchandiser for produce and floral at Save Mart Supermarkets in Modesto, CA, details, “A 16-oz. bag should have three facings, while a 12-oz. bag should have two facings. A bulk display should be at least two-by-two.”

Faye Clack’s Berger comments, “Many retailers choose multiple display locations for their walnuts, with placement on end-cap corners, stand-alone aisle displays and, of course, with bulk snacks.”

Consider Price And Packing

Hitting the right price point can be tricky, but it is key for sales. “Pricing needs to be somewhat competitive with the grocery section,” acknowledges Cox.

Jo Fishette, produce manager for Rochester, NY’s Gates Big M Supermarket, a 35-unit chain of stores located throughout New York and Pennsylvania, headquartered in Syracuse, NY, adds, “A 2-for-\$5 price point is always positive for sales.”

Other ways of merchandising include offering walnuts in various presentations. “Some customers may want just the amount a recipe calls for, so if you offer a package equivalent to a cup it really helps movement,” states Cox.

“Retailers can teach their shoppers that a perfectly satisfying snack size is just a handful of walnuts, so on an ounce-for-ounce comparative basis, walnuts offer excellent value,” adds Berger.

While variety is helpful, packaging decisions should be weighed carefully. “It is important to have brands or products that resonate with consumers, enhance the image of the produce department and create incremental sales,” says Honan. “Different sizes of packaging should be driven by the consumer usage and needs versus the desire to have more pack types on shelf.”

A Rightful Place In Produce

Due to their year-round enjoyment, walnuts can hold their own as a member of the produce department. The Walnut Commission’s Olmstead states, “Today, 86 percent of consumers believe walnuts are nutritious, so it is natural that walnuts be merchandised as a produce item.”

“Walnuts should be merchandised year-round in high traffic locations to capture impulse sales because customers may have them on the shopping list, but they may not think about purchasing them from the produce department.”

— Keith Cox, K-VA-T Food Stores



CHART COURTESY OF FAYE CLACK COMMUNICATIONS INC.

“Customers perceive walnuts sold in the produce department as fresher,” suggests K-VA-T’s Cox. “They also perceive retail value in a larger package.”

Walnuts’ attributes are a perfect fit with produce. “Stores should position both in-shell and shelled walnuts as being as equally fresh, natural and healthful as any piece of fruit sold in the department,” contends Berger of Faye Clack. “Additionally, shelled walnuts are more easily consumed as a healthful out-of-hand snack choice compared to other fresh fruits that need to be washed, peeled or cored.” Berger adds, “The walnuts’ value proposition as a healthy, natural snack affords them a rightful place in the produce department.”

Proper storage is also important for walnuts to keep their “fresh” status. “Walnuts should be handled just like fresh produce where rotation is always key — first in first out,” states Save Mart’s Corvelo.

“To extend shelf-life for up to six months,

refrigerate at 32° to 41°F and 65 percent relative humidity,” details Berger. “For storage longer than six months, freeze walnuts at 0°F. Shoppers should be informed that for optimum freshness, flavor and quality, shelled and in-shell walnuts should be stored in airtight packaging and away from foods with strong odors.”

High Health Benefits

Compared to the health benefits of other nuts, research has shown the walnut ranks extremely high in the health food category. Olmstead explains, “Walnuts’ nutritional profile offers many health attributes: they are rich in poly-unsaturated fatty acids, including alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, all of which help to protect against a variety of health conditions.”

“Walnuts are the only nut with a significant amount of alpha linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid,” explains Faye Clack’s Berger. “ALA is an essential fatty acid that can’t be produced by the body and must be consumed through diet. A 1-oz. serving of walnuts provides 2.7 grams of ALA.”

“You’ll find walnuts on numerous super-food lists because of their exceptional nutrient profile,” says Olmstead of the Walnut Commission. “Walnuts have also been certified by the American Heart Association with the Heart-Check mark due to the depth of research on their cardiovascular benefits.”

Research has not only given the walnut notoriety among health associations, its nutrition content speaks for itself when compared with other nuts. Berger reports, “A 1-oz. serving of walnuts has almost twice the antioxidant content of an equal amount of any other nut.”

Sell The Flavor

Taste, along with recent health claims, is another good reason to help boost walnut sales. Berger points out, “Unlike other shelled nuts routinely merchandised as roasted, salted, candied or flavored, walnuts hold their own when sold as a natural nut. Strong annual walnut sales prove it’s not what’s coated on the outside, but instead the goodness on the inside that counts.”

Fishette of Gates Big M adds, “They taste great, and in the past few years word has gotten out about their nutritional value, so people are interested in buying more.”

Berger states, “Thanks to prolific media coverage touting the numerous health benefits associated with the regular consumption of them, shelled walnuts have become an increasingly popular food choice for grocery shoppers.” **pb**

BLUE SKY FUTURISTIC



Time is relative. Remember in your first decade it was, “Are we there yet?” every few minutes during an hour’s drive? And two days to your birthday seemed like an eternity? During life’s fifth decade, in the prime of life, time moves steadily, yet there is simply not enough of it for busy people. Approaching a ninth decade, the previous year seems almost like last week.

Coupled with time, relativity has been the growing rapidity of change, let alone the speed at which new technologies are adapted, impacting our lives and business. Just look back at the changes taking place during your life that has impacted production, logistics and retailing. Throw in the impact of globalization, and the elements are even more diverse and complex.

The question becomes: What will be the future retailing trends, and where do we find clues to the speed of those developments? It’s much more than so-called conventional supermarkets versus big boxes, with the rapid development of hundreds of smaller-size units as well as the modern convenience outlets tied to energy distribution. As the latter two retail classifications evolve, the reduced produce variety and modified selling units available to consumers may become an important influence on the entire industry supply chain.

Perhaps, more importantly, is the recognition of consumer eating trends and how they are impacted by changes brought about by developments occurring in away-from-home eating. By some measures, meals consumed away from home outnumber those eaten at home. The traditional sit down family meal for many is a rarity, with more and more people living from snack to snack four or five times daily. These consumers, more than ever before, are going to demand consistency of product, taste and texture. Flavor will be paramount. Thus, the marketing thrust for the future provides opportunity for those recognizing we are there now.

Long time fast food leader, McDonalds, known for fries and burgers, is perhaps in the lead position to influence consumption trends and how food is supplied. Having hired an executive chef trained at the Culinary Institute of America, McDonald’s is taking healthier eating more seriously. What will its potato utilization trend be in future years and what openings will that provide for other produce suppliers? More importantly, what will the preferred form of sourced product be?

Efficiency in meal preparation will be a primary consideration for

not only fast food chains, but also operators throughout the food spectrum. Eventually, as consumers experience these trends they will also be looking for the same variety and efficiencies for in-home utilization, translating to retail operators adapting entirely new methods for marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables.

One only has to review what has happened in recent decades. It seems like only yesterday when the first prepackaged salads were introduced, when organic was but a word associated with a handful of difficult-to-locate items in the store and at point of production, and processed ready-to-eat fruit and vegetables were nearly nonexistent. During these years, retail produce departments have undergone significant physical changes, expanding in terms of space, layout form and type of display fixtures.

The challenge becomes anticipating the retail produce department structure and organization in order to accommodate the complexity, which inevitably will be required to satisfy entirely new consumer interests.

Currently, new developments in packaging provide an expectation of extending the shelf-life of fresh product throughout the supply chain, not only as far as the retail level, but also for longer life in consumers’ homes. Reducing spoilage among processed products could not only alter retail presentation, but also consumers’ interest in increasing the amount of produce purchased and consumed.

Equally as important is the long regarded blemish-free concept. Is pretty as a picture the only way otherwise consumable produce should be offered for sale, and how does product with minor defects find its way into the distribution stream? Is this a question of offering product alternatives or is this approach more acceptable according to various socio-economic demographics?

But what happens when science finds methods to combine flavor, nutrition and texture of respective fruit and vegetables into items resembling a granola bar, no refrigeration required? Then the challenge of snacks replacing sit-down meals takes on a whole new marketing dimension. Nothing is improbable.

The Kodak Company invented the first digital camera in 1975. Dominating the highly profitable film industry, they waited until others made digital a success before entering the market, only to have that technology suddenly replaced by the likes of Smartphones and tablets, leading to the company’s recent declaration of bankruptcy earlier this year.

Originating new concepts and methodology is not the challenge. Rather, it is becoming aware of latest developments, and innovating those with the potential to improve your eventual performance. Otherwise, a currently unidentified competitor may determine your future direction.

pb

Originating new concepts and methodology is not the challenge. Rather, it is becoming aware of latest developments, and innovating those with the potential to improve your eventual performance.

By Dave Diver

Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford, and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.

ADDRESSING ISSUES OF EUROPEAN PROCUREMENT



The 31st Fruit and Vegetables Freshness Forum that was part of the Fruit Logistica Conference in Berlin, Germany, fully reflected procurement in the year 2020. In the upcoming decade, the procurement of high quality fruit and vegetable products will develop into a completely new challenge.

The up-and-coming markets that are gaining economic power are hungry and have the financial ability to treat themselves

to products of the highest quality. How will the flow of commodities develop given this new situation?

The European Food Retail Industry (FRI) is making great strides in organizing the future of its procurement. It is looking to optimize costs, as well as have more influence on the various requirements made of the goods and specifications of them. What influence will direct procurement by the food retailing industry have? How will the roles be re-assigned and/or re-defined?

It is crucial that we remember that the customer is the lynchpin of the value creation chain. This is clearly demonstrated by the recent *E. coli* crisis in Germany. Consequently, a) we must not act negligently with regard to the overall confidence of consumers in the safety of our products; and b) transparency has to be increased over the entire value creation chain.

Quality requirements, in particular, the inner values of our high quality and healthy products, will undeniably continue to increase. The European consumer expects that fruits and vegetables be produced “cleanly.” What does this mean? On one hand, the consumer expects the products to be produced under fair working conditions. This is not so much a matter of making sure that each product is marked with a fair-trade label, it is more so that producers are pressured into guaranteeing their workers’ proper working conditions (salary, accommodation, working hours, etc.). The customers in the upcoming decade will be more sensitive to such topics than ever before. Furthermore, they will most likely condemn commercial enterprises that ignore these ethical principles.

On the other hand, the same consumer will expect goods to be produced without leaving a footprint. This in no way means that only organic products will find a place on the shelves; however, it will be expected for conventionally produced goods to meet legal standards. If this fails to happen, the entire division will suffer a severe setback. Once again, we would be jeopardizing consumers’ confidence. It is also expected of the fruit and vegetable industry that communication is open, honest, transparent and prompt, as communication with the consumer is central to creating confidence. Even uncomfortable topics, (i.e., water consumption per kg of tomatoes produced), must be made transparent.

Furthermore, “regionality” will increasingly become even more

important for the consumer. A clear indication of this is that even the German hard discounters have discovered the “local for local” trade. The personalization of products will also have great significance in the future. Consumers of the future want to know more and more about the products they are being offered. Current and future communication technologies are (and will be) making this possible. Their need to know who produced the goods, thus matching a face to the product, will be met. Subsequently, some retailers have already started to place photographs of the producers on the packaging. I, for one, am convinced that in a few years we will have a QR code on all products, which will provide us with all the relevant information of the producer.

The food retail industry brings our products to the consumer. As already mentioned at the outset, it will increasingly influence procurement in order to better control the whole value creation chain. Even the FRI would like to know where the products are coming from, and who is producing them. I am once more convinced that, in the future, the FRI will only work with authorized producers, and that buyers will be

personally acquainted with the producer. Here too, trust will have to be built between producer and buyer. Here, the planning of what is to be cultivated between the two parties will be a central element of any success. Good planning will lead to prices that cover costs and prevent supply and demand

Good planning will lead to prices that cover costs and prevent supply and demand from getting completely out of sync, which, sadly, is currently the case in Europe.

from getting completely out of sync, which, sadly, is currently the case in Europe. The deterioration of prices in Europe is causing producers to ship their products to more attractive destinations. Therefore, the FRI will increasingly communicate directly with the producer and, consequently, the distribution of tasks within commercial enterprises will be completely redefined. In the future, commercial enterprises will increasingly take on the task of service provider and develop the logistics for the FRI. To that regard, logistics will be a crucial element. The FRI is interested, above all, in moving products from point A to point B as efficiently and sustainably as possible. The ecological footprint will become the focus even more, thus creating new challenges to the service provider.

Collaboration between producer, seed producer and research institutes will be a necessity in order to keep a closed and transparent value creation chain. In the future, the food retail industry and consumers will want to know where the seeds originated. However, it is also a matter of researching — together — the most profitable and tasty varieties. In the future, innovations will be significant in supplying the further increasing world population with our amazing products.

The prerequisites of being able to continue to exist in the hard-fought market of the future, (as it has been recently), is very simple. We have to create taste experiences, offer our customers sustainable products of flawless quality. In the long term, quality and taste will determine the customer’s choice. The great confidence of the consumers in our healthy basic goods must not be abused under any circumstances.

pb

By Andreas Allenspach

managing director, Van Rijn Group, based in Poeldijk, Holland

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A DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY

This year, the Eagle-based Idaho Potato Commission celebrates its diamond anniversary, and is commemorating its 75 years with a number of over-the-top marketing promotions and sweepstakes. While today's celebrations are exciting, one of the most memorable marketing occasions had to have been the December, 1962, debut of Idaho potatoes on national television, when it was advertised for the first time on *The Today Show* and *The Tonight Show*. According to James Davis' *Aristocrat in Burlap*, a book that covers the history of the Idaho potato, "At that time, it was estimated that even with the successful marketing of the large 1963 crop, the Idaho potato industry had been able to put only one 10-lb. bag of potatoes in each 2 1/2 homes throughout the nation."

Soon after the success of the original advertisements, a consumer-advertising budget of \$300,000 for television was approved for the 1966-67 season, and a national television push for the Idaho potato was underway. "Later in that year, 20-second commercials on film were combined with the live commercials used on *The Today Show*. The experience with that show was so favorable that the advertising was continued until May at an additional cost of \$61,000," reads another excerpt from Davis' book. Pictured at right is a still from one of the live commercials featuring Hugh Downs, the host of NBC's *The Today Show* from 1962 to 1971.

To say the Idaho potato has come a long way since its humble beginning would be an understatement. What began in 1937 as the Idaho Fruit and Vegetable Advertising Association, a small group of farmers from the burgeoning Idaho potato industry who wanted to spread the word about their Russet potatoes, has become one of the largest and longest running commodity groups in the country. The organization has not only surpassed the goals of the initial charter, but has also created one of the most well-known, respected and successful brands in the world. Case in point: Today, Idaho potatoes contribute more than \$4 billion to the local economy and provide more than 30,000 jobs.



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Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	80	800-468-7111	www.melissas.com
Mexican Hass Avocado Importers	25	410-877-3142	www.theavocadocentral.com
MIXTEC Group	24	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
Mooney Farms	48	530-899-2661	www.mooneyfarms.com
Morada Produce Company	63	209-546-1816	www.moradaproduce.com
Nobles-Collier, Inc.	52	239-657-4401	
The Nunes Co.	50-51	831-751-7500	www.foxy.com
Peri & Sons Farms	78	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Phillips Mushroom Farms	71	800-722-8888	www.phillipsmushroomfarms.com
Primavera Marketing, Inc.	63	209-931-9420	www.primaveramarketing.com
Produce for Better Health Foundation	99	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
ProducePackaging.com	36	800-644-8729	www.producepackaging.com
PuraVida Farms	85	480-588-7012	www.puravidafarms.com
Ray Farms, Inc.	75	800-692-3093	www.rayfarms.com
Roberson Onion Co.	78	912-375-5760	
Ruma Fruit & Produce Co., Inc.	24	800-252-8282	www.rumas.com
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	40-41	202-728-1727	www.sagarpa.gob.mx
Shuman Produce, Inc.	75	912-557-4477	www.realsweet.com
Silver Creek Software	24	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
State Garden, Inc./Olivia's	8	617-884-1816	www.stategarden.com
Sutherland Produce Sales	81	619-588-9911	
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	65	800-772-4542	www.taproduce.com
Trifecta Foods	22	818-834-8222	
Trinity Fruit Sales	63	559-433-3777	www.trinityfruit.com
Uesugi Farms, Inc.	64	408-847-9403	www.uesugifarms.com
The USA Bouquet Co.	12	786-437-6502	www.usabq.com
Village Farms	55	877-777-7718	www.villagefarms.com
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Weis-Buy Farms, Inc.	52	239-433-3530	www.weisbuy.com
Well-Pict Berries	65	831-722-3871	www.wellpict.com
West Lake Fresh	64	831-724-0644	
Wholly Guacamole	42	817-509-0626	www.eatwholly.com
Kurt Zuhke & Association	36	800-644-8729	www.producepackaging.com



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Thank You



www.PBHFoundation.org

To learn more about how your company can support Produce for Better Health Foundation and the Fruit & Veggies—More Matters national health initiative, contact **Renee Bullion** at (678) 333-9329, ext. 371, rbullion@PBHFoundation.org, or **Cyndy Dennis** at (678) 333-9878, cdennis@PBHFoundation.org.



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