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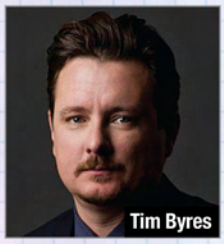
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TEN TOP TOQUES
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Dole leads the way in nutritional education, helping consumers to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

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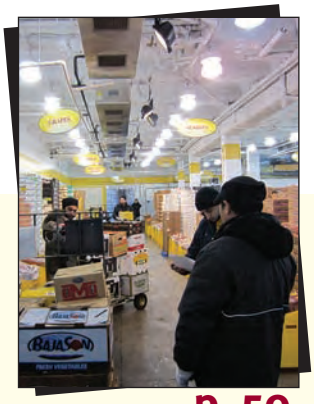
DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS



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SPECIAL FEATURES

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PRODUCE QUIZ

THIS MONTH'S WINNER

Richard Giudice
Director of Produce
McQuades Marketplace
Westerly, RI

Richard Giudice has been working for McQuades Marketplace, a family owned, three-chain store in New England, since 1972. His father-in-law, Edward McQuade, started McQuades Marketplace in 1959. He remembers making produce runs with him to Providence, RI. "We did that for years until the market had difficulties, forcing us to find a provider, so that's how we ended up with C&S," he says.

"All through high school and college, I worked for First National," says Giudice. "It was a super market chain that was popular in the Northeast, but it went out of business about 20 years ago."

Today, Giudice is director of produce at McQuades, a job he states requires him to wear a few hats. "I do everything from hire the produce personal to create a produce ad every week," he describes.

McQuades Marketplace uses both local and national suppliers. "We still get our grocery supplies from C&S, but we also have other [produce] suppliers who are more local to our area," said Giudice.

Giudice has been reading PRODUCE BUSINESS for quite some time, "I enjoy all the sections on the new items and equipment," he notes. "It helps me stay abreast of what's new."

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) What is the contact number for California Sun Dry? _____

_____

2) What is Gambles' booth number at CPMA? _____

3) What three flavors of Bella Sun Luci Sun Dried Tomatoes are offered by Mooney Farms? _____

_____

4) What four kinds of social media does Sunkist use to market its products? _____

_____

5) What sizes of guacamole are offered by Cabo Fresh? _____

_____

6) What is the name of Dole's new salad line? _____

_____

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PDP Report Confirms Pesticide Residue On Fresh Produce Not A Safety Concern For Consumers

By Burleson Smith,
United Fresh Vice President of Environmental Affairs And Sustainability

United Fresh PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

The latest report of the USDA's Pesticide Data Program (PDP), issued earlier this year, once again reaffirmed that pesticide residues on fresh produce are not a safety concern for consumers. USDA stated, "Overall pesticide chemical residues found on the foods tested are at levels below the tolerances established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and do not pose a safety concern." This positive news means that the extremely low levels of residues are not a food safety risk, and the presence of such residues does not pose a safety concern.

The 2011 PDP Annual Summary was released by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) in late February, 2013. The findings demonstrated that nearly half of the samples of food tested (48.9 percent) had no detectable pesticide residues. In 2011, a total of 6,989 samples comprising 14 fresh commodities were collected and tested by PDP. These included cantaloupe, cauliflower, lettuce, mushrooms, onions, plums, sweet bell peppers, and winter squash, as well as six that had not been tested for the report before: cabbage, cherry tomatoes, hot peppers, papayas, snap peas and tangerines.

There have been occasions where commodities have shown residues exceeding tolerance or appearing where no tolerance has been established. In the 2011 PDP report, snap peas were found to have an unusually large number of detections of pesticides for which no tolerance has been established, but usually at very low levels. The majority of the offending samples were from imported product (430 detections from imported samples versus 48 from domestic samples) and were spread over 28 different pesticides. As this is the first time the commodity has been included, the second year of sampling will provide additional information, which may be different due to seasonality, source or other factors.

The report does show that residues exceeding the tolerance were detected in 0.27 percent of the samples tested, and there were some residues found in 3.4 percent of the samples with no established tolerance levels on that particular food. However, the report reiterates that these extremely low levels do not pose a safety concern.

Unfortunately, the PDP data is annually repurposed to create the so-called "Dirty Dozen" list, which needlessly scares consumers about the levels of residues on certain commodities. For several years, fruit and vegetable producers worried that these false claims were negatively influencing consumers' buying decisions, and ultimately decreasing consumption of produce.

As a strategy to help consumers and news media better understand the real implications of the PDP data, United Fresh and other major industry groups from across the spectrum of fresh produce crops, asked USDA to help clarify the bottom-line results of the reports. In a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in April 2011, the groups asked USDA to prevent mischaracterizations by providing more context with the report that showcases the strength of the regulatory system and the safety of products used to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables.

The USDA's annual survey and analysis of the pesticide residue of fresh produce underscores the efforts of the industry to minimize chemical exposure for consumers. At the same time, it helps to identify those few cases where the industry can do a better job. It's gratifying that this PDP data can finally be used as a public health tool.

The *Pesticide Data Program Annual Summary, Calendar Year 2011* can be downloaded at www.ams.usda.gov/pdp.

United Fresh 2013 Tackles FSMA Implications For Produce Supply Chain

The Food Safety Modernization Act is set to a have a profound impact on the produce industry, from farm to retail. United Fresh has voiced concern over small farm exemptions, reminding the industry and regulatory agencies that pathogens don't discriminate based on farm size.

"It's a big flaw in the law: pathogens pose a risk on large farms and small farms," says Ray Gilmer, United Fresh vice president of issues management and communications. "Until this exemption is fixed, United believes that retail and foodservice buyers have a special role to play in enforcing the rules, with their responsibility to ensure that their produce suppliers — large or small — are in full compliance with these food safety standards. It is in all of our best interests to promote a consistent food safety standard with no exceptions."

To meet that goal, several education sessions at United Fresh 2013, which takes place May 14-16, in San Diego, CA, will focus on FSMA. The sessions will review the proposed rules, their strengths and weaknesses, and outline how United's member-driven response is designed to focus the FDA on a recommitment of the greatest needs and opportunities to prevent food borne illness. For more information, please visit www.unitedfreshshow.org <http://www.unitedfreshshow.org>.

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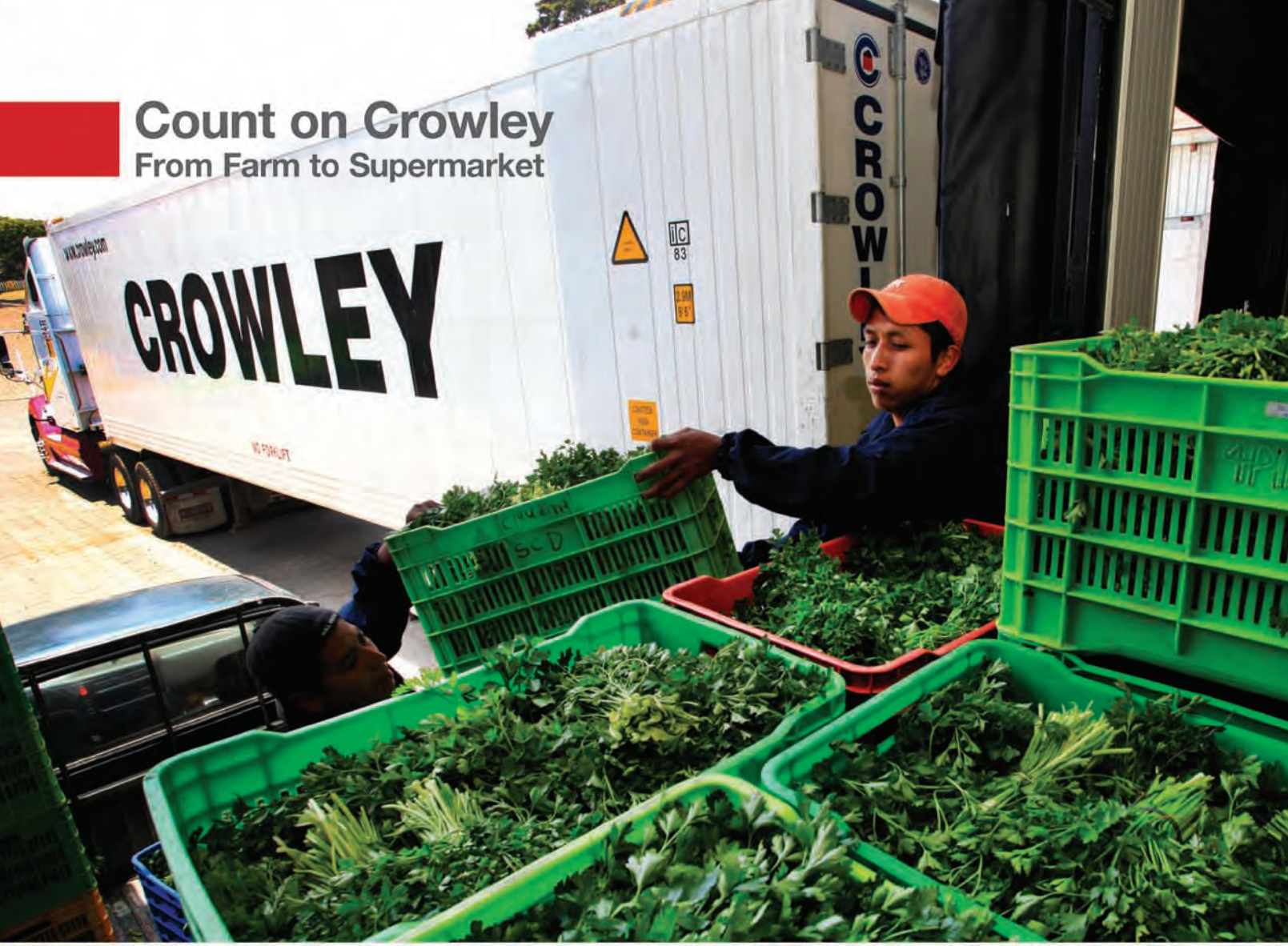

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APRIL 3, 2013

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Conference Venue: Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, Boston, 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

April 10, 2013

FPFC NORTHERN CA EXPO

Since 1965, the Fresh Produce & Floral Council has been providing unique networking and business growth opportunities for professionals in the produce and floral industries in California.
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 17 - 19, 2013

CANADIAN PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

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Conference Venue: Direct Energy Centre, Toronto, Ontario Canada
Conference Management: Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Phone: 613-226-4187 • Fax: 613-226-2984
Email: info@cpma.ca • Website: www.cpma.ca

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Phone: 800-645-7350 • Fax: 503-682-4455
Email: info@nwfoodserviceshow.com
Website: www.nwfoodserviceshow.com

April 21 - 23, 2013

WOMEN'S FRESH PERSPECTIVES CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: FireSky Resort & Spa, Scottsdale, AZ
Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE
Phone: 302-607-2155 • Fax: 302-731-2409
Email: dsiegfried@pma.com
Website: www.pmafoundation.com

April 30 - May 2, 2013

SIAL CANADA 2013

Conference Venue: Palais des Congres de Montreal, Montreal, Canada
Conference Management: IMEX Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC
Phone: 704-365-0041 • Fax: 704-365-8426
Email: EricH@ImexManagement.com
Website: www.imexmgt.com

MAY 7 - 9, 2013

SIAL CHINA 2013

International food, beverage, wine and spirits exhibition in China.
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

May 14 - 16, 2013

UNITED FRESH 2013

Conference Venue: San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, CA
Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C.
Phone: 202-303-3424 • Fax: 202-303-3433
Email: united@unitedfresh.org
Website: www.unitedfresh.org

May 18 - 21, 2013

AMERICAN FOOD FAIR 2013

Your recipe for global success
Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: NASDA, Fairfax, VA
Phone: 703-934-4700 • Fax: 703-934-4899
Email: aff@naylor.com
Website: www.nasdatradeshows.org

May 18 - 21, 2013

NRA SHOW 2013

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

JUNE 19 - 21, 2013

IFE 2013

International Floriculture Expo (formerly The Super Floral Show) is the only U.S. venue where people from every aspect of the floriculture industry will converge under one roof.
Conference Venue: Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami Beach, FL
Conference Management: Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME
Phone: (207) 842-5313 • Fax: (207) 221-1471
Email: floriexpo@divcom.com
Website: www.floriexpo.com

June 30 - July 2, 2013

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Conference Management: NASFT, New York, NY
Phone: (212) 482-6440 • Fax: (212) 482-6459
Website: www.fancyfoodshows.com

JULY 16, 2013

FPFC EXPO 2013

Conference Venue: Disneyland Hotel, Anaheim, CA
Conference Management: Fresh Produce & Floral Council, La Miranda, CA
Phone: 714-739-0177 • Fax: 714-739-0226
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CELEBRATING FRESH

ENHANCING THE FRONT LINE: RAISING THE BAR FOR PRODUCE MANAGERS

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

For most supermarkets, a key differentiator from Wal-Mart, warehouse clubs and the deep discounters such as Aldi, Save-a-Lot and Dollar Stores is service, and part of that is having knowledgeable and personable staff at store level in the produce department. Indeed, many supermarket chains include a line about providing "informed and pleasant" staff in their mission statements.

There is a general recognition that produce managers and their clerks are our front-line troops, and the industry as a whole benefits from having better people and better trained people on the front line. After all, these are the salespeople for the industry, and if they are warm and excited and knowledgeable, there is little question that sales will increase.

Unfortunately, there are many challenges to upgrading the front line staff. For example, labor hours are generally being cut, not increased. This means that the remaining staff is busy stocking or doing in-store cutting or other tasks. They just don't have the time to devote to interacting with the customers.

It is also a common complaint by produce directors that the young clerks who are hired today are often not comfortable interacting with people face-to-face. It is unclear why this is so, but many theorize that the younger generation, brought up texting and using Facebook and Twitter, is just not as accustomed to face-to-face interaction as previous generations, who had no choice but to interact face-to-face.

Being a knowledgeable adviser to consumers has also become more difficult. If you walked into a particular Harris Teeter store on a recent day, you would have seen a sign explaining that on that particular day the store had 849 separate produce items. How many produce clerks could even name all those items, much less know how they should be cared for, where they came from, how to cook or utilize them and their flavor profiles?

Plus the information needed today is vast compared to what was expected in years past. The whole "know your farmer" concept requires an extraordinary increase in knowledge about each product carried, and the rise of the "functional food" movement — with people expecting specific foods to help them in specific ways — also has expanded the range of knowledge required if a produce clerk is to be genuinely helpful.

Yet few stores have any kind of methodical training to offer associates in the skills and knowledge needed to be optimal produce ambassadors.

The old PMA Produce Training program, which Chiquita funded a couple of decades ago, is still being used in some stores, and truth be told, there is not much better that is out there. That is both a credit to the original program and an indictment of industry action in this space today.

Computer-aided training, where individuals can go through various modules on a self-paced format, is clearly the way to go, but retailers are hesitant to invest in either the technology or the staff time, especially because turnover is so high. Plus a lot of the "know your farmer" information changes with each shipment, so constant updating is essential.

It seems likely that all this will be hard to actually execute on the clerk level, so vendors need to look to technological solutions such as QR codes on every item, etc., so that people are able to access the information for themselves. This may be the ultimate solution, but retailers should realize that it devalues service and reduces the likelihood that their efforts to differentiate themselves through service will be successful. After all, if consumers get the information electronically, they can do that at Aldi as well as at Harris Teeter.

The old model, in which the produce clerk with the strongest back gets to be manager, is clearly not going to work in the future.

Still, it seems important to have at least a top-notch produce manager to control all the things necessary to make a department top-notch. This job, though, is changing as well. One hears talk about department managers as the new "compliance managers," as they are now spending good portions of their time making sure the department is in compliance with country-of-origin labeling, nutrition labeling, organic segregation requirements, food-safety requirements and much else. The old model, in which the produce clerk with the strongest back gets to be manager, is clearly not going to work in the future.

Of course, in many cases, stores are having problems getting people to accept the job. All across the country, retailers report that assistant produce managers refuse to accept the job of manager when an opening exists. One hears assessments such as "Those guys work too hard," or "I don't want the extra hours," or "I am a lot less likely to be fired if I stay where I am." In truth, the bigger issue is salary compression, with many chains offering as little as a dollar an hour more to take on much greater responsibility.

Instead of assuming that assistant managers will become managers, retailers should hire from the clerks a class of Produce Manager Trainees, which would involve a two-year program in which these people would both receive formal training and education and be rotated around as assistant produce managers in a variety of stores. They might also get some time working in receiving and procurement locations and with the merchandising team. After two years, those who didn't wash out would be in line to get the next available manager slots and be given jobs in the meantime as assistant produce managers or other slots in the company.

Then each store would have a cadre of motivated and educated people ready to step in as produce managers who would be front-line generals worthy of the industry and the opportunity at hand. **pb**

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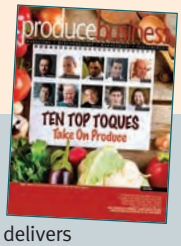

BOOTH #531
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE
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Boca Raton, FL
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IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL
Salinas, CA
Stop by and check out our exciting new "Queen Victoria" 2-Count Microwaveable Artichoke Packages. We're North America's largest Brussels Sprout grower/shippers along with a full line of vegetables.

BOOTH #942-C
CHURCH BROTHERS
Salinas, CA
Church Brothers offers a broad variety of fresh vegetables throughout North America. This year, we are featuring red Heirloom Spinach and several new Kale blends. Visit us to discover how we can optimize your fresh produce needs. Quality, Consistency, Food Safety, Innovation and Customer Service.

BOOTH #1128
JEMD FARMS
Taylor, MI
Red Sun and Golden Sun of JemD Farms produce provides greenhouse perfection all year long. With six North American distribution centers and designated regional sales teams to support our greenhouse category needs, including planning support, marketing support, and new product launch support.

Mexican Produce Exporter Of The Year Award

Presented At The America Trades Produce Conference On March 6, 2013
By Produce Business, FPAA and TIPA

DAN EDMEIER

Dan Edmeier of Kingdom Fresh and Ken Whitacre of Produce Business

Loyalty, vision, integrity, hard work and a love for produce are some of the characteristics colleagues use to describe our third annual Mexican Produce Exporter of the Year. This award, presented by the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Texas International Produce Association and Produce Business magazine, recognizes someone who has contributed significantly to the Mexican export industry and general produce industry over the years.

The members of FPAA and TIPA voted in the selection of this honoree, stating, "He has been instrumental not just in the growth of his company, but also in growing sales of exports from Mexico."

Comments include recognition of his contribution to furthering Mexico's reputation as a reliable, quality supplier, saying, "Over the past years, he has been promoting Mexican produce in almost all states in the United States, offering and selling big volumes of Mexican produce to a wide variety of customers. He is always promoting the benefits of Mexican produce, and that has helped many customers to have faith in our product."

He established himself and spent most of his career working for a multinational produce company. Then, in 2005, he was offered, and took a job, at a company that did not yet exist.

He is known for his commitment to the industry and his forward-thinking. A co-worker remarks, "I remember back when it was just two of us in the office and almost no product, and he would tell me that this will grow down the road into something bigger and better. He had a vision as far as what he saw for the company, and his original vision has been affirmed through our growth."

Over the past seven years, our Honoree has taken that non-existent company to its current state of handling more than three million packages a year. Starting with just one tomato grower, the company now manages products from about six different growers consisting of multiple lines, including tomatoes, bell peppers, eggplant and cucumbers.

The company has moved from its humble origins in a small sales office in McAllen, TX, to now sharing space in a 100,000 square-foot refrigerated facility.

A principal in the company states, "Working for us, he has promoted the quality of Mexican produce. He clearly understands the quality that Mexican produce offers to customers, and he has excelled at promoting this and helping grow the business, taking our product to a wide range of customers and guiding them as to why to choose Mexican produce."

Our Honoree is dedicated not only to the sales side of the business but also to developing greater industry cooperation and has been involved in several organizations including PMA, United Fresh Produce Association and the Produce for Better Health Foundation. He's also a staunch supporter of local charities, such as Children's Mercy Hospital and the Victoria Flick Foundation.

Coming to Texas by way of California — but originating in the Midwest — he remains a loyal Chicago Bears and Cubs fan. He has two daughters and a stepson.

His unique resourcefulness and determination is evidenced by his first encounter with the grower with whom he now works. Back in 2005, he was approached by that Mexican grower with the idea of creating a marketing company in the United States and asked to travel to Mexico for an interview. After arriving in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico, his potential future employer and the man with the great idea, Alberto Gonzalez, was late picking him up at the airport. He found himself alone in Torreon, without the ability to make a cell-phone call and not speaking a word of Spanish. Somehow, he managed to find his way to his hotel and settled in at the restaurant/bar. After about half an hour, Alberto walked in, and a unique relationship began — two strangers sharing a dream of creating a marketing company for Mexican produce.

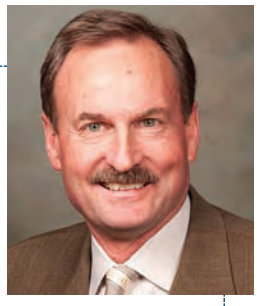
Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating the 2013 Mexican Produce Exporter of the Year — Dan Edmeier of Kingdom Fresh Produce.

Excerpt from the speech by Ken Whitacre, publisher and editorial director of Produce Business

PRODUCE AND FLORAL WATCH

TRANSITIONS

AMHPAC
CULIACAN, SINALOA, MEXICO
AMHPAC, the Mexican Association of Protected Agriculture, has hired **Alfredo Diaz Belmontes** as CEO of the Association. Belmontes' professional career and experience in the field will facilitate the growth of AMHPAC. He replaces Eric Viramontes, who had been the CEO since 2008. Belmontes, an agricultural engineer, was previously the Sinaloa delegate to Mexico's Ministry of Social Development, SEDESOL.



AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO
FALLSTON, MD
Tim O'Connor, president and CEO of the Denver, CO-based U.S. Potato Board, has accepted an offer to lead a new marketing agency dedicated to the Mexican avocado industry. Avocados From Mexico is being jointly created by the Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAIA) and the Mexican Avocado Producers and Packers (APEAM) to combine resources and develop and manage a common brand for the Mexican avocado industry. O'Connor takes the helm on April 1st.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

INDUSTRY PUBLISHES NEW CANTALOUPE GUIDANCE
A new resource, *The National Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for Cantaloupes and Netted Melons*, is now available from the National Cantaloupe Guidance, a collaboration among a broad coalition of committed industry and academic experts, government scientists and regulators to help companies that grow, harvest, sort, pack, process or ship cantaloupes in developing production practices that address risk and minimize microbial hazards. The guidance offers a comprehensive framework for ensuring the highest level of food safety in cantaloupe production.

AIDING ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILD ABUSE
Richard Byllott, founder of the We Are Many Foundation and chief operating officer of Nathel & Nathel, Bronx, NY, presented a check for $2,500 to Cynthia G. Scott, executive director of the Coalition Against Child Abuse and Neglect (CCAN), to support efforts to serve male adult victims of childhood abuse. The We Are Many Foundation helps, heals and educates society concerning children who have been sexually victimized, as well as adults who struggle in their current life.

OCEANSIDE POLE TOMATOES TO RETURN TO PEAK VOLUMES
West Coast Tomato Growers, Oceanside, CA, owner of the popular Oceanside Pole tomato brand, is ramping volumes up to historic heights. The Oppenheimer Group estimates that volume could jump to roughly 4.5 million cases between July and November. This move elevates West Coast Tomato Growers back to its dominant position as the foremost Western U.S. vine-ripe tomato producer.

SPARTAN STORES OPENS SEVENTH VALU LAND LOCATION
Valu Land, Grand Rapids, MI, opened a supermarket in a revitalized vacant building in Dearborn, MI, bringing new life and energy to the neighborhood, in addition to 40 new jobs. The store offers a full and convenient shopping experience with grocery, produce and other fresh products, in addition to hard-to-beat savings on everyday items.

NEW PRODUCTS

TROPICAL FOODS REVEALS NEW PACKAGING
Tropical Foods, Charlotte, NC, has introduced a new line of packaging for some of its most popular snack mixes. The new stand-up, resealable packaging has undergone a design upgrade while staying true to the bold flavors of the product. The new bags will better showcase the snack mix and provide a user-friendly packaging option.

IN MEMORIAM

LEN VERI
It is with profound sadness that his family announces the sudden passing of Leonard M Veri of Exeter Produce, based in Exeter, Ontario, Canada, in his 76th year. Len had a long history as both a grower and a shipper in the fresh produce industry, and built a fourth-generation family owned and operated business into one of the largest field-fresh market vegetable producers in Ontario.

RECORD SALES YEAR FOR POM WONDERFUL
POM Wonderful posted record annual sales in 2012, buoyed by the introduction of POM's new 8-oz. bottle of 100 percent Pomegranate Juice, which has become the fastest-selling, single-serve premium refrigerated juice less than a year after launch. POM Wonderful's new 8-oz. bottle is available at grocery stores nationwide for a suggested retail price of $1.9

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

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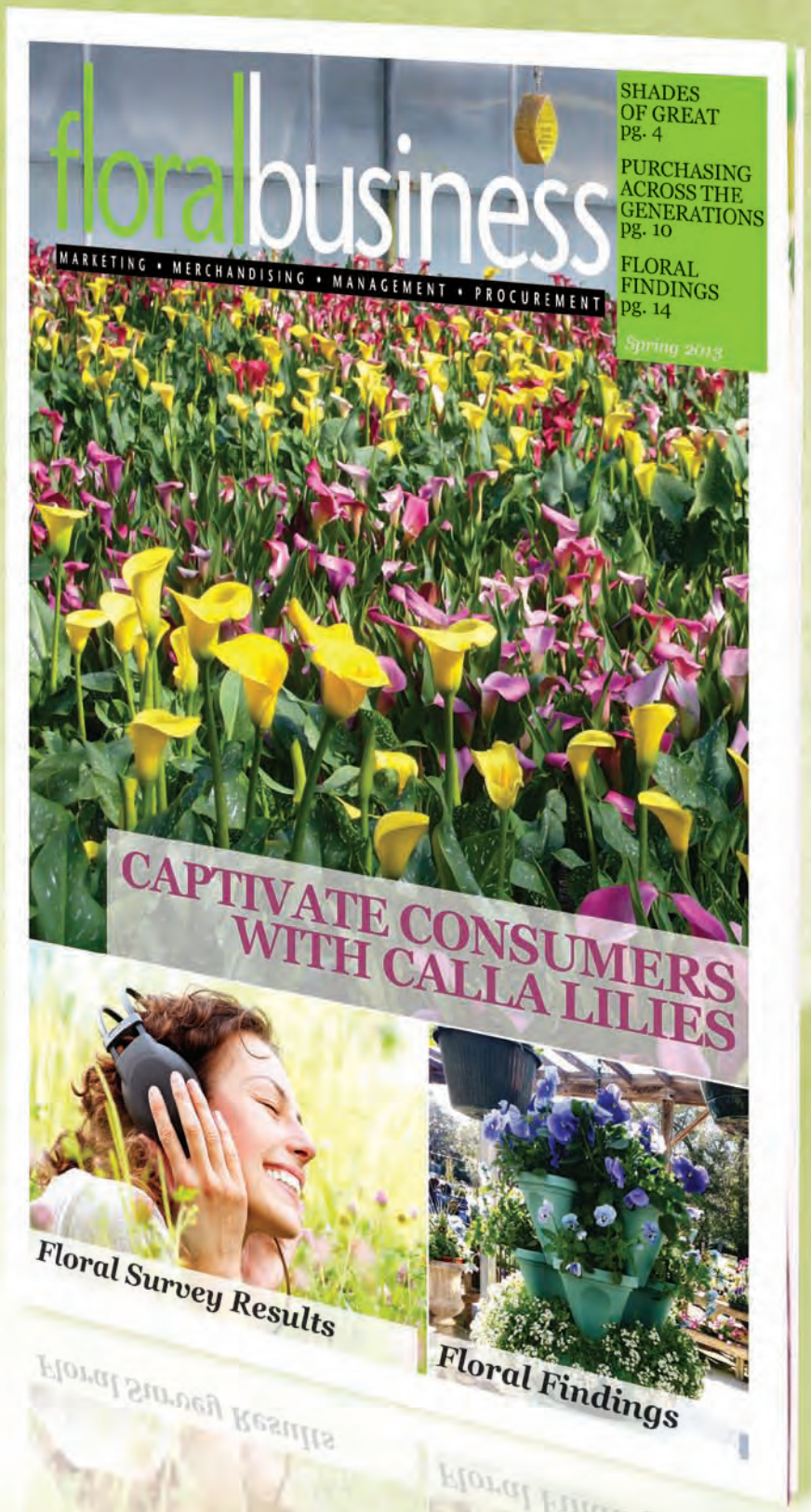
- a magazine that seeks answers from within the industry and reaches out to the retailers themselves – as well as leading floral marketers – for solutions
- a magazine that is easy-to-read and pass along – all the way down to the store-level floral managers



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Shopper Marketing Coming To A Produce Department Near You

BY BILL BISHOP, CHIEF ARCHITECT, BRICK MEETS CLICK, AND FOUNDER, WILLARD BISHOP LLC

Big consumer goods companies such as Procter & Gamble and General Mills pioneered the use of shopper marketing by translating their understanding of what catches customers' attention into programs to get them to buy. These manufacturers have used shopper marketing to help retailers sell more product and, at the same time, improve the shopper experience. There are now signs that shopper marketing is coming to produce and, at least for early adopters, this could create some significant competitive advantage.

Shopper marketing has proven to be effective in-store and is now being extended to digital. Today, for example, with most shoppers carrying a cell phone and shopper marketing driven promotional texts are being used to cost effectively alert customers to special promotions, there's a good chance that within the next year or two shoppers will actually be getting their personal circular via text.

To better understand where shopper marketing is going, Brick Meets Click completed some research last fall looking at what's next. From the study results and other work recently done, it's clear that shopper marketing is no longer limited to consumer package goods suppliers and is already being used in perishables. For example, Cargill recently introduced a website to help improve shopper experience buying and using ground beef, which shows that even suppliers of unbranded perishable products are now using digital shopper marketing. This is just one of the reasons we expect to see shopper marketing used more in produce.

There's a lot to shopper marketing, but one aspect with application to produce is solution-selling, and this is a tool that's gaining traction.

Shopper marketing practitioners are using solutions to increase collaboration with retailers and to drive higher sales. Over two-thirds (68 percent) of those surveyed agreed that solutions are getting more focus, and that this tactic is producing significant benefits including:

- Producing measurable sales increases.
- Strengthening the relationship between supplier and retail customers.

While shopper solutions can take more effort to develop and execute, compared to traditional merchandising, these solutions also tend to create greater value so they represent a good investment.

CHART COURTESY OF: *ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE OF SHOPPER MARKETING: A GUIDE TO WHAT'S NEXT,* A BRICK MEETS CLICK ORIGINAL PAPER, DECEMBER 2012

Proof Of Concept

The power of shopper marketing solutions in produce can be seen in a test that showed strong sales increases by selling berries and yogurt/cheese together.

We conducted this study, *Dairy Meal Solutions, Merchandising Works* with the Retail Advisory Board of The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. The study was carried out in the stores of five retailers: Brookshire's, K-VA-T, Roche Bros., Save Mart, and Weis Markets. It was designed to develop and test different meal solutions, including one for snacking.

The motivation for the snacking solution came from the realization that healthy snacking is very popular; i.e., 51 percent of snack occasions involved nutritious snacks such as fruit, nuts, and yogurt. This selling solution was called *Perfect Pairings*. It was executed on-shelf in the produce department and gave shoppers "new ideas, new tastes, and new twists on old favorite snacks." The *Perfect Pairings* solution combined different types of berries with yogurt and snack cheeses. The sales increases from this snacking solution were the highest of any of those tested.

Next Steps

Shopper marketing will not be for all produce suppliers, but for those who want to learn more so they can decide if it can help them grow the sales of their product, here are three things to do:

1. Look at the "dairy meal solutions study" report. It's available at www.usdairy.com/retailers under the Meal Solution Merchandising tab on the left. While the focus is mainly on dairy, it provides detailed examples and shows where and how there is an opportunity for produce.

2. Think through what things you have learned about why shoppers are buying your product and then see if there is an insight that can be used to build a shopper marketing solution or themed message.

3. Approach a retailer who already does a good job supporting and selling your product and offer to work together to create a shopper marketing solution or themed message that can be tested. As you move forward, be sure that the plan supports the retailer's marketing strategy while selling more of your products.

Shopper marketing won't be a replacement for "good ole" mass merchandising, but it will be a way to drive additional sales and increase consumption by better meeting shopper needs.

brick meets click™

Brick Meets Click is a strategic resource for retailers, suppliers and technology providers that enables professionals to make insightful decisions about meeting the digital needs of today's shoppers. Bill Bishop can be contacted at Bill.Bishop@brickmeetsclick.com

Produce Variability Makes It Harder For Solution Selling

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

One is always wise to pay attention to Bill Bishop, and so when he gives the clarion call that produce marketers should pay attention to "shopper marketing," one should start taking notes.

Shopper marketing has varying definitions but, in essence, the idea is to look at how one's target customers behave in their role as shoppers and then try to leverage these insights into increased sales. Initially, the efforts focused mostly on the in-store experience, but increasingly, the focus has shifted to efforts outside the retail environment.

Think about how specific consumers decide to add something to their shopping list and how they decide to deviate from that list, and then think about what understanding these processes could do in terms of offering opportunities to change those consumers' purchasing behaviors. One then starts to gain insight into "shopper marketing," and one understands why a company such as Proctor & Gamble spends upward of half a billion dollars annually on these efforts.

The challenge in produce is the difficulty in getting accurate data on consumer behavior, combined with a paucity of marketing budgets to implement whatever insights can be derived. Even the relevance of the data we do have is often suspect, because quality, condition and availability of product — both the one we are studying and competitive products — are ever-changing variables in produce. So what will work just fine under dataset one will be a total failure under dataset two, collected one week later. Consumer packaged goods companies don't generally work under the same highly variable conditions.

Of course, the idea of solution marketing, basically selling not a product but a solution to consumers' problems is very powerful. The example Bill Bishop gives is a case in point: One philosophy is to offer a whole bunch of products in different parts of the store and make the consumers solve their own problems.

This attitude, pretty much the universal way product is merchandised and marketed in supermarkets, poses a couple of challenges. First, it means that shopping is going to be hard work. Consumers have to be organized and search out products all to solve their problems — in the example Bill gives, what shall I buy to have healthy snacks around the house? Second, it is bound to reduce sales either because consumers don't realize all their needs or they don't find all the options that might help them in identifying a solution to their problems.

So it is not surprising that offering "Perfect Pairings" would be a hit with many consumers. It solves their problem, simplifies their lives and expands their horizons all at once. In a sense, it is a "no-brainer."

Yet the fact that these types of efforts happen so rarely that they are the exception — worthy of a Bill Bishop study — rather than the rule, points to major obstacles in implementing these types of solutions.

Part of the challenge is the way retailers are structured. When a produce department gives shelf space to yogurt, that ring typically still goes to dairy. So the companion produce product has to increase in sales sufficiently to cover the total loss of a produce ring on the shelf space given to the yogurt for the enterprise to be profitable for produce. In other words, if the promotion is berries and yogurt, and the consequence is that the apples got scaled back to make room for the yogurt, the berries alone have to increase in sales sufficiently to cover the reduced sales of apples. The yogurt sales, no matter how large, don't count because that ring goes to a different department.

Produce vendors often fail to even propose these types of solutions. They are into selling their "stuff," and neither have good insight into what consumers might really want, nor do they have the time or skills to put together deals with other companies in different fields for jointly merchandised solutions.

Of course, some produce companies, particularly in the value-added area, have honed right in. Sometimes the solution selling is inherent in the product — say party vegetable trays. Sometimes they segregate a market — say mini carrots sold with ranch dressing or peanut butter in a snack pack. Sometimes it is the packaging that provides the solution, as in cup-holder-sized-and-shaped snacking packages.

Gaining insight and developing products is key, of course, but retailers know which consumers they are targeting, so the most successful shopper marketing efforts depend crucially on collaboration between a retailer and a vendor. More of that is much to be desired and would probably boost sales all by itself.

Gaining insight and developing products is key, of course, but retailers know which consumers they are targeting, so the most successful shopper marketing efforts depend crucially on collaboration between a retailer and a vendor.

BANACOL:

QUALITY LOGISTICS SERVICES

COMPLIMENTARY SERVICES

Banacol Corporation'S logistics facilities are located in the Uraba zone of Colombia, with port facilities in the areas of Zungo and Nueva Colonia, and marine operations in Bahía Colombia in the Gulf of Urabá. Through its port operator, Seville Fruit Company, Banacol provides the following services:

- Ground transportation of general cargo.
- Ground transportation of fruit among properties and terminals.
- Reception of fruit at terminals.
- Filling refrigerated containers and cooling fruit.
- Provision of nitrogen to refrigerated containers for controlled atmosphere.
- Operation in container terminals.
- Fluvial and sea transportation from Zungo and Nueva Colonia terminals to vessels anchored in the Gulf of Urabá and vice versa.
- Containers and loose cargo loading and unloading in terminals and vessels.
- Maintenance of dry and refrigerated containers.
- Building and maintenance of sea equipment.

Facilities and services are certified via BASC and ISPS and the company maintains a Department of Homeland Security endorsed by the Superintendant of Surveillance – comprised of highly skilled personnel in the prevention, control and health risks in land and aquatic operations and utilizing cutting edge technology to monitor facilities.

Ships loading and unloading operations are done while anchored. There are no waiting times for serving vessels, since Colombia Bay has enough room to simultaneously anchor more than 20 vessels in areas deeper than 20 meters. Furthermore, it is possible to work on both sides, which for some cargo means a faster loading speed than at a conventional port.

The company has two Public Depots authorized by the National Directorate of Taxes and Customs of Colombia (DIAN) both in the region of Urabá in the zones of Zungo and Nueva Colony with areas sufficient to store proprietary and third party merchandises. Altex Chartered Inc. customers have five free days of storage on arrival to the company's facilities.

Banacol employees are highly qualified and with a standard of excellence in service to assist customers in coordinating with customs agents and foreign trade authorities of Colombia.

EXPERIENCE, INTEGRATION AND INNOVATION IN LOGISTICS FOR LEADING BANANA COMPANY

For over 30 years, Banacol has been providing high quality fruit with profitable results. Since the early 1980´s, Banacol Colombia has delivered on its vision of becoming the leading company in production, transportation, and marketing of bananas. Year after year, it has experienced significant growth, expanding its trade and offering logistics services to other parties.

By means of its subsidiaries in Colombia, Costa Rica and the U.S., Banacol markets transport services through vessels offered by Altex Chartered Inc., an associated company. This association allows the expansion of the company's transportation portfolio to include the necessary equipment to guarantee transport of fruit produced in Colombia and Costa Rica to the northeast coast of the U.S. It also allows the transport of inputs on the return trip with space available to trade between third parties in both rotations. The service can be complimented with port operations run by Banacol in each destination port.

HANDS-ON MANAGEMENT

To ensure quality, the company manages its own port operations. It currently ships to the final destination port of Eddystone, PA, in the U.S. from Turbo, Colombia, and Moín, Costa Rica, on a weekly basis and with short transit times. This Northbound rotation represents an advantage as it involves fewer days of inventory.

Banacol is committed to finding logistics efficiencies to improve product quality and the business in general. Customers can count on the unbeatable advantage of Banacol in terms of transit times, weekly frequency and vast experience in handling cargo. Its ships are built with a multi-purpose orientation and can accommodate almost any merchandise: bulk, containerized or even extra-dimensioned.

CERTIFICATIONS

BASC

Logistics operations carried out by the Banacol Corporation in Urabá, Colombia and in the port of Moín in Costa Rica are certified by the BASC international standard (Business Alliance for Secure Commerce). This certification allows Banacol to generate confidence in national and international communities. It is the guarantor of business opportunity and generates credibility in national and international authorities.

ISPS

Banacol's port facilities in Nueva Colonia and Zungo in Urabá, Colombia, are certified by the ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security), whose objective is to obtain favorable conditions of security for all people performing work activities in the ports and ships served by the company.



C-TPAT – Level 3

C-TPAT is a joint initiative of the U.S. government with companies whose objective is to build commercial cooperation and relations that reinforce and improve the supply chain and border security. This norm requires an exhaustive review of the security system of suppliers from the point of origin to the distribution in the U.S. for the purpose of identifying any illicit substance that could threaten the country's security.

CONTAINER TERMINALS

Zungo:

- 15 thousand square meters which is adequate for containers, warehousing and movement.
- 1,000 KVA electrical sub-station.
- 8 Power Packs with potency between 200 and 500 KVA.
- 1 nitrogen generation plant of 400 cfm @ 120 psi.
- Workshop for maintenance of refrigerated containers, fulfilling the standards of the Institute of International Container Lessors (IICL).
- Security and surveillance supported by closed-circuit television.

At present we are working on the adaptation of 8,000 additional square meters, which will increase our operational capacity.

In Nueva Colonia:

- 5 thousand square meters adequate for containers, warehousing and movement.
- 800 KVA electrical sub-station.
- 4 Power Packs with potency between 200 and 500 KVA.
- 1 nitrogen generation plant of 400 cfm @ 120 psi.
- Workshop for maintenance of dry containers, fulfilling the standards of the Institute of International Container Lessors (IICL).
- Security and surveillance supported by closed-circuit television.

At present we are working on the adequacy of 4,000 additional square meters, which will increase our operational capacity.

Piers for palletized or loose cargo:

- NUEVA COLONIA: Two piers with 250 t/h lifting capacity each.
- ZUNGO: One pier with 300 t/h lifting capacity.

EQUIPMENT

Sea Equipment:

- 14 fluvial and sea tugboats. All of them working from 200 to 500 HP
- 3 Hopper barges. Each one of them holds up to 48 40-ft containers.
- 7 flat deck barges. Each one of them can hold up to between 8 and 27 40-ft containers. They are adapted with all the security elements for transporting containers.
- 25 canoe barges, each one of them can hold up between 220 and 310 pallets.

Equipment for Container Movement:

- 1 Liebherr Reach Stacker with a capacity for stacking 40-ft containers, 45 tons to six levels.
- 1 Terex -PPM Reach Stacker with a capacity for stacking 43-ft containers, 45 tons to five levels.
- 1 mobile crane with a lattice boom with 120 tons as maximum capacity.
- 3 Bridge-cranes with a capacity of 30-tons for up to 40-ft containers.
- 1 mobile crane with a lattice boom with a maximum capacity of up to 40 tons.

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Salad Bars: Give Generously But Verify Effectiveness

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 03.18.2013

The enthusiasm over salad bars in schools bubbles over, and one of the reasons is that the industry clearly sees business when a salad bar is put in a school. Items that schools never ordered before are suddenly being delivered and fresh consumption probably increases in the school because such a wider assortment of fresh product typically becomes available.

Besides, so many people in the industry take such pride in being on the side of the angels. They yearn to use our wonderful products to help children to lead healthier, more achieving lives. And as Diane Harris, Ph.D., M.P.H., C.H.E.S., Health Scientist, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the CDC, points out in regard to salad bars and related efforts to encourage healthy eating: "There's nothing bad about encouraging schools to bring in salad bars and try these activities."

But Dr. Harris also makes another point about the long-term future of this effort: "In the long run, it's hard to project. We don't know the sustainability of the program for the future."

The produce industry, of course, cares about the moment at hand, but it also cares about the sustainability of the effort. That sustainability revolves around 10 questions:

1) If salad bars are so good, why is it necessary for the industry or any charity to fund the acquisition of salad bars? There are no similar efforts for ovens or refrigerators or sinks. Shouldn't schools be expected to budget for needed equipment as part of their normal costs of business?

2) Do salad bars actually increase produce sales to schools? If so, is this total produce sales volume or is it more fresh replacing frozen and canned volume? Is it sustained over time as the novelty wears off?

3) Do salad bars actually lead students to take more produce on their plates than on a served cafeteria line? Or do they take less because they are in control?

4) For reasons of economy and convenience, most salad bars are not refrigerated... Does this have negative impacts on food safety, palatability, etc.?

5) Is there increased food safety risks associated with salad bars as opposed to pre-packaged salads? As opposed to hot-line cooked produce?

6) Even if salad bars do increase sales, consumption and health, are they the optimal way to do this? Maybe putting wok stations in every school would boost consumption more. Maybe pre-packaged fruits and vegetables will be perceived as more sanitary and lead to still higher consumption. Perhaps students prefer hot food to cold, and more emphasis should be placed there to achieve the optimal result.

7) Giving away salad bars unconditionally is nice, but when Coke or Pepsi or an ice cream company give away equipment, they typically lend it with the condition that it be used to display the products of the company. To what degree are these salad bars continuously used rather than abandoned? If they are used, to what degree is it to display non-produce items, say cheese or

hard-boiled eggs? To what degree are the schools actually changing product so as to introduce children to new fruits and vegetables? And is there anything we can do to make sure this is all done according to the donor's preference?

8) Do salad bars actually increase produce consumption? In school only? All week? Just of fresh or all produce?

9) Even if the presence of salad bars does increase produce consumption, does this result in better health or other improvements such as better academic performance?

10) Does being exposed to salad bars in school change eating habits and expectations in such a way that this pattern is sustained even after the circumstances change? Put another way, do students whose high schools had salad bars eat more produce in college than those who did not? If so, how long does this effect last and what is the degree of difference?

* * *

The truth is we don't really have very good answers to many of these questions, especially to those related to the question of how salad bars actually impact consumption and human health.

This is not a trivial matter. For a while, a program can grow based on enthusiasm but, in the end, that enthusiasm is unlikely to be sustained if there is not hard evidence as to its efficacy.

Dr. Harris identifies what she calls the "most rigorous research" in support of the salad bar program in this study — *A School Salad Bar Increases Frequency Of Fruit And Vegetable Consumption Among Children Living In Low-Income Households* — but the truth is this study is very weak. If this is all we have in three years when we have to make the case to a new President or need to demonstrate to donors that their last gifts achieved something, we will be in big trouble.

The study looked at data from children collected in 1998, before a salad bar was introduced, and then again in 2000 after the salad bar had been introduced.

We urge the industry to support the salad bar effort by donating funds, but we also need to move ahead with the research that will prove we are spending money wisely. It has to be a two-track approach or all the good we do now will be at risk when we can't demonstrate we are making a difference.

Look at just a few of the obvious limitations of this study:

A) It is dated. It was submitted in 2006 based on data from 2000! How is it possible that with the tremendous expansion of the salad bar program there is no more recent and rigorous study?

B) There is no control group. The study really can tell us almost nothing because there is nothing to compare it to. You need to do the same interviews in schools that don't add a salad bar to be able to see if the salad bar caused changes. Otherwise, you are using the salad bar as a kind of "residual" and crediting it with any changes one can't account for in another way.

C) The study only applies to children eligible for the USDA reimbursable lunch program. It tells us nothing at all about children who don't get free meals.

D) The study only covers children in schools in which 100 percent of the students are eligible for free lunches. Its finding may be inapplicable to mixed environments.

E) The study relies entirely on the recall ability and honesty of 7 to 11 year-old children. No attempt is made to cross-verify with adults or purchase data, food diaries, etc. Children's recall could easily have been impacted by the educational component, which taught them what the "right" answers are.

F) The importance of salad bars is muddied by the inclusion of an educational program. Whatever changes occurred may be due to the educational element and have happened without regard to the salad bar.

G) The research didn't study the same children over time. Although researchers interviewed children in the same school over time, they were not the same children. No efforts seem to have been made to control for any variables such as religion, household income, single parent status, education of the parents, etc.

Now, none of this means we shouldn't support salad bars in schools. All of us often have to make decisions based on imperfect or limited information. It is not an unreasonable thing to believe that salad bars can be a force for good in the schools.

But it is also reasonable for the industry to expect that its leaders will have a plan down the road to prove the efficacy of these efforts.

Research is expensive and does take time but, perhaps, after the California effort is done we should decide to raise the price of each salad bar by 5 percent with that overage going into a fund that the United Fresh Research and Education Foundation could use to conduct research to determine the efficacy of this effort.

Research may be expensive, but spending industry money on things without being certain of the results is not an acceptable option.

We need to move ahead right now. We urge the whole industry to support the salad bar effort by donating funds, but we also need to move ahead with the research that will prove we are spending money wisely. It has to be a two-track approach or all the good we do now will be at risk when we can't demonstrate we are making a difference.

We think this effort will make a difference, and we believe we should collect the data to prove it.

Produce Pavilion Continues To Draw Heavy Crowds At NGA Conference

Grower, shippers, wholesalers and retailers of fresh produce find value in attending this year's NGA Conference as part of the Produce Pavilion. **BY OSCAR KATOV**

There is nothing more unsettling in undertaking a new venture than the sharp challenge from doubters, such as ... are you sure it will work? That was the scene a year ago, when similar questions were heard at the convention of the Arlington, VA-based National Grocers Association (NGA), as a stand-alone Produce Pavilion appeared on the exhibit floor — reflecting NGA's new "strategic alliance" with the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), headquartered in Newark, DE.

This year, at the Las Vegas convention in February, any lingering doubts about the popularity and effectiveness of the pavilion were dispelled before the show opened, when several hundred grocers and produce exhibitors sat together at breakfast with PMA president, Bryan Silbermann, for an exhibit preview and to discuss how fresh produce can be an important differentiator for the independent retailer.

Praise For Produce Pavilion

Howard Nager, vice president of marketing for Yakima, WA-based Domex Superfresh Growers — a discussion participant — sums up the situation this way: "I think the retailers were more positive as a result of the produce session on opening day, and I believe they were better prepared to discuss their own produce merchandising questions after walking through the pavilion. The fact that the pavilion was in its second year also strengthened their positive feeling. For our company, we found that the format was excellent to stimulate meaningful discussions about our conventional and organic apples, pears and cherries. This was our second year as an exhibitor, and we look forward to returning in 2014."

Layout of exhibits in the pavilion had a "positive effect," observes Tim Hallows, western region marketing manager for Mission Produce, Inc., located in Oxnard, CA. "I thought our exhibits were better organized than others in the show, which were spread throughout the expo space, making it difficult for attendees to seek out a specific company. The show was well attended on both days, with busy aisles, from the executive level to the retail store manager, with some specific produce people in attendance as well. Regarding future participation, I believe the show provides us with the opportunity to keep a high visibility in the grocery industry, particularly with the independents."

The record attendance of over 2,700, reported by NGA president, Peter Larkin, impressed exhibitors of the show's growing strength. "It was difficult to know what to expect, so the increase in attendance was a pleasant surprise," acknowledges Bob Koehler, lead regional marketing manager for the Milwaukie, OR-based Pear Bureau Northwest. "What's impressive was the significant number of independent grocers in one location — retailers and wholesalers together. Our 27 PMA exhibitors offered the grocers a good mix of product information and merchandising ideas, as well as making business deals on the spot. Of interest, too, was seeing students coming through the pavilion, and I learned they came to the show as part of an NGA education program. That's an initiative that speaks well for NGA."

Kent Beesley, western retail promotion director for the Eagle-based Idaho Potato Commission, adds, "Not only did we see fresh faces, but we also had the pleasure of visits by

grocers who already were our customers. It was unexpected, and a great opportunity for updates with existing customers, which saves time and expense on new trips to meet with them. We are exhibiting for the second time, and the results are good. Access to independent grocers is important to our marketing strategy, and the show is an effective way to accomplish that objective."

"Educating sales prospects is very important," adds Michael Blume, a sales executive for Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., located in Greencastle, PA. "Simply saying that we are a grower/shipper doesn't have the good story interest in describing how we grow and harvest Vidalia-type onions in Peru, Mexico and Georgia, depending upon the time of the year. Talking with some grocers here... we enjoyed the feeling of being in a classroom."

Jan Garrett, national category development manager for the Watsonville-based California Strawberry Commission, notes, "Reaching out to the independent grocer is not new to us. We exhibit at other retailer events, and this show is a good way to continue to deliver our message to the independent channel. The idea of a pavilion — like a big tent for all the exhibitors — was a good idea in help visitors focus on produce, without distractions from other types of exhibitors. This event was a good learning experience in contact with NGA members, and we will consider returning next year."

The phrase "learning experience" was also heard in conversations with other pavilion exhibitors. "The pavilion was an effective way to develop working relationships with independent grocers," confirms James Grabowski, merchandising manager for Well Pict Berries, headquartered in Watsonville, CA. "It's a great way to learn about this channel of distribution, and the national role of NGA. It's a very effective way for a PMA member to expand its marketing reach."

"The last time we exhibited in the NGA show was 2005, and the reason we're here now is directly attributable to the produce pavilion and our desire to speak with high level executives of independent grocers," recounts David Moore, director of western sales for Earthbound Farm, in Salinas, CA. "Overall traffic was strong to keep us busy on Monday. We exhibited our packaged salad innovation items, and also our recently launched line of organic frozen fruit and vegetables. We will consider exhibiting again if we can feature both organic produce and other non-organic products."

Anthony Barbieri, PMA's vice president of business development, who organized the pavilion, notes, "This year provided an opportunity to unite the distribution chain as most independents use a wholesaler to supply their fresh fruit and vegetable needs. There was a significant increase from the produce wholesale community that helped connect the dots. Regarding our cooperative relationship with NGA, it's fairly simple. We help and learn from each other, for the benefit of our respective memberships, to enhance and grow their business, which ultimately leads to increased customer satisfaction."

"We were thrilled once again to partner with the Produce Marketing Association," says NGA's Larkin. "The PMA pavilion gave NGA retailers, wholesalers and trading partners the opportunity to connect with produce companies and learn more about the innovations coming down the pipeline in that industry. Additionally, it brought together NGA and PMA attendees for networking and educational functions, setting the stage for stronger relationships between suppliers and retailers. We look forward to working with PMA and continuing to expand its presence in front of the independent grocery channel." **pb**

Ten Top Toques Take On Produce

AS FOODSERVICE CONTINUES TO SPOTLIGHT FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, PRODUCE BUSINESS GOT TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER WITH A SERIES OF QUESTIONS AIMED DIRECTLY AT TOP CHEFS AROUND THE COUNTRY.

Carol M. Bareuther, RD

PRODUCE HASN'T TOPPED CENTER-OF-THE-PLATE STAPLES LIKE meats and seafood on chef's list of what's hot. That is, not yet. However, according to the 1,800-plus chefs nationwide who were queried for the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot in 2013* survey, locally grown produce ranked second with 81 percent of chefs calling this a "hot trend" and an additional 15 percent calling it a perennial favorite. A more specific crystal ball forecast of fresh produce trends for foodservice comes in the Top Ten listing by category. For produce, locally grown is followed in order of importance by organic produce, superfruit (açaí, goji berry, mangosteen), Heirloom apples, exotic fruits (rambutan, dragon fruit, pawpaw, guava), Heirloom tomatoes, dark greens (kale, mustard greens, collards), hybrid fruits (plumcot, Grapple, broccoflower), micro-vegetables/micro-greens, and specialty potatoes (Purple, Fingerling, Baby Dutch yellow).

For first-hand insight, PRODUCE BUSINESS went direct to the source


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"The quality of ingredients dictates preparation. We focus on exploring ingredients, and with that comes creativity; it lets us do something new and unique."
— MIKE LATA, FIG RESTAURANT

and interviewed ten top toques for their take on the role fresh produce plays in today's menus. Included are: Tim Byres, owner/executive chef of Smoke and Chicken Scratch in Dallas, TX; Amanda Cohen, owner/chef of Dirt Candy in New York, NY; Michael C. Giletto, executive chef for the Bayonne Golf Club, in Bayonne, NJ; Kerry Heffernan, executive chef at South Gate Restaurant and Bar in New York, NY; Dan Kluger, executive chef at ABC Kitchen in New York, NY; Mike Lata, chef/partner at FIG restaurant in Charleston, SC; Nathan Lyon, chef, author and television personality of the Discovery Health series, *A Lyon in the Kitchen*; John 'Johnny Prep' Prepolec, cooking show host and author of *The Five Star Entertaining Casual Cookbook*; Blaine Wetzel, chef at the Willows Inn on Lummi Island, WA; and Kevin Willmann, chef/owner at the Farmhaus in St. Louis, MO.

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

Tim Byres: Cucumbers fermented into half-sour pickles and Italian parsley in salads.

Amanda Cohen: For me, it's always fresh herbs. I add them as a punch at the end of a dish because they bring a real vibrancy to the plate.

Michael Giletto: There are so many to choose from! If I had to pick a best-of-the-best in the field per say, I would select American Kale. It's a versatile green that can be used in many ways. It's loaded with vitamins and minerals. You can enjoy it hot and cold. It really adds a crisp life to daily recipes.

Kerry Heffernan: It depends on the season. In the winter, it's root vegetables like rutabaga, potatoes and onions. These are often overlooked because they look ugly and sound funny. I serve a rutabaga puree for Thanksgiving that guests turn their noses up at first, but then actually like it better than my mashed potatoes, and my mashed potatoes are pretty good.

Dan Kluger: One of my favorite produce items is chili peppers. Chilis can be used fresh, pickled, dried or fermented and made into a hot sauce. They really heighten a dish by brightening it and adding some heat. I love using peppers, particularly special ones such as *Aji Dulces* from Tim Stark. Tomatoes are a definite favorite of mine as well. I love the fresh, sweet yet slightly tart flavors of different tomatoes, either raw or roasted to intensify their flavor.

Mike Lata: The most inspiring produce to cook is the one-in-ten or one-in-a-hundred delivery that arrives perfectly. It could be a delivery of young tender greens that are sweet and lend themselves to a specific preparation due to the pristine condition at delivery. We have very high standards and only accept ingredients in the kitchen that reach that standard. The quality of ingredients dictates preparation. We focus on exploring ingredients, and with that comes creativity; it lets us do something new and unique.

Nathan Lyon: That's like asking who my favorite child is or which of my parents I love more! It's whatever is freshest as the seasons change. You never know what to expect when you shop a farmer's market. Favorites one week can be side-swiped the next by what's just been harvested. I like to always be open to that excitement.

John Prepolec: While my favorite fresh produce item tends to evolve over time, right now I am just in love with spinach. I particularly love spinach salads. These are great big bodacious salads that pop with flavor and comprise a whole meal. There is something very comforting yet fresh when you pour a warm dressing over fresh spinach. It gives it that partial wilt that adds complexity to the salad. Teaming that up with caramelized vegetables such as sweet onions, mushrooms, asparagus, Brussels sprouts and fresh tomatoes coated in a sweet-and-sour-style dressing creates a flavor theme park in your mouth. I do Thai variations with chili paste and fish sauce. I also make Mexican variations with tomatillo and red salsas, which liven up your taste buds.

Blaine Wetzel: Lately it's been escarole. I like it marinated in onion stock, grilled and topped with pickled onions. Why? I like the slight bitterness. It stays crunchy when grilled. It's local.

Kevin Willmann: Sweet Corn! Our corn repertoire is crazy. It is usually our longest running best-good vegetable. Dishes like succotash, creamed corn, pickled corn salads and grilled corn ice cream hit the menu and cycle through from the Fourth of July until the last ear is shucked in November. We also use the cob 'bones' to make sauces and stocks as flavor bases for other ingredients like a corn water court bouillon that we use to poach lobsters and shrimp, corn consommé, corn cream... I sound like Bubba Gump.

2. What trends do you see with regard to chefs using fresh produce? Which produce items are you hearing about most — what's the next big "Kale" item?

Tim Byres: Heirloom potatoes. I just got back from South America and the waxy golden goodness there is so different from the average commodity varieties at home. I have seen lots of small and multi-colored Heirlooms in the market. I have smoked new potatoes (uncured and small) for a meaty flavor and roasted them in edible clay...There's lots to do with potatoes!

Amanda Cohen: I have no clue, unfortunately.

Michael Giletto: Magma Red Mustard Green is up and coming. It has great flavor and is grown with love and passion from the team on the farm at The Chef's Garden in Ohio.

Kerry Heffernan: Mustard greens. Like kale, there are different usages for each stage of maturity. Young leaves are great for salads, while mature leaves work better in soup.

Dan Kluger: This is a tough one. I am sure someone will come up with something,but I sort of feel like we have been through all the big ones by now.

Mike Lata: Sunchokes. Root veggies seem to be the godfather of under-appreciated vegetables, and they are making a comeback. At one point, no one knew how to cook sunchokes. But once you understand how to prepare them, you realize how great they are both pickled and raw. When you have a unique ingredient and develop a command of how to make it delicious, you explore it and it spreads

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— NATHAN LYON, *A LYON IN THE KITCHEN*

through your menus, as well as other menus in your market. This has happened with beets, kale and Brussels sprouts.

Nathan Lyon: Heirlooms are making a comeback. Farmers are becoming involved now in the slow food movement and planting older seed varieties. It's like being able to taste a piece of decades-old history. What's new really means looking back rather than forward for future food trends.

John Prepolec: I believe the next big item will be Brussels sprouts. This often misunderstood mini cabbage takes on new dimensions when fried crispy. But the real potential I am excited about is caramelizing them and putting them in warm slaws.

Blaine Wetzel: What is next are grains like kamut and farro. We'll see more vegetable and grain-based dishes like salads.

Kevin Willmann: One newer consciousness that I do have a bunch of hope and respect for is the foraging movement. Like Farm to Table, it has always been there, but there are some super cool cats out there showing off the wild edibles from their regions and I want to eat them all!

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

Tim Byres: Internet and Twitter.

Amanda Cohen: Usually my purveyors tell me if they've got something new. Occasionally, I'll walk through the green market to see what's out there, and I'm always eating at other chef's restaurants to see what they're using.

Michael Giletto: I stay informed with many local farmers as well as farmers across the country, whom I have become friendly with over the years. I usually stop by for coffee and walk the grounds as they work, ask questions and creatively pick the minds of the seed handlers as they test in the greenhouses.

Kerry Heffernan: We live on top of a Whole Foods in New York City, so I go down there quite a bit. Then there's the greenmarket at Union Square. People at the market have their finger on the pulse. They're looking all the way back to the seed variety. Is it worth it for them to grow? Worth it for the chef to buy? Worth it for the customer to eat? There's a real back and forth between the grower and chef.

Dan Kluger: Definitely the farmers at the greenmarket and sometimes their product lists as well. The best way is by walking around the greenmarket seeing new and different items that farmers grow and bring to the market. It's always exciting to see different varietals and to start thinking about what components and application would go best with them.

Mike Lata: A great way is to conduct research and development in other towns by looking at menus and see what people

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are using. Each city has common threads that unite, produce-wise. I pay attention to ingredients in other markets and seeing how chefs are using them. I also talk to our growers. When they ask me, "What do you want us to grow for you?" I turn around and ask them, "What do you want to grow for me?" Rather than us dictate to the grower what we want, we'd rather have the grower pick ingredients that are suitable for growing, whether it's an ingredient that is particularly adept at growing in their soil, or perhaps they're talented at raising a specific ingredient. We treat all growers differently, depending on their largesse, and build on that.

Nathan Lyon: Since I live in Southern California, I go to the farmer's market each day. When I travel the United States on cookbook tours, I always go to the local farmer's markets of the different cities I visit.

John Prepolec: I learn from my friends that live in the organic farming areas of the thumb in Michigan. There are great farmers there that grow incredible produce. Never underestimate the sophistication of a farmer when it comes to food!

Blaine Wetzel: Friends and colleagues; we always talk about food.

Kevin Willmann: Our more adventurous and inspired local farmers keep the juices flowing for us. They usually start showing up around late February with obscure seed catalogues and visions of all manner of new crops on our plates. We flip through and discuss possibilities for new varietals and whether or not we can get them to grow here. New is often trial and error.

4. *What are the biggest challenges for restaurants to achieve the FDA's My Plate Initiative, which recommends that half the plate should be fruits and vegetables?*

Tim Byres: As Americans, portions are out of control and everything is protein, vegetable, starch and sauce. I push toward family-style with lots of sides to offset the protein-priority dinning.

Michael Giletto: Well that's a good question...I was in an American Culinary Foundation meeting a few weeks ago and this was on topic of review. I can't answer for other chefs at this time, but chefs are starting to look deeper into the program. So, it's an on-going process and discussion.

Kerry Heffernan: The U.S. public is indoctrinated toward large meat servings. They may be O.K. with a 6-oz. portion at home, but not when they're dining out. Restaurants in NYC might be able to get away with [serving half the plate full of fruits and vegetables] because of the Asian and European influence, but not in the rest of the country.

Dan Kluger: The fruit part can be a bit challenging. We do have many vegetable-driven dishes that comprise a fairly large portion of the dish, if not all of it.

Mike Lata: We try to create a balanced meal for the customer from start to finish, not just on one plate. We've always had dishes that are vegetable-focused, and when we have a protein-based dish, we incorporate veggies to add value.

Nathan Lyon: Restaurateurs, especially the independent mom-and-pop ones, put produce on the plate because they want to and it tastes good, not because the government requires them to or to comply with a government standard. That might


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— KEVIN WILLMANN, FARMHAUS

not be true of the big chains, though.

John Prepolec: Customer habits. Unless they are vegetarians or vegans, they are much less prone to gravitate toward produce, and turnover is a key to putting really good produce into action on the dining room table. But one thing we have going for us in the United States is that our customers love big portions. We just have to make that bigness be centered on gorgeous and tasty vegetable foundations.

Blaine Wetzel: I don't see a problem. I do vegetarian-oriented cooking at my restaurant and it gets a great reception by our guests.

Kevin Willmann: We work hard to put the bounty of our region's great produce front-and-center. Being a direct buyer from most of the farms we work with means a ton of picking, cleaning, organizing and preserving. Even our service staff gets involved when we get overwhelmed in the kitchen by helping us with this stuff. They wanted to kill me when I brought in eight bushels of hull peas [in the shell] last year. But I know they know how much better of an experience our patrons have when there are solid mouthfuls of delicious peak-season veggies in the dish and not just a few manipulated bubbles that remind you of the veggie. This is our biggest specific challenge as a farm-to-table place: handling the sheer volume of raw produce that it takes to accomplish a dish for even one night is challenging.

5. What motivates you to add fresh produce in unconventional ways in your cooking, and how do you introduce new produce items to your clientele? Please don't forget about dried fruits and nuts as well.

Tim Byres: I like to use simple standards and bring them to light. Quick-pickled celery with lemon juice and salt makes a strong jolt and pops when added to heavy meats.

Amanda Cohen: We base each dish around a vegetable. I'm constantly adding new dishes to the menu, so I'm forced to either keep searching for new ways to use familiar favorites or to find new vegetables to bring to my customers.

Michael Giletto: As for nuts, I am a partner in Bakers Southern Peanuts, so I am always recipe-testing and creating peanut recipes. Otherwise, I usually introduce a new item via an *Amuse Bouche*,

a small kiss from the chef — a free sample, per se. I have them try it and cleanse the palate at the same time and then I ask for feedback. It works well; they never expect it and it's always a surprise as to the answers received.

Kerry Heffernan: It's a focus on the season. For example, in the winter I'll go for pomegranate, citrus and pears. In the spring, the freshness of the greens is what it's all about. Summer means simple and grilled.

Dan Kluger: I am not sure if anything is all that unconventional, but again I try to make the vegetable the focus on a lot of our dishes. I tend to use nuts such as hazelnuts and pistachios in vinaigrettes in salads as well as toasted to accompany roasted vegetables. I like the texture element they often offer.

Mike Lata: There's been a movement to take classic or traditional dishes and incorporate different products; for example, salsa verde — as long as it's green, and has a semblance of the original sauce, you can make it with kale, stinging nettles, etc. We make squash romesco when it's not tomato season. There are no rules or limits. It's exciting to see this happen on menus across the country. Diners are used to seeing rules bent, and they are open to being introduced to new ideas. For example, we wouldn't think twice about taking a thick slice of cauliflower and treating it like steak au poivre.

Nathan Lyon: Doing the unconventional is what I enjoy. For example, the home experience is that Brussels sprouts are boiled to death. Instead, I roast or thin-slice them into a Caesar salad. It's like introducing the vegetable to the customer for the first time. It's a new experience.

John Prepolec: I am incredibly engaged in working with youths in an effort to encourage their love of vegetable and fruits. This provides a lot of feedback. I find the keys to success are engagement. No.1 is tastings. Kids love tastings, as do adults. It is by far the best way to get people exposed to the wonderful tastes and also gather those very valuable opinions. The second most important part is to engage people in the whole aspect from brainstorming ideas to participating in the preparation. We have had great success in engaging students in programs such as *Veggie Wars*, where we increased vegetable consumption in a school cafeteria tenfold.

Blaine Wetzel: I like to experiment. Maybe a grain and watercress or escarole salad — something our guests haven't tried before.

Kevin Willmann: Usually we are motivated by bounty or a lack thereof. When we have a whole bunch of something, we push ourselves to learn and grow as cooks. We try familiar techniques and unfamiliar stretches of rationality to see what discoveries we can make. We use our tasting menu to introduce the best of these ideas to our guests. When the availability is low, dishes are often fortified with previously preserved or often dried forms of the same ingredient from a more bountiful time. As far as nuts go, our region produces some great pecans, walnuts, fresh peanuts, sunflowers and chestnuts, and we hope to use more in the future.

6. ***Do you or your restaurant participate in Meatless Monday? Do you think it is***

helping to raise awareness that vegetables can be center-of-the-plate items?

Tim Byres: Not on Mondays, but I really think vegetables need more focus and not just in vegetarian menu items, but also more focus on quality and flavor as backdrops to meats as well.

Amanda Cohen: We don't serve meat.

Michael Giletto: I am sorry to say we do not participate in this program. However, we do follow a program for our banquets called *Sassy Seductive Selections*, which is a version of Meatless Mondays for our female clients and female members who are on a strict vegan diet and eat veggies and gluten-free cuisine.

Kerry Heffernan: I like the awareness that it brings and the great opportunity to substitute protein for vegetables prepared in interesting ways. We don't participate in Meatless Mondays, but we can do a vegetable tasting menu any day of the week. For example, we don't automatically put bacon in the Brussels sprouts, so we can add smoked onion instead.

Dan Kluger: We do not participate in Meatless Monday.

Mike Lata: No, we have been a vegetable-friendly restaurant for so long. I don't feel like we have to make such a bold statement. Diners know that they can always have a meatless experience, because we always have that option.

Nathan Lyon: People in this meat-centric country think protein first. I always tell them to think of fresh produce as the talented back-up singers. They're the real stars of the show.

John Prepolec: I participate as a guest chef on our local TV morning segment, *Meatless Mondays*. It gives me the ability to showcase non-traditional twists on produce-based foods. I have made dishes such as Ratatouille Strudel and Thai Red Lentil and Udon Noodle Salad. I find it is a great way to promote the concept of a weekly meatless dish.

Blaine Wetzel: What's that? I haven't heard of it! We serve lots of vegetables every day.

Kevin Willmann: No, our Monday lunch is actually a meat lover's dream. Monday is fried chicken day! We are not open for dinner and serve only one dish for lunch.

7. What are your preferences regarding produce grown locally vs. organically vs. imported or purchased through a distributor or local program?

Tim Byres: Local is great, but I think the real deal is fresh, super fresh, however you can come across it. In Texas, it's harder to be local than in California with produce. A plain red radish pulled from the ground and eaten is spicy and crunchy, but people think of them as fluff, like button mushrooms, because what is in the stores is old and flavorless. Keeping a garden changes the game.

Amanda Cohen: We don't have much storage space, so I place several small orders throughout the week, rather than one big order, which means I don't hit the order caps for most organic and local purveyors. So I tend not to use either. I also believe in using vegetables that everyone has access to rather than going for Heirloom or exotic varieties, because I think it's fun to do something different with vegetables people can get at their

"I believe in using vegetables that everyone has access to rather than going for Heirloom or exotic varieties, because I think it's fun to do something different with vegetables people can get at their local supermarket, rather than trying to impress them with the provenance of some rare variety of tomato."
— AMANDA COHEN, DIRT CANDY

local supermarket, rather than trying to impress them with the provenance of some rare variety of tomato.

Michael Giletto: I am a firm believer in local and organic, either from a local support system or distributor — it's whoever has the best price and the fastest response. I support our local and country farmer first. However, with changing cultures and cuisines, sometimes we need to seek outside our elements to support our guest and clients who are sometimes inquiring about their family cuisine as they grew up. Pleasing the clients, hitting your bottom line and delivering results to your owners is all important in the culinary world...it's all about the balance.

Kerry Heffernan: I like to buy as much local as possible, but I'm not unrealistic. In the Northeast, you're hard-pressed to find much local produce in the winter, and what of it there is, is easy to get bored with quickly. On the other hand, the celebration of seasonal results in discovery and enjoyment. After all, how can you get excited about fresh asparagus if you have it 12 months of the year? I've become interested in foraging and using ingredients like lambs' quarters, purslane and garlic mustard.

Dan Kluger: We try to keep local, organic, and/or sustainable if and when possible. Supporting local farmers is what's really important. We try our best to support not only farmers, but also local fish mongers, artisanal cheese makers, beekeepers, etc. If we're not able to acquire locally, then we go toward the organic and/or sustainable route. I believe in really knowing the farmers and what they are giving you.

Mike Lata: I think about sourcing in concentric circles, starting with 'local' as priority at the center and working my way out. We see how much of the menu we can build out from local produce, then look to regional then domestic produce, and that's where it stops. We do not import to satisfy a menu item. It's not a political statement — it's just the way we run the business. It doesn't make sense to import an out-of-season ingredient; asparagus in December doesn't taste very good, so why bother. We have to have limitations.

Nathan Lyon: In a perfect world it would be local and organic.

John Prepolec: I have a strong preference for locally grown produce (particularly from my backyard). I have a much lesser concern regarding certified organics versus buying from farmers that use organic methods. There are some great small farms that just can't swallow the nut for the certification. I have participated in organic co-ops before and haven't had much success on getting consistent product. I believe the key is to establish relations with your purveyors and growers where they understand your emphasis on quality. Once you have that, they become your guide.

Blaine Wetzel: Nothing in fresh produce benefits by being imported. For us, we seek out locally-grown. Beyond that, we look for quality, freshness and flavor.

Kevin Willmann: I am somewhat bitter about how the organic lobby made itself so expensive and difficult in years past. In our surrounding states, the process is so expensive that it is often prohibitive. We are also right in the middle of much of our country's feed, ethanol, and bio-diesel grain production. Much of the methods used to grow this grain means that most adjacent vegetable farms cannot become certified organic even if they wanted. We don't have preferences other than that we have relationships with the farmers built on trust and honesty and I like to be able to reasonably drive to them and pick out my own stuff. So that means we work nearly exclusively with our local farmers, many of which are not certified organic. **pb**

• A classically trained chef, entrepreneur, and author, **Tim Byres** is the guiding force behind two Dallas restaurants. The first, Smoke, quickly became a culinary blockbuster in the Dallas dining world and was the perfect platform for Byres to celebrate the history and integrity of handmade food. In 2012, another star, Chicken Scratch, was launched under Byres' guidance. This concept nourishes the spirit of hospitality and celebrates the diversity and community of the American table. Byres has made appearances on local, regional and national cooking shows and has appeared in *Southern Living*, *Bon Appetit*, *Garden and Gun*, and *Forbes Magazine*. *Food & Wine* named him one of the Best New Chefs for 2012. His first book, *Smoke, New Firewood Cooking,* is due out this month.

• **Amanda Cohen** is the chef and owner of Dirt Candy, a nine-table vegetarian restaurant in New York City's East Village. The first vegetarian restaurant in 17 years to receive two stars from the *New York Times*, it has been recognized by the Michelin Guide three years in a row, and won awards from *Gourmet Magazine*, the *Village Voice*, and many others. Cohen was the first vegetarian chef to compete on *Iron Chef America,* and her comic book cookbook, *Dirt Candy: A Cookbook*, is the first graphic novel cookbook to be published in North America.

• Executive chef for Bayonne Golf Club, **Michael C. Giletto** developed his love of culinary arts as a young child. Months after graduating from the JNA Institute of the Culinary Arts in Philadelphia, Giletto was awarded the Chef of the Year Award from the American Culinary Foundation. Soon after, he became the executive chef for the Peacock Inn's Le Plumet Royale, and the four-star restaurant was awarded the distinguished James Beard Award for the Great Country Inn Chef's Series. In 2005, after working as the lead food stylist for the Book and the Cook Fair, Giletto's talents were recognized by Food Network's Cat Cora. Since then, Giletto has received cooking spots on *Iron Chef America*, appearing as one of Cat Cora's competition sous-chefs. Most recently, Giletto has appeared on Food Network's culinary competitions, *Chopped* and *Ultimate Recipe Showdown*. In 2012, Giletto was awarded the title Most Creative Chef of NYC from *Wine and Country* Magazine.

• An interest in the culinary arts developed at a young age in **Kerry Heffernan**, executive chef at South Gate Restaurant and Bar on Central Park South in New York City. Heffernan took his first restaurant job at the age of 14, and bicycled through Europe after high school for four months exploring the *goût de terroir* in the south of France, then returned home to graduate second in his class at the CIA. He became the opening executive chef and eventually partner at Union Square Hospitality Group's Eleven Madison Park. While at Eleven Madison, Heffernan introduced New Yorkers to his elegant signature seasonal cuisine. Under his leadership, the restaurant received accolades from a wide variety of sources, including a tie with Per Se on *Zagat Survey's* Top 20 Most Popular Restaurants in New York, The James Beard Foundation's Award for Outstanding Service in America, *Wine Spectator's* Award of Excellence and *Esquire Magazine's* Best New Restaurant. Over the course of his career, Heffernan has remained active outside the kitchen with numerous volunteer services, such as cooking for Share Our Strength, Project by Project, City Meals on Wheels, Kids for Kids and both the Central Park and Madison Square Park Conservancies.

• Born and raised in NYC, **Dan Kluger** grew up in a family where cooking always played a major role. Kluger attended Syracuse University, spent his externship in the dining room of Danny Meyer's Union Square Cafe (USC) and after graduation, returned to work in the front of house until he was offered his first kitchen position as a prep cook. It was USC that opened his eyes to the wonders of seasonal cooking and he spent the next two and a half years working his way through every station. In 1999, Kluger was asked to become part of the opening team of Tabla Restaurant and spent the next seven years working his way up and becoming Tabla's first chef de cuisine. Upon leaving Tabla, Kluger worked under Tom Colicchio at The Core Club and as part of Jean Georges Vongerichten's team where he's helped open restaurants in Arizona, Utah, Washington, D.C. and New York. Since opening ABC Kitchen in 2010, Kluger has won multiple awards including the 2011 James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant and *Food & Wine's* Best New Chef of 2012.

• Known for his straightforward approach to cooking with pure, bright flavors and the highest quality ingredients, **Mike Lata's** longstanding and outspoken commitment to supporting local farmers, fisherman and purveyors has fortified his position as a leader and notable champion for Charleston's dynamic culinary renaissance. Lata, the 2009 James Beard Foundation Award-winning Best

Chef: Southeast, is chef/owner of Charleston's beloved FIG (Food Is Good), and newly opened The Ordinary, a convivial oyster hall and seafood restaurant, in the city's historic Upper King District.

• Recognized for his simple, innovative cuisine featuring fresh, local ingredients, **Nathan Lyon** is a chef, cookbook author and co-host of PBS' *Growing A Greener World*. Lyon created and hosted *A Lyon in the Kitchen* on Discovery Fit & Health TV, was among the final four on the second season of *The Next Food Network Star* and appeared as a guest chef and expert on TLC's *Home Made Simple* and *Real Simple Real Life*. Lyon is a regular fresh foods contributor on *Huffington Post Live*, is a Monterey Bay Aquarium Sustainable Seafood Ambassador, and his seasonal cookbook, *Great Food Starts Fresh*, was recently named one of the top cookbooks in 2012 by the *Washington Post*.

• **John 'Johnny Prep' Prepolec** is an author, entrepreneur, cooking show host, soup expert, and an advocate for children's health. The author of The Five Star Entertaining Casual Cookbook published in 2012, Prepolec now hosts *Soup and Co.* airing in the Detroit metro area. He's the national spokesperson for Zoup! Fresh Soup Company and founder of *Veggie Wars*, an innovative middle school curriculum developed through his Quality for Kids non-profit.

• Raised in Washington State, **Blaine Wetzel** began working in kitchens at age 14 and he's never stopped. A dozen years later, Wetzel has studied and apprenticed widely, notably as Rene Redzepi's chef-de-partie at noma in Copenhagen, which repeatedly garnered recognition as the best restaurant in the world. Since arriving on Lummi Island and becoming a partner in the new ownership group, The Willows Inn, Wetzel has attracted international attention. *Food & Wine* named him Best New Chef of 2012 and he became a James Beard Award semifinalist in the Pacific Northwest for the second year in a row. In 2011, the *New York Times* declared Willows Inn on Lummi Island "One of the 10 Restaurants (in the world) Worth a Plane Ride." Wetzel brands his exquisite meals with a commitment to island- and locally sourced ingredients and the traditions of farm-to-table preparation.

• Born into a farming family in Greenville, IL, and self-taught in the culinary arts down south in the Florida panhandle, **Kevin Willmann** has a community approach to his food. Specifically, his menus are mostly comprised of locally grown produce. He partners with local cheesemakers, bakers and coffee roasters. Willmann moved to the St. Louis area six years ago. He made a name for himself at Erato, an eatery that stole the show in the St. Louis Restaurant scene, and in 2010 opened his first restaurant, Farmhaus. In 2011 *Food & Wine* named him one of the nation's Best New Chefs.

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Keep an eye especially on the tomato, cucumber, bell pepper deal starting by April. The company is expecting to receive 50 hectares of Roma tomatoes from April through June with a quantity currently lowballed at 500,000 packages. It also expects 48 hectares of cucumbers in the same time frame resulting in about 250,000 packages. As well, the company will handle 45 hectares of green bell peppers and is estimating about 225,000 packages. This represents a significant increase from last spring, at least a doubling in all three commodities.

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.

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Grower Alliance continues to seek out perfect deals to source year-round. Currently, the company has availability to ship color bell peppers year round from Nogales and McAllen.

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

Jaime Martinez
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Frank Hernandez II
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PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF FRESHERIZED FOODS
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF CABO FRESH

Fresh packaged guacamole, along with mixes that just need avocados, help time-starved, health-conscious consumers find nutritious snacks.

A Fresh Look At Guacamole

The growing buzz around prepared guacamole is flourishing as consumers become aware of the convenience of this fresh, natural produce item. **BY JANEL LEITNER**

Guacamole has long been a favored party snack. However, today it is gaining popularity and can be found anywhere from a main dish all the way to a child's lunch box. "Guacamole is a category leader in dips, and has surpassed ranch dip sales at most retailers across the country as the hottest selling value-added item in the set," reports Kristyn Lawson, vice president of sales for Cabo Fresh, located in Los Angeles, CA. "Many retailers are adding more and more flavors and sizes to optimize the category sales."

"The growth of the avocado category, in general, has been very strong," maintains Tracey Altman, vice president of marketing at Saginaw, TX-based Fresherized Foods, home of Wholly Guacamole. "Nielsen just named the avocado as one of the Top Five foods staged for success in 2013."

According to a 2012 Nielsen report, avocado volume sales increased a remarkable 34 percent, and other recent data shows a continuing increase. "Symphony IRI ending in December, 2012, shows sales in total U.S. food of the top brands are slightly over $75 million and growing approximately 20 percent," reports Lauri Buell, vice president of sales at Cabo Fresh. "Sales are growing in all regions of the country with the Eastern Seaboard seeing the largest percentages of growth."

"Our sales continue to improve annually in retail," adds Al Ahmer, vice president processed sales, foods division at Calavo Growers, Inc., headquartered in Santa Paula, CA.

"Guacamole SKUs rank most often in the Top Five selling SKUs and always in the Top 10 selling SKUs in the value-added produce section of all grocery stores," notes Buell. "These sections vary from between 20 and 40-plus SKUS."

Dried guacamole mixes have also experienced an expansion in popularity. "In 2012, guacamole dry dip mixes saw a 12 percent increase in unit sales and a 14 percent increase in dollar sales," reports Samantha McCaul, marketing manager at Brockton, MA-based Concord Foods Inc. "This is a consistent trend, and Guacamole Seasoning Mixes have been growing solidly for a few years."

Driving Forces

Increased familiarity is a key driver in the popularity surge of prepared guacamole. "The household penetration of avocado purchases has increased steadily over the past five years, and is growing particularly strong outside the traditional areas of California and the West,"

PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF FRESHERIZED FOODS

This clever retail display catches consumers' attention with a Marilyn Monroe cutout that calls out the classic taste of Wholly Guacamole.

states McCaul.

Altman of Fresherized Foods agrees, adding, "The growth of the entire avocado category helps to drive the popularity of guacamole."

Buell of Cabo Fresh adds, "Consumers are more familiar with avocados, how to buy them and what to do with them due to all the promotional activity, and TV and magazine advertising. Plus, most retailers now stock guacamole in the produce, deli and dairy departments."

Promoting the healthy benefits of avocado amplifies the popularity of prepared guacamole. "The health benefits associated with avocados in general have driven movement on both guacamole and avocados," explains Keith Cox, produce category manager at Abingdon, VA-based K-VA-T Food Stores, with 104 Stores. "In the past few years, consumers have had more and more education on the uses and benefits of consuming avocados."

"The health benefits associated with avocados in general have driven movement on both guacamole and avocados."

— Keith Cox, K-VA-T Food Stores

McCaul agrees, "There is a health halo surrounding avocados, which has supported consumers' desire to eat more avocados."

A significant part in promoting prepared guacamole is emphasizing fresh ingredients. "Guacamole brings excitement for healthy eating and consumer passion for the fresh food experience to the value-added produce category," explains Cabo Fresh's Lawson. "It's a product that supports the entire department and sequential purchases for a fresh produce lifestyle."

"Consumers are extremely interested in healthy products, especially items that taste good," states Ahmer of Calavo Growers. "Our guacamoles are in both of those categories, because we use only 100 percent fresh Hass avocados, along with other fresh and natural ingredients."

"By offering a pre-packaged alternative that is all-natural with no preservatives, we give the consumer a reason to put it in their basket," shares Altman. "The Wholly Guacamole 100-calorie snack packs go a step further and offer consumers a perfect 2-oz. size for individuals in a portion control they wouldn't otherwise get with a fresh avocado, since the fruit has to be completely consumed once cut."

Increased advertising has also driven popularity of guaca-mole. "Large adver- tising campaigns fea- turing guacamole have been helpful by educating consumers," explains Jessica Brown, sales and marketing coordinator with Cabo Fresh. "They've com-municated how guaca- mole not only goes well with tortilla chips or Mexican food, but is also an excellent addition to burgers, like the Carl's Jr. campaign, or on sandwiches as a substitution for mayo, like the Subway campaign."

"Restaurant menus are now, more than ever, featuring avocado as an ingredient," adds Altman.

Targeting The Customer

Guacamole is breaking away from old stereotypes. Lawson of Cabo Fresh states,

"While guacamole was created South of the Border, we are enjoying guacamole in North America for its versatility in a variety of cuisines. It's used for entertainment for its flavor and fun dip-ability for sporting events, holidays and more."

"Of course, consumers who are pursuing healthier eating habits are driving purchases," says Cox of K-VA-T Food Stores. "Targeting consumers to purchase during holidays or sporting events with advertising also helps drive movement."

The convenience and health of guacamole covers many different demographics. Fresherized's Altman states, "Busy moms looking for nutritious and convenient snacks for kids; people looking for alternatives to mayo and ranch for salads and sandwiches; and those consumers who just love guacamole are all looking for easy and convenient ways to enjoy it."

"We are seeing more men purchasing Concord Foods Guacamole Seasoning Mix and responding to our promotions because today, men are spending more time at the grocery store and preparing meals for their families as well," explains McCaul of Concord Foods.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CONCORD FOODS

"It is not really a particular age group, ethnicity, or gender-specific product," states Greg Calistro, executive director of produce and floral at Save Mart Supermarkets, headquartered in Modesto, CA. "We're really looking at customers who are seeking a way to save time as they are preparing a meal or snack. Prepared guacamole is a very healthy option."

Healthy eating habits motivate consumers. "As more people shop in produce and look for healthy foods to feed their families, they are also looking for convenient items," says Brown of Cabo Fresh. "Prepared guacamole fills both of these needs."

"The target market includes anyone who wants a healthy, flavorful and fun eating/snacking experience," adds Calavo's Ahmer.

The Whole Package

Prepared guacamole fits needs of both customers and retailers. "Guacamole offers the whole package," says Buell of Cabo Fresh. "Sales, popularity and profits!"

Prepared guacamole meets a convenience need for consumers. "It is a value-added convenience item for our customers," says Calistro of Save Mart Supermarkets. "Convenience items are growing as a category by over 10 percent. Our customers are time-starved and looking for ways to buy healthy foods that are ready to serve."

"Having pre-made guacamole in the produce department increases basket ring by providing additional items of interest in the produce department besides regular fruits and vegetables," says Altman of Fresherized Foods.

Retailers can help consumers see

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"It is not really a particular age group, ethnicity, or gender-specific product. We're really looking at customers who are seeking a way to save time as they are preparing a meal or snack. Prepared guacamole is a very healthy snack option."

— Greg Calistro, Save Mart Supermarkets

guacamole's full potential with cross-promotion and secondary displays. "We often do IRCs, coupon tear-pads and floor clings that help the customer get from one department of the grocery store to the produce department," adds Altman.

"I've seen one retailer with refrigerated cases in the chip aisle and others using it in their chef sections with hand-outs of recipes for quick meals," recollects Buell. "The retailers that can cross-merchandise total meal solutions all in one spot are the real winners."

Proper display of the dry mix is important as well. "Retailers will increase sales of Guacamole Seasoning Mix and avocados by displaying the mix with avocados and other tie-in items such as tomatoes," shares McCaul of Concord Foods. "To help retailers merchandise the product, Concord Foods offers 18-pack cases and 144-pack shipper displays."

Get To Know Guacamole

Retailers are finding creative ways to familiarize consumers with guacamole. "In addition to our guacamole parties we distribute across the country, we are using social and digital media to introduce consumers to the category," explains Lawson of Cabo Fresh. "Each SKU of guacamole size and flavor add incremental value to the category. For instance, we now have a new four-pack of 2-oz. dipping cups that has been a big hit as added sales for school lunches or quick snacks."

"Some retailers will run other in-store cross promotions with other departments such as meat and dairy to promote a taco night," shares Altman. "We also help provide channel strips, POS and coupon interrupters to help promote our product."

Calavo's Ahmer adds, "We promote with our retailer partners during the heavy guacamole demand periods such as Cinco De Mayo, Super Bowl, Fourth of July, and Christmas/New Year's."

Innovative advertising is important. "Multiple price points that generate trial, digital coupons and the many recipes in magazines and on TV are helping drive consumers to guacamole," reports Buell of Cabo Fresh.

"POS and QR codes help increase consumption," adds Calistro of Save Mart.

"Some retailers feature recipes using Guacamole Seasoning Mix in their newsletter," points out McCaul of Concord Foods. "This helps educate consumers on alternative ways to use the mix. We're also investing more resources in promotions and social media to support retailer efforts to educate consumers. In the past year, we have run several promotions including a College Bowl Football promotion, and we are currently running a promotion in conjunction with Disney." **pb**

the consumer connection

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Citrus, apples and pears are just a few of the categories available from Australia and New Zealand.

Counter-Seasonal Opportunity Knocks With Australian And New Zealand Fruit

Fruit from down-under fills needed gaps and continues established demand. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Fruit from Australia and New Zealand during the U.S. summer months provides plenty of opportunity to continue sales of many mainstream items. "For the items we handle, Australia and New Zealand offer a good counter-seasonal balance in goods for customers here in the United States," says Jason Bushong, division manager for Giumarra of Wenatchee, located in Wenatchee, WA. "This benefits retailers by offering the consumer an uninterrupted supply of high quality fruit. Avoiding gaps in supply is crucial to a retail customer's bottom line."

"Produce from Australia and New Zeeland helps us avoid gaps in supply," confirms Randy Bohaty, produce director for B&R Stores, an 18-unit retail chain based in Lincoln, NE. "Having a consistent supply increases purchase; the fact that people are able to get their favorite items over a longer period allows us to capture sales. Usually the items from those areas are high volume movers like citrus."

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Food Markets, in Parsippany, NJ, with 25 Kings and 6 Balducci's stores, agrees, adding, "It fills in seasonal gaps, for example, the time when we don't have Washington apples. We need to maintain our supply to meet our customer demand."

Michael Worthington, CEO of Produce Marketing Association Australia/New Zealand, in Melbourne, Australia, reports, "The most important benefit of the Australia/New Zealand source is its counter-seasonality to U.S. product. Consumers love choice and variety, and keeping the retail shelves full of a wide variety of products helps entice consumers."

Fruit from New Zealand and Australia maintains the consistency and quality retailers look for year-round. "Our retailers always look forward to Australian citrus due to its consistently great taste, great quality, and high color," says Stu Monaghan, national marketing manager for Ft. Pierce, FL-based DNE World Fruit. "Its counter-seasonal nature to California provides a profitable boost to the overall citrus category."

Production standards are at high levels and continue to advance. Giumarra's Bushong explains, "The environmental stewardship these growers have enacted on in these countries to assure high quality, clean, and safe produce, with minimal impact to the environment, is very important to most consumers. Also, these growers have focused on advancements in growing practices to maintain a consistent quality throughout the season."

"New Zealand growers continue to be recognized as the producers of the best-quality kiwifruit on the market," says Steve Woodyear-Smith, tropicals category director for The Oppenheimer Group, in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. "The Zespri brand signifies the highest level of care and the most sophisticated growing practices to the trade, while conveying to consumers that this kiwifruit will deliver a consistent eating experience time after time."

Quality Products

By volume, the most popular items supplied from Australia and New Zealand are citrus, kiwi and tree fruit. "For the U.S. market, we target apples, pears, kiwifruit, and citrus," says Bushong. "In these items, availability usually begins as early as March and will go until September, depending on the commodity."

Australia is a significant citrus producer, though exports to the United States have suffered some in recent years. "Australian Navel oranges were at 11,215 tons in 2012, up from 8,000 tons the previous year," reports

"Grower interaction with consumers at the store level has been a big push. Putting a face with the fruit we sell really makes an impact with consumers, especially when it's the family farmer."

— Jason Bushong, Giumarra of Wenatchee

Worthington of PMA AUS/NZ. "This is still well short of its record 30,000 tons in 2007. Australian Mandarins were at 1,800 tons in 2012, down about 20 percent compared to the previous year and well down on a record 4,500 tons in 2005 and 2007."

"Navels will be available from mid-July through mid-October," says DNE's Monaghan. "Minneolas will be available late July through early September, Daisy Tangerines in July, and Cara Caras will run from August to mid-September. Clementines are here in June, and Mandarins will be available late September through mid-October. Additionally, Blood Oranges are available in September."

New Zealand focuses primarily on apples and kiwi, though other products are on the increase. "New Zealand apples boast about 40,000 to 45,000 tons per year, and New Zealand kiwifruit does about 20,000 to 25,000 tons per year," says Worthington. "New Zealand pears are at about 2,500 tons per year."

"Gold kiwifruit is available mid-May through mid-October; organic and conventional green kiwifruit is available mid-May through November," says Woodyear-Smith.

"Small quantities of other products such as blueberries, avocados, onions and apricots also find their way to the U.S. market," adds Worthington. "For apples and kiwifruit, it is mainly new season fruit in the April to July period, when it is counter-seasonal to U.S. fruit production. Kiwifruit does increasingly clash with Chilean kiwifruit."

Be Prepared

A profitable Australian/New Zealand season is a prepared one. "Be as informed as possible regarding what is available and take advantage of the opportunities," advises B&R's Bohaty.

"The most important preparation is developing a program of supply," states PMA AUS/NZ's Worthington. "Shipping times from Australia/New Zealand to the United States mean that good planning is vital to prevent fruit from being held up in ports or in storage. It is also important to know the status of the local U.S. supply, as the worst thing that can happen is for the imported fruit to clash with the end-of-season local fruit."

"There is not much spot-buying these days," continues Worthington. "Most of the fruit is imported on a well-planned program, which covers all aspects of quality, variety, price, timing, etc. Therefore, for this to happen, buyers need to have a close and strong relationship with their suppliers, so every aspect of the new season crop is well known and can be incorporated into the plan."

Prior planning of promotions is crucial. DNE's Monaghan states, "Simply put, plan ads. During the summer months, the competition is heavy from other products and varieties, so it is important retailers are well informed when promotional opportunities are available."

"Especially in the transition period of going from domestic to imports, communication is crucial," states Kneeland. "Know when it's going

to come in, and pass the information on to stores so they can properly merchandise and label."

Developments in kiwi production could have some market affect. "Overall crop is down, which will force volumes into North America to decrease as well," reports Michele Hoard, senior marketing manager for Zespri Americas, in Redwood City, CA

Pseudomonas syringae pv. actinidiae (Psa), a bacteria affecting kiwifruit vines, is still a major issue in New Zealand but growers are finding that most Green and Organic vines are able to push through and survive. "Hort16A, our current popular Gold variety, is very affected," says Hoard. "At least half the Gold vines have already succumbed to Psa, so our Gold variety worldwide volume is down over 50 percent."

The organic crop is pushing through Psa and is looking great this season. "Organic volume will increase," says Hoard. "North America is a great market for Zespri Organic, and we will have programs to support this opportunity for the United States and Canada."

Focus On Fresh

The Australia/New Zealand product gives a unique opportunity to promote a new, fresh crop. "Promote the new harvest freshness and counter-seasonal aspects of the product," advises Worthington.

"Promote the advantages of new crop early in the season," adds Giumarra's Bushong. "Emphasize the flavors of particular varieties with POS materials and sampling."

Ensure product is merchandised separately. Kings' Kneeland explains, "Sell out of the domestic fruit first before putting in the imports. There is a difference, and if they're mixed in, consumers will get confused and not have an optimum experience."

Retailers will need to weigh the costs and benefits of using fresh crop versus storage crops. "This decision often depends on price and availability," says B&R's Bohaty. "Usually, we only go to the new crop apples if there is an issue of supplying them from storage, or if there are proprietary varieties."

"There is a symbiotic relationship with using both supply sources to best enhance the produce department," advises Bushong. "An uninterrupted offering of these products is the goal. As with any commodity from any country, quality dictates price."

PMA AUS/NZ's Worthington adds, "Most apples sold will still be stored apples with New Zealand apples only filling niche markets. Most of the New Zealand apples and kiwifruit go to Europe and Asia, which provide better returns than the United States."

Side Note

UP AND COMING STARS

As the Australian/New Zealand fruit season gets underway, keep your eyes posted for these new and exciting varieties. David Nelley, apple, pear and cherry category director for The Oppenheimer Group, in Vancouver, B.C., reports, "While we present the more traditional New Zealand apple varieties, we are continuing to build the market for new and exciting flavors."

New apple and pear varieties include:

Smitten: "Smitten's parents are Braeburn, Royal Gala, Fiesta and Falstaff," explains Nelley. "With a sweet flavor and refreshing sweetness, it has red, striped skin and is firm and crisp. It's available April to July."

Divine: "Divine is a crisp, crunchy and juicy apple with a firm texture and an attractive 'traditional' apple appearance that yields to a surprisingly new flavor," says Nelley. "It's available May through October."

Ambrosia: "Ambrosia's skin is smooth, with a bright, almost iridescent pink blush," says Nelley. "The flesh is tender and juicy, with a very fine, crisp texture. It is a sweet, low-acid apple with a pleasing aroma. It's available June through September."

Eve: "This sweet, tangy apple with a superb white flesh contrasting with a bright red skin makes a stunning color-break at retail," suggests Nelley. "Refreshing and spritzy, Eve boasts excellent shelf-life and is available May through October."

Pacific Rose: "A delicate, crisp apple with a rosy red skin and crunchy white flesh, this apple is sought after in Hispanic and Asian neighborhoods," says Nelley. "It's available May through September."

Tentation: "A cross between Golden Delicious and Grifer, Tentation has a distinctive golden yellow color, often showing a fine pink blush," explains Nelley. "With a firm and juicy flesh, the high sugar level is balanced with the acid content to provide a sweet and tangy eating experience. It's available June through August."

Honey Belle: "The diminutive Honey Belle is a petite, yellow-green pear with red blush," says Nelley. "It's perfect for snacking — it's crunchy, sweet, and picked ready to eat. Availability is mid-March through May."

Velvetine: "A medium-sized, green pear with yellow undertones and slight russet, Velvetine is silky smooth and sweet with a slightly tangy burst of flavor, reminiscent of citrus," states Nelley. "It's available in July and August." **pb**

Pump Up Promotion

The season presents a wide window for promotion. "Promotions can be run often July through October," says Monaghan of DNE. "Expanded displays are helpful so consumers can recognize when certain varieties are in peak season and at their best flavor. The multiple varieties of Australian summer citrus available July through October have made it possible for retailers to keep the promotion line-up fresh."

Connecting consumers to growers down-under also yields rewards. "Clearly label the country of origin and provide strong images from that country," suggests Worthington. "Tell the story! Consumers love to connect with where their produce is coming from."

"Grower interaction with consumers at the store level has been a big push," agrees Giumarra's Bushong. "Putting a face with the fruit we sell really makes an impact with consumers, especially when it's the family farmer. There is a real connection, and that connection drives sales."

Stores can use technology-linked programs for easy connection to consumers. Oppenheimer's Woodyear-Smith explains, "During the past two seasons, Zespri sponsored a highly integrated promotional campaign called Kiwi for Kids. Supported by innovative social media components, shoppers competed by U.S. region to earn donations for local philanthropic entities dedicated to promoting healthy eating and helping kids combat obesity."

POP activities such as demos and good POS material also drive sales. "We have seen great success in taste testing, department place settings, and the continued education on the health attributes and alternative uses of the products we sell," reports Bushong. "This includes using strategic POS materials and visually appealing, well-placed displays to focus attention on the product."

"Use in-store demonstrators that speak the 'local language' and/or have good knowledge of the country and the product," says Worthington. "Growers from Australia/ New Zealand often go to the United States early in the season to see how their fruit is being received. This is a good opportunity for consumers to meet with the real suppliers."

"We tailor promotional opportunities to retailers' needs," explains Monaghan. "In the past, we've supported contests that offer trips to Australia, tie-ins with other complementary products, and even demonstrations with Australian growers who traveled here to just to talk about the great eating experience of Australian citrus." **pb**

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GRAPE TOMATOES
GRAPE TOMATOES

The arrival of spring grapes announces winter is over, and thus, consumers clamor for them.

Fundamentals For Spring Grape Profits

A short season can have a big payoff for prepared retailers. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Spring grapes may have a short season but can be long on profits. "The sales generated by spring grapes are very important for the department," says Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., a Reading, PA-based chain with 43 stores. "Grapes turn a lot of sales and when you promote grapes it increases distribution. It's a key category."

"Spring grapes are a high-margin, fast-moving product, with excellent demand and promotion opportunity," says Gonzalo Avila, general manager of Malena Produce, Inc., headquartered in Nogales, AZ.

"It's limited time to capture extra sales," adds Marc Serpa, director of domestic grapes for The Oppenheimer Group, based in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. "This year, the spring grape deal offers a great opportunity to make up for revenue lost during the Chilean season."

Spring grapes represent an opportunity to create fresh excitement in produce. "They bring the excitement of the start of a new crop being harvested," says John Harley, sales manager at Bakersfield, CA-based Anthony Vineyards.

"Spring grapes announce winter is over," adds Veronica Kraushaar, managing partner with VIVA International Partners, Inc., headquartered in Nogales, AZ, and representing several growers and shippers of spring grapes since 1996. "They are well received and respond well to aggressive promotions."

Freshness is the crux of the spring grape deal. Jim Llano, account sales manager at Castle Rock Vineyards, located in Delano, CA, points out, "Spring table grapes provide one of the season's first fresh fruit items entry back onto retail store shelves. The emphasis in spring grapes is on production locality and closer, faster transportation times to U.S. markets, which translates to freshness."

Jim Pandol, president of Pandol Associates Marketing, based in Selma, CA, explains, "Chilean grapes have passed their optimum freshness period by the time we get to May, so it's time to switch production areas."

"In the spring, Chile's product is winding down, is old on the vine and is still traveling a long distance," maintains Jerry Havel, director of sales and marketing for Rio Rico, AZ-based Fresh Farms. "With our season, retailers are looking at about 24 hours from

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Table Grape Seasonality Chart

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
RICHARD BAGDASARIAN, INC.								
Red Seedless Table Grapes								
Green Seedless Table Grapes								
Black Seedless Table Grapes								
BRAVANTE PRODUCE, INC.								
Red Seedless Table Grapes								
Green Seedless Table Grapes								
Black Seedless Table Grapes								
Red Seeded Table Grapes								

Note: For specific variety availability, please contact growers.

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For grape availability and outstanding sales support, contact:

Richard Bagdasarian, Inc.
Mecca, CA
760.396.2167
nbozick@mrgrape.com

Bravante Produce, Inc.
San Joaquin Valley, CA
559.638.5075
ron@bravanteproduce.com

www.sunkist.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANTHONY VINEYARDS

time of harvest to time of pick up, providing a much fresher product."

Short Season

The short season of spring grapes makes for an exciting marketing opportunity for retailers who can harness the potential. "The season starts fast and the volume of the harvest goes just as fast," states Harley. "You must be ahead of the harvest when talking to suppliers."

"The season is short, focused and with high demand, so prepared receivers should be placing orders well ahead of time," advises Kraushaar.

Depending on weather conditions, the season starts around the end of May and continues through early July. "We will start our harvest of California spring season table grapes right around May 15th, with Flame Seedless being the first harvested," reports Harley of Anthony Vineyards.

Southern California (the Coachella Valley) and Mexico are the principal suppliers of spring table grapes. "Traditionally, the Hermosillo district in the state of Sonora, Mexico, starts the week of May 5th and normally finishes around July 8th," reports Havel. "Both Mexico and California compete during that time frame. Starting time is weather-dependent, but traditionally, they start within a few days of each other."

Behind The Color

Grape sales are more about color than specific variety, and consumer preference may vary. "We have a large selection of all colors of seedless table grapes available," says Harley. "The spring deal consists of strong varieties like Flame Seedless and Sugraone."

Serpa shares, "According to Freshlook Data, during the 2012 spring grape season, varietal popularity is somewhat regionalized. Green grapes performed very well in California, while red and green grapes were equally strong sellers in other western states. Red grapes dominated most other areas."

The spring deal ushers in popular varieties to the marketplace. Havel states, "Chile closes its season with Crimson Seedless and we start with Flame Seedless, which is traditionally a more popular red grape. It is available through the whole season."

"Our opportunities for imported organic grapes during the winter months have been virtually non-existent due to the fumigation requirements. That typically means customers are willing to pay a bit more for them, and volumes can be strong right out of the gate."

— Matt Landi
New Leaf Community Markets

There are three different varieties of green grapes throughout the short season. Havel explains, "We start with Perlette, a smaller size green seedless. Then we move into a Sugraone or Superior. Usually the Sugraone is a larger berry and sweeter than the Perlette. Also, we grow a grape called Prime, which comes off the same time as Perlette, but offers a sweeter taste and bigger berry size. There are currently two growers in Mexico growing the Prime and we happen to be one of them."

Mexico increasingly offers a good supply of black grapes. "The black grape Summer Royal starts around the second to third week of May," adds Havel, detailing, "It's a black seedless and is very popular with big size and great taste. We have another Chilean variety called the Black Unknown. It is available usually around the first week of June and is comparable to Summer Royal in size and taste."

The last grape variety harvested in this period is the seeded Red Globe. "It is very popular in overseas markets for export, as well as domestically here in the United States," states Havel.

Newer Varieties

Growers and marketers continue to seek out new varieties and products. "Summer Royal is showing promise as a new red variety," says Castle Rock's Llano. "Autumn Royal also shows promise as a new black in both regions."

Anthony Vineyards' Harley reports, "There are some new plantings of Scarlet Royal, a red seedless, which should be available for shipment in the middle of June, but these will be limited as far as supply."

Pandol Marketing has started a Sweet Babies line of grapes. "These are grapes grown with a focus on flavor intensity," says Jim Pandol. "It has been a niche market, but it has been growing into mainstream retail and catching on there."

Keep your eye on the horizon for Heirloom varieties. "The Perlette has a reputation it does not deserve," states John Pandol, special projects manager for Delano, CA-based Pandol Brothers. "Growers in other parts of the world have destroyed the reputation by picking too early to cover the programs of inflexible buying organizations. A sweet Perlette is a fabulous tasting grape but has a tendency toward ambering. Sonora does a good job. If the American consumer pays for ugly Heirloom tomatoes...why not Heirloom grapes?"

Organic Potential

Organic grape sales are another growing opportunity. According to Matt Landi, produce director for organic-focused New Leaf Community Markets, a seven-store chain based in Santa Cruz, CA, "There certainly has been an increase in availability for both early season as well as late season organic grapes. It's

tough to quantify because it varies from year to year, especially since springtime weather can be a bit more finicky."

"The availability of organic grapes that we will have through the spring harvest is increasing," says Harley.

Spring organic grapes end a long awaited hiatus for organic consumers. "Customers tend to be ready, especially for organic spring grapes," says Landi. "Our opportunities for imported organic grapes during the winter months have been virtually non-existent due to the fumigation requirements. That typically means customers are willing to pay a bit more for them, and volumes can be strong right out of the gate."

"We are downsizing the 2-lb. bags. We repack some of our grapes into smaller 1-lb. bags and it has increased our sales. There are a lot of customers who are intimidated by two pounds, especially elderly and single-person households. We've gained a lot of impulse sales by offering a 1-lb. bag."

— Dick Stiles
Redner's Markets Inc.

Organic grape availability parallels conventionally grown. "We have the same varieties available in organic as we do in conventionally grown grapes," confirms Harley. "They mirror the harvest of conventional."

Landi adds, "We see red and green seedless varieties out of both Mexico and California. We see lesser amounts, but increasing, of black seedless."

Rethinking Packaging

Though grape packaging leans strongly toward bags, other options are on the rise. "The principal pack is still the bag, but we do pack some clamshells," says Harley of Anthony Vineyards.

"Most of the grapes we sell are packaged in the traditional plastic bag," says Landi. "Although the trend toward clamshells has certainly been popping up a bit, it hasn't really taken hold on the organic side. The only exception to this is with a few specialty varieties."

"Clamshells containing one, two, and three colors are still relevant and highly effective for in-and-out specials, though fixed-weight packs represent less than 10 percent of grape sales during the spring," reports Oppenheimer's Serpa.

Suppliers increasingly offer multiple packaging choices. Fresh Farms' Havel says, "The traditional zipper bag is very popular, but we also do clamshell in 2- and 4-lb. option. Increasingly popular is the handle bag. It's an attractive, high-graphic bag with a handle."

Options for convenience and better presentation may increase sales. "I have seen the most excitement last year in high-graphics bags and bags with handles on them sometimes called Carry Bags," says Jim Pandol of Pandol Associates Marketing.

"The clear, less opaque plastic used in the stand-up bag provides a better visual of the grapes," acknowledges Llano of Castle Rock.

Side Note

KEY TIPS FOR BUILDING GRAPE SALES AND PROFITS

If handled and merchandised well, spring grapes bring in profit and set the stage for summer fruit sales. "Spring grapes represent great volume, great quality, and excellent taste, all in a short amount of time and an excellent formula for successful promotion," says Jerry Havel, director of sales and marketing for Fresh Farms, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ. "It's also a great time of year because springtime weather promotes eating grapes."

"Spring grapes are the opening show for the table grape season," says Jim Llano, account sales manager at Castle Rock Vineyards, based in Delano, CA. "Successful retail sales and well executed promotion of spring grapes will set the stage for the balance of the summer table grape deal."

"Among fruit items at retail, grapes are third behind only apples and bananas in terms of purchase frequency," reports Marc Serpa, director of domestic grapes for The Oppenheimer Group in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. "Since they are suitable for everything from special occasions to snacking, shoppers are always looking for quality grapes. Stocking them consistently and promoting them regularly throughout the spring will drive sales."

The brisk dynamic of the deal, however, requires retailers to be informed and prepared. "The season comes and goes quickly," says Gonzalo Avila, vice president of Nogales, AZ-based Malena Produce, Inc. "Maximize profit by planning procurement early and minimize late-season shrink with effective, aggressive merchandising."

"You must be aggressive with spring grapes," asserts Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., a Reading, PA-based chain with 43 stores. "You must know your timing and plan promotions accordingly — not too early and not too late."

Tip 1: Build Big And Visible Displays

While each retailer must work within their own confines of size, it's a given that larger, more prominent displays sell more. Llano states, "Given the impulse nature of fresh table grapes and the excitement of the first of the season, spring grapes should be prominently displayed with large, ample displays of mixed colors: reds, greens, and blacks."

"The bigger, the better, because this is the first time in many months where a fresh, new crop of grapes is available for sale," says John Harley, sales manager at Anthony Vineyards, based in Bakersfield, CA.

Secondary displays and creative signage also add to sales. "Research shows that displays of at least 25 square feet devoted to grapes generate the largest dollar lifts per store," reports Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the Fresno-based California Table Grape Commission. "A primary grape display should be located in the front of the produce department and secondary displays should be created to drive additional sales."

"We advise retailers to build a Season Schematic for grapes because the varieties come in one by one and quickly," suggests Veronica Kraushaar, managing partner with VIVA International Partners, Inc., headquartered in Nogales, AZ. "Retailers should promote coming attractions, with, for example, an "Arriving Soon: Red Flames!" message or similar, via ads and POP right before a new variety kicks in. This builds anticipation for the next one and gets the consumer to think multi-variety."

Tip 2: Ensure A Good Product

A crucial part of a good display is quality and maintenance. "You have to maintain the display throughout the day," says Redners' Stiles. "You must clean up the shatter, spruce it up and keep it restocked because people throw the bags around. If you have good quality and the grapes look nice and taste great, you'll get repeat sales."

"Shoppers definitely buy with their eyes," says Plummer. "Grape displays need to be abundant, fresh, and well-maintained."

Stores should keep updated on the newest product coming in and change displays accordingly. "As older varieties look a bit worse for wear, remove them and rotate, rotate, rotate displays," advises Kraushaar. "Fresh is crucial!"

If displaying both bags and clamshells, retailers should follow practices to gain maximum shelf-life. Plummer explains, "To reduce shrink for bagged displays, place grapes on non-refrigerated displays up to 24 hours or on refrigerated displays up to 48 hours. For clamshell grape displays,

merchandise grapes on non-refrigerated displays up to 48 hours or on refrigerated displays up to 72 hours."

Tip 3: Provide Variety

Retailers should stock and promote multiple colors and varieties. "Multiple-variety grape promotions produce the greatest lift in volume and dollars on the grape category," reports Plummer. "Since research shows that promotions of five or more varieties produce the greatest lift on sales, retailers should have at least that many varieties on display."

Variety choice for consumers essentially breaks down into color. "Retailers should offer at least two colors — red and green seedless — and three when the black seedless becomes available," advises Harley of Anthony Vineyards. "The longer they can offer a good quality consistent grape, the more opportunities they have to keep customers happy."

"Varieties in this particular case don't mean as much as focusing on color," adds Stiles. "We focus on white and red seedless grapes. The price breaks and promotional amount available seem to be in white and red. We throw black seedless whenever we can into that group. Merchandising all the colors together creates more sales."

Jim Pandol, president with Pandol Associates Marketing, based in Selma, CA, reports, "Market research has shown that having multiple varieties and colors increases sales per unit of shelf-space. Our Pandol Family Farms Sweet Babies line gives an additional dimension to the grape category. It is something different that adds variety and interest to the category."

Tip 4: Play With Pricing

Retailers can count on strong pricing options for spring grapes. "Selling by the pound is the most typical way to move grapes," says Oppenheimer's Serpa. "Grapes are a destination item as opposed to an impulse item, and a significant driver of sales and profit for the produce department."

Spring grapes present a lot of flexibility with pricing. "You don't necessarily need a rock-bottom price," states Redner's Stiles. "Because it is springtime and they're available you can get a decent retail on them. If you build a display in the front of the department and you're promoting, people gravitate to it and will buy the grapes."

However, retailers will want to present a fairly perceived price to customers. "Grapes priced between $1.20 and $2.79 are perceived at a good price for consumers," states Plummer of the California Table Grape Commission. "Research shows that consumers feel grapes are a bargain at $1.20 per pound, reasonable at $1.70 per pound and begin to seem expensive at $2.80 per pound."

Following production volume will help retailers adjust pricing. "Though one ideal pricing strategy may be illusive if you follow the production curve, the month of June would be the best time to promote due to the increase of production," says Harley.

Tip 5: Capitalize On Ads

There may be no better example of a perfect ad opportunity than spring grapes. "During the spring time frame, there isn't a week we don't advertise grapes," says Stiles. "As long as they're available, we keep pushing them."

"We only have an eight-week season and there are a lot of grapes produced in that timeframe," says Havel of Fresh Farms. "This is a large promotable volume in a short time. It's a good time to set up ads in advance."

Prominent ads will yield better results. "Front page ads will deliver the best lift on sales especially when the California origin is mentioned in the ad," says Plummer.

"We make a big splash in the paper with advertising to create excitement," reports Redner's Stiles. "Back-up advertising by keeping product in prominent displays and having good quality."

Organic volumes even permit ads. "As organic volumes have gone up, our opportunities for an early ad or two have as well," says Matt Landi, produce director for organic-focused New Leaf Community Markets, a Santa Cruz, CA-based chain with seven units. "This can be particularly true as the Mexican and California supplies have overlapped a bit creating a stronger overall availability and driving prices down. However, the bulk of our ad opportunities on grapes don't appear until later on in the summer and fall months."

Tip 6: Watch The Timing

The fast, furious season can be tricky if not managed closely. "Most retailers start too early and finish too early," says John Pandol, vice president of special projects at Pandol Brothers in Delano, CA. "The peak of season is loading May 25 to July 5 — the 40 days in the desert. This year, June has five weekends. Retailers should plan ads during the peak, all five June weekends and the first two weekends of July."

"Volumes usually begin to become significant by the third week of May, so producers and retailers can look to Memorial Day promotions," suggests Llano of Castle Rock.

"We anticipate some volume for Memorial Day promotions even though the holiday falls earlier than usual this year," says Tom TW Wilson, grape manager at The Giumarra Companies, in Los Angeles, CA. "Memorial Day will take place on May 27, instead of May 30 or 31. Peak volumes will be the last week in May and the first two weeks of June."

"One of the best opportunities to really promote is in the month of June," agrees Harley. "This is when we will start the peak of the harvest."

Tip 7: Look For Creative Promotion

Think beyond price and volume to get customers excited about spring grapes. "Because the new varieties follow each other into the market, we recommend retailers inform their customers before the arrival," says Gonzalo Avila, vice president of Malena Produce, Inc., in Nogales, AZ. "For example, signage saying, "Flames: Fresh from the Field Next Week!" is very effective."

Avila continues, "We ask our customers what they prefer to do to maximize the short season. Some chains do well with in-store demos and tastings; others like secondary and even tertiary displays to capture the impulse shopper," he reports. "Still others like us to work with their in-house nutritionist or consumer affairs personnel to develop a nutritional or recipe campaign."

Consumer advertising also supports sales. "Promotion and mentions on Food Network television, Food Network online, and in *Food Network* magazine drive customers to purchase grapes," says Plummer. "Traffic radio is available for retailers when advertising California grapes on the front page or multiple varieties of grapes. Consumer and category research presentations are available to help retailers learn more about grape consumers and how to generate more grape sales."

"Tell the grower's story using QR codes or POS material that enable the shopper to feel more connected to the producer," suggests Oppenheimer's Serpa. **pb**

"Consumers are savvier in their consumption of produce and expect more information of the product and provider. Graphics and details on the bags can provide this."

— Jim Llano
Castle Rock Vineyards

"Consumers are savvier in their consumption of produce and expect more information of the product and provider. Graphics and details on the bags can provide this."

"Many retailers report increased sales with the new stand-up gusseted-style bags," reports John Pandol of Pandol Brothers. "The secret behind the secret is these bags don't lend themselves to being double-stacked, which reduces damage, but also requires more frequent stocking."

Redner's has had success with an innovative idea in packaging. "We are downsizing the 2-lb. bags," explains Stiles. "We repack some of our grapes into smaller 1-lb. bags and it has increased our sales. There are a lot of customers who are intimidated by two pounds, especially elderly and single-person households. We've gained a lot of impulse sales by offering a 1-lb. bag."

Havel adds, "We currently do a 1-lb. pouch bag for one customer."

Customizing pack sizes and presentations may be a future trend. "One size no longer fits all and so we are responsive to customer profiles," states Malena's Avila. "For example, in some larger ethnic markets, they prefer bulk presentation. Other chains want smaller packs. Some of the higher end chains like multi-variety packs or a showcase bag."

"Innovative suppliers have developed Grab n' Go pack options that highlight the high snackability of this item," reports Viva's Kraushaar. "With the highest snack-usage ratio in fresh fruit, helping consumers find multiple occasions to enjoy grapes is key." **pb**

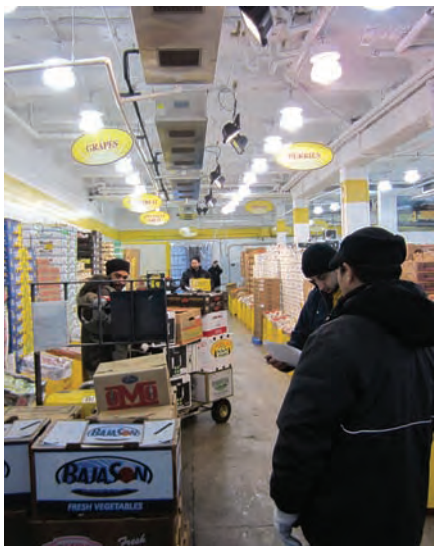
The Power Of Produce At The Ontario Food Terminal

Providing Canada's changing demographics with plenty of fresh produce, the Ontario Food Terminal proves its staying power.

BY NICOLE BRAYSHAW BOND

The Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto, Canada, runs like a well-oiled machine. With 5,000 registered buyers, 21 warehouse tenants, 400 farmer's market tenants and 50 office tenants, it is the largest wholesale fruit and produce distribution center in Canada, and the third largest in North America. Roughly 5.4 million pounds of produce move through it every day, and it serves a vast geographical area from Fort Albany in the far north of Ontario to Windsor in the south — and even further into the U.S. northeastern states — and as far west as Thunder Bay, while as far east as Newfoundland.

The men who run the businesses are hardy, enthusiastic, independent entrepreneurs. But they also know that they need each other, and that the market as a whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. What are the common denominators of all these companies? Talent, belief in innovation, and ability to change with the times and the market.



Innovation In Value-Added Produce

Time and convenience are key factors in guiding produce consumers' buying habits, and the Food Terminal continues to meet the need. "Innovation is how we survive; we are constantly changing," says Jeff Hughes, president of Gambles Ontario Produce, Inc.

Joe DaSilva, vice president of terminal operations for Ippolito Produce Ltd., reports the company is offering five varieties of soup kits.

"We are testing out four new products right now," reveals Vic Carnevale, president of Veg-Pak Produce Ltd.

At Fresh Taste Produce Limited Canada, Julian Sarraino, vice president of marketing and sales, says, "We offer custom-packaging, to meet the unique requirements of each customer."

Working with and saving consumers time by doing the preparation for them works for Nick Arrigo, in sales of F.G. Lister & Co. Ltd.: "Chopped food is a big trend. Chopped packaged lettuce is big. There used to be no market, but now there is a huge one."

Vince Carpino, president of Tomato King, observes, "People prefer shucked corn in packaging. Cooking with these products is just as quick as prepared food or picking up take-out."

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Jim Gordon, Joe DaSilva and Kuldip Sandler – Ippolito Produce Ltd.

Vic and Rick Carnevale – Veg-Pak Produce Ltd.

Terminal has seen many changes in the city that surrounds it. "Twenty years ago, the produce was all European," says Vic Carnevale, who notes that Toronto's multicultural market is part of a sweeping trend. "There are big changes in the whole food industry now that people eat ethnic food all the time," he points out. "It's important to cater to all ethnic groups."

In Toronto, that's a tall order. Over 5.5 million people live in the Greater Toronto Area, and it is one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The city of Toronto welcomes about one-quarter of all immigrants to Canada, and over half its population was born outside the country. Toronto speaks over 140 languages and dialects, and 200 distinct ethnic origins were identified by residents in their response to the 2006 Census; 47 percent had a mother tongue other than English, with the top five languages being Chinese, Italian, Punjabi, Tagalog/Pilipino, and Portuguese.

Nick Arrigo identifies specific market changes: "Lately, Indian and Asian specialties have taken over Italian produce. A multicultural market also revolves around many different important calendar dates and festivals, each with its own specific culinary requirements and preferences, which means lots of sales opportunities where they may not have existed before," he points out.

During Christmas and Holiday season, the market serves a diverse group of ethnicities that celebrate different holidays. As Richard Rose, vice president of Gambles Ontario Produce, sums up, "Our customers' needs drive change."

Veggies Gone Viral: Media Influence On Produce Trends

Kale. That one word evokes the power of media influence in consumer buying behavior when it comes to produce. Danny Simone, buyer for Stronach & Son, explains, "Only a few years ago, kale was used almost exclusively as a garnish and added to extend salads and cooked greens. Inexpensive, and preferable to lettuce for its deep color and resistance to wilting, nobody actually expected it to be eaten. The picture, however, is quite different today."

Kale appears in everything from chips to smoothies; it is featured on web recipe sites and high-end restaurant menus alike. Kale has always been high in nutrients and fiber, but it's never been fashionable, and demand is soaring... for now.

"The media drives food trends," says Tomato King's Carpino. "Take The Food Network, for example. When they feature recipes with

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certain ingredients, they fly off the shelves."

Veg-Pak's Carnevale agrees. "People want to follow what the chefs on TV are doing, and we have to stay on top of demand." The next fashionable produce item is already out there, waiting for a celebrity chef endorsement, cable and web distribution, and virtually instantaneous social media spread. But fashion is notoriously fickle, whether in produce or in automotive or clothing trends, and having the skills and technology to stay on demand can be an extra challenge to the industry.

"Knowledge is so important. We now invest a lot in information technology," says Gambles' Hughes.

A challenge can also be a blessing: a constant stream of changing trends, in combination with a diverse and knowledgeable customer base, can be healthy for the bottom line. Carnevale acknowledges, "We are lucky Canadians want something unique when it comes to their food."

Nick Arrigo – F.G. Lister & Co. Ltd.

Lorie Goldfarb – Morris Brown & Sons Co. Ltd.

Vince Carpino – Tomato King

"The Heartbeat Of Things"

That's how Fresh Taste's Julian Sarraino describes the Market, and he has lots of support from his fellow merchants. "Pride is evident on the Ontario Food Terminal, but it's rooted in connection. It's a very competitive marketplace, but we all manage to get along with one another," he says.

That connection operates on many levels. Relationships are apparent within each individual business. Like Carnevale says, "Others run businesses like a corporation. I like to run it like a family."

This special relationship is evident as you see Terminal employees interact with their customers. Hughes says, "Customers push us. They get as involved in our business as we do in theirs."

There's also a noticeable connection

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Ted Kurtz and Danny Simone – Stronach & Sons Inc.

Julian and Christian Sarraino – Fresh Taste Produce Canada Ltd.

Andy Ientile, Joe Fortunato and Vince Bruno – Italian Produce Co. Ltd.

between businesses. Lister's Arrigo points out, "The houses here help each another...if you are short, another business will sell to you."

After all, as Ted Kurtz, president of Stronach, puts it, "The finish line is the same for all of us."

The structure of the Terminal itself is a study in connections, both internally externally with the community. The Ontario Food Terminal is owned and operated by the Ontario Food Terminal Board. The Board runs the terminal 24 hours a day, seven days a week with a total of 36 staff. Including tenants, buyers and suppliers, more than 100,000 people have jobs thanks to the existence of the Market.

Information sharing is a major way the Food Terminal business people connect with one another. "We call the Food Terminal the University of The Queensway," says Christian Sarraino, vice president of sourcing and procurement for Fresh Taste.

Gambles' Hughes adds, "Everyone talks. There are no secrets."

"We all have a passion for the business and work well together," says Kurtz.

The value of connection is a major asset to the Food Terminal. Hughes acknowledges, "Business must be win/win. Win/lose does not make you successful."

A Focus On Local And Independent

"The farmer's market complements all of our businesses here," says Bruce

A FOOD TERMINAL FIRST: Fresh Fest

While the businesses of the Terminal have always supported charitable causes, Fresh Fest was an event without precedent in the Ontario Food Terminal's 58-year history. "We opened to the public for one day and it was very successful," says Joe DaSilva, vice president of terminal operations for Ippolito Produce Ltd. Held on September 22, 2012, Fresh Fest was an opportunity for the general public to find out firsthand how the Ontario Food Terminal works and meet the produce specialists who work year-round to provide them with the best and the freshest.

"We enjoyed participating in Fresh Fest," says Vince Bruno, vice president of Italian Produce Co. Ltd. "We gave away lots of free products. The best thing is that people from the outside learned where their produce comes from."

A family-friendly event, Fresh Fest was attended by over 3,500 people. They toured wholesalers' showrooms as well as the outdoor farmer's market, attended cooking demonstrations, and feasted on fresh salad buffets and Ontario corn on the cob.

Fresh Fest raised awareness of the Food Terminal's role in produce distribution and promoted the health benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables. It also raised funds for FoodShare Toronto, a non-profit community food organization that spends more than $1 million annually at the Market to provide 141,000 students with healthy meals. Formed in 1985 to address hunger in Toronto communities, FoodShare's mission is "Good Healthy Food for All."

Fresh Fest was such a success — with the public, the media and the Food Terminal participants — that the next one is already in the works, thanks to The Ontario Produce Marketing Association, the Ontario Food Terminal Board and the Toronto Wholesale Produce Association. **pb**

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Richard Rose, Rob Giles, Rick Ashford and Jeff Hughes – Gambles Ontario Produce

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Nicholas, general manager of the OFTB. The Food Terminal is home to 400 farmer's market tenants, who provide local fruits, vegetables and floral products. Ontario growers can sell on a daily basis or apply for a stall on an annual or semi-annual basis, which allows greater flexibility. In season, Ontario farmers arrive at the Terminal from as far north as Cold Water, Leamington to the west, Kingston to the east and Fort Erie to the south, all in an effort to sell their goods to buyers.

Many warehouse businesses, like Ippolito, also carry local produce. DaSilva points out, "Farmers often don't want to do the selling, so companies like ours take care of that for them. They can concentrate on what they do best — growing."

Many types of businesses buy at the Food Terminal: local fruit and vegetable stores; independent and chain supermarkets; retailers; restaurateurs; foodservice companies; caterers; farmer's markets; farm gate markets; florists; garden centers; landscapers; convenience stores and institutions.

The Terminal makes it easy for independent stores to shop. Besides an enormous variety of product choice, "We allow flexibility; stores can buy in smaller amounts," says Veg-Pak's Carnevale.

The nature of the produce business creates philosophers, comics and social commentators out of the tenants and employees of Food Terminal.

Joel Ippolito, president of Ippolito Produce Ltd., brings an open mind and a sense of humor to every situation, admitting, "The more I learn, the less I know,"

"This business is fun, and we are still having fun," says Gambles' Rose. **pb**

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE: Produce Family Heritage

In an industry defined by change, family heritage is rock-solid. At the Terminal, it's not hard to find company histories that proudly date from the 1930s. "We were raised in the industry," says Julian Sarraino, vice president of marketing and sales at Fresh Taste Produce Limited Canada.

"When we were kids, we would get pulled from school to get an order out," recalls Christian Sarraino, Julian's brother, and vice president of sourcing and procurement for Fresh Taste.

Some, like Joel Ippolito, president of Ippolito Produce Ltd., grew up on a farm. Their experiences are not unique: many at the Terminal are produce people, born and bred. **pb**

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Dutchie's Fresh Market: Bringing Europe To Ontario

Fresh produce from around the world, impressive displays and active social media sites are just a few of the reasons customers love the Dutchie's Fresh Market experience.

BY NICOLE BRAYSHAW BOND

Mike Renkema has reinvented the definition of his family's produce business. From the time he was 4 years old, Renkema's life revolved around fruit and vegetable markets. "My father sold the crops from our Woodstock area farm at the St. James Farmer's Market," he recollects. "I was always so excited to go — I would even pick out special outfits to wear!"

Renkema took over the family business when he was 19, and since then, hasn't lost any of his enthusiasm. Twelve years later, he still loves his store and the produce business, and it shows.

His store, named Dutchie's because of its interest in all things European, is a refreshing alternative to the big box stores and chains that dot the Waterloo, Ontario landscape. The difference is obvious, and Dutchie's is a great example of what makes independent stores special. One main reason is the emphasis on produce: "I love the fresh local market atmosphere that we create in our stores, and I know that the quality of a store is seen primarily in the quality of its produce," Renkema says.

Renkema is able to maintain his high standards by getting produce from local farmers, and because he comes from a farming family, this comes naturally to him. "It is important to me to work with local producers." He cites the Ontario Food Terminal as an indispensable resource. "The Food Terminal is great because I can shop from all over the world; it feels like you are traveling to those countries to shop."

This diversity is especially important to him because of the European feel he creates in his store, which his customers crave. "I get the freshest and best produce from everywhere," he says. "I can pick and choose daily, and my customers love that."

And it is not just the produce that is important, but also the way it is displayed. He is especially proud of his signature: the pillar of apples he creates in the store. Customers who visit Dutchie's get very excited to see what unique visuals the store will come up with next.

And who can blame them? Recently, Renekma worked closely with Julian Sarraino, vice president of marketing and sales for Fresh Taste Produce Ltd. Canada, a wholesaler on the Ontario Food Terminal, to create a display of Moroccan Clementines, possibly the world's largest. In an effort to promote the store and the recent imported fruit, which many customers may not be familiar with,

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Renkema and his employees used 160,000 pounds of Fresh Taste's brand of Moroccan Clementines to create an enormous display of stacked crates in the parking lot of the store. Sarraino confirms it's the largest display of Clementines he has ever seen at a retailer, so large, in fact, it can be seen from the road. At press time, the store was waiting for confirmation from the *Guinness World Records* that the display was officially the largest one in the world.

What Renkema is doing is working. Since taking over the business, he has tripled his sales and boasts a staff of 72 employees. "Quality, service and consumer confidence are key," he says. He doesn't want to be everything to everyone — the big box stores can do that. Renkema's commitment is to doing what he does well.

Being young gives Renkema a grip on social media. Dutchies' Facebook page is as lively as his store. Every day, the business posts several informative and friendly messages. "Lip smacking delicious!" and "Try our succulent pork side ribs brushed in a cranberry garlic rum preserve from The Garlic Box!" are just a couple of the recent posts. Dutchie's Facebook followers are just as keen to post about their shopping experience. Comments like these appear regularly: "The best customer service...great place to shop...!"; "Really worth the drive to Dutchie's ... service, quality, price are exceptional, and the smiles are free!" and "Love love love this store!!!!!"

But Renkema isn't resting on his laurels. "I have lots of plans for the future," he says. "In my next store, I want to create aisles based on European countries, and fill them with products to match." Sounds like only good things to come at Dutchie's. **pb**

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10 Ways To Sell More Sweet Onions

Covering all consumers' expectations with a variety of SKUs and helpful serving suggestions will bring year-round success to the sales of your sweet onions. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEYSTONE FRUIT MARKETING

Thanks to a solid import program, sweet onions are available virtually year-round.

Sweet onions have taken out the "cry" and put the "buy" in the onion category. Industry experts peg sweets as the major driver where they accounted for 28.8 percent of total onion dollar sales during the 52 weeks ending January 26, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh-food-consulting firm. That means sweet onions alone contributed nearly 1 percent of the 3.3 percent of the total produce department dollar sales onions generated during this same time period.

Mike Maguire, produce director at Market Basket, a 69-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, acknowledges, "Sweet onions have seen tremendous growth in the past five years, while sales of yellow cooking onions have dropped. Today, we sell sweet onions by the trailer-loads."

1. Meet Demand With Supply

Consumer demand for sweet onions is on the rise, says Scott Schuette, director of produce operations for Bashas' Family of Stores, headquartered in Chandler, AZ. "Many customers are finding that their taste buds favor the taste of sweet onions over the sharp contrast of regular onions. Popular restaurants are making sweet onions a hit by showing how versatile they really are. From the popular Bloomin' Onion appetizer, to the many main entrees using sweet onions, the consumer is exposed to more options on how to use them."

Barry Rogers, president of the Sweet Onion Trading Co., in Melbourne, FL, says, "This year, demand is outpacing supply and we see the trend holding steady until at least May. The reason started with Peru having a crop in which bulb size was down from 30 to 50 percent. Smaller bulbs mean lower yields and less units shipped to market."

John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce, Inc., in Reidsville, GA, adds, "Because of the increased demand over the years, sweet onions have become a year-round commodity with growing regions throughout North and South America to meet supply needs."

Reflecting this availability, Bashas' stocks both domestic and imported sweet onions year-round, according to produce buyer, Darin Eastridge, who details, "This includes bulk Vidalia, Oregon Hermiston Sweet's, Texas 1015's, Peruvian, OSO Sweets and Walla Wallas. We also promote a 5-lb. bag of Arizona-grown sweet onions."

However, like most agricultural products, sweet onions do have peaks and valleys in availability throughout the season. Matthew Curry, president of Curry & Co., in Brooks, OR, acknowledges, "There are times when demand exceeds supplies and other times when supplies exceed demand. Sweet onions are more perishable than regular onions, so there's always a sense of urgency to make sure you have the right promotional programs in place to sell through your peak periods."

2. Call Out Truly Sweet Onions

One of the biggest obstacles currently facing the sweet onion category is the labeling of domestic Grano-variety cooking onions as sweet onions to capture a premium price at retail, especially during the fall and winter months. Shuman asserts, "These varieties do not share the same sweet and mild flavor profile or the familiar flat, Granex shape consumers recognize from Vidalia and Peruvian sweet onions."

Marty Kamer, vice president of Greencastle, PA-based Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., agrees, adding, "Despite the fact that year-round sweet onions have evolved into a mainstay in the produce department, there continues to be a lot of imposters — onions that are labeled sweet, but fail to meet consumer expectations and destroy consumer confidence, ultimately slowing the sales and profits for everyone."

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"Something as simple as a small sign with a description of the product, its flavor profile, and some suggested uses goes a long way toward helping consumers recognize value."

— John Cameron, Bland Farms

Yet there is a sizable field of shippers who keep taste as the main focus of their programs. Sweet Onion Trading Company's Rogers points out, "Some growers try very hard to grow an onion with a superior taste and some use third-party pungency labs to help guide the process in varietal selection. These are the shippers responsible for growing this category."

Beyond grower/shippers, there's a need to educate retailers and consumers alike on this relatively new category. John Cameron, director of sales for Bland Farms, in Glenville, GA, says, "Through research that we conducted with the Nielsen Perishables Group, we found that retailers who treat sweet onions as another conventional onion fail to capitalize on the revenue and margin that a focused sweet onion program achieves."

"One way to do this," recommends Curry and Co.'s Curry, "is to take advantage of local and regional sweet onions when they're available and make consumers aware of them. Display space is critical, and distinguishing sweet onions from other types certainly increases sales. We provide our customers with year-round sweet onion charts so they'll know what sweet onion variety we have available next, and we'll work on a plan together for the promotions," he adds.

Peri & Sons Farms, in Yerington, NV, has gone one step further by educating consumers directly via its Onion Obsession Club. Shoppers who join receive regular news, information and sweet onion recipes via e-mail.

3. Satisfy The Organic Shopper

Sales of organic sweet onions make up a small percentage of overall sales, says Bland's Cameron. "For the most part, there tend to be more organic yellow onions on retailers' shelves than organic sweets. Most of our organic sales come during the Vidalia sweet onion season," he says. "However, in our opinion the segment is increasing. We've received more requests for organic sweet onions from retailers because consumer demand for organic fresh produce is on the rise and retailers recognize the revenue potential."

Teri Gibson, marketing and customer relations manager for Peri & Sons, reveals, "About eight percent our sweet onion crop is grown organically. We are looking to expand this."

4. Bigger Isn't Always Better

The movement on bulk jumbo sweets has flattened, according to David DeBerry, director of category management for onions at Edinburg, TX-based Crescent Fruit & Vegetable, LLC. "This is due to a lack of active floor-level promotion at the retail level," he says.

A jumbo sweet onion is one SKU among many offered at Market Basket. Others include 2-, 3- and 5-lb. bags of medium-sized sweet onions. Maguire notes, "As long as the pricing and availability are there, many customers prefer the mediums because they represent a value, especially if they're just going to cut them up anyway. This has really helped the sweet onion category grow."

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Most retailers carry two sizes. "It's because there are smaller onions in the bag and larger onions in bulk," explains Curry. "It's important to have bags and bulk available as this gives consumers a choice between a value pack and hand-picking individual bulk items."

Size of sweet onions sold also varies by the merchandising strategy of individual retailers. Derrell Kelso, Jr., owner and president of Onions Etc., in Stockton, CA, notes, "Upper-income stores usually sell bulk large jumbos or colossals. Middle-income retailers sell bulk large jumbos or colossals and a 2-lb. bag of medium-sized sweets. Low-cost selling retail stores sell 2-lb. bags with mediums. A lot of Hispanic retail stores don't sell sweets at all."

5. Don't Handle Like Hardware

Sweet onions need to be handled with more care than their conventional cousins. "The higher water and sugar content makes a sweet onion more susceptible to bruising and also makes for a shorter shelf-life," explains Bland Farm's Cameron.

Retailers can reduce shrink with proper storage, maintaining temperatures of 45 to 55° F with 70 to 75 percent relative humidity and good air circulation, details Shuman Produce's Shuman. "Don't store onions in plastic bins or use plastic pallet wrapping that prevents good air circulation," he warns. "It's also important to keep the onions dry and separate from items like potatoes and other produce that give off moisture. Be sure to place them a foot or more away from walls and other pallets to maintain proper air flow."

Onions Etc.'s Kelso points out that it's important to realize that imported sweet onions come in at 34°F in order to eliminate mold formation during the three-week transit. Importers then take the onions out of the container and put them in a cooler at the same temperature. "When you give your importer an order, give them two to three days notice," he suggests. "The handler should take the onions out of the cooler, put them under huge fans where they can be dried and warmed. After drying, the handler will pack them for you. If you bring the onions out of cold storage and put them on your racks at store-level, you're going to have wet onions that will mold, and the shelf-life will be cut from one to two weeks to four to six days," he warns. "Distribution centers must rotate sweet onions three times a week."

At store-level, Shuman advises, "Handle onions carefully to ensure that they are kept from bruising when placed on displays. Never throw, toss or drop bags or boxes, and don't dump sweet onions into display bins. Bulk sweet onions should be piled carefully onto displays and bags should never be stacked over five feet high." Should you find any sweet onions that are bruised, cut or already rotting, remove them immediately, he adds. "It's possible that they could negatively affect others around them."

6. Offer Assorted Pack Sizes And Styles

According to Crescent Fruit & Vegetable's DeBerry, the real growth over the past 18 months has been in packaged sweets. "From less than two percent a few years ago, we are now probably close to 15 to 16 percent of all sweet sales in consumer packages," he estimates. "Consumer packages of two, three and four pounds seem to be on the rise."

Packaging has become a popular place for growers to tell the story of their operation as well as their product. Cameron reports, "QR codes are becoming a popular on-pack addition and are a great way to engage consumers by directing them to web pages filled with product and company information. Recipes, best usage occasions, storage tips, and food

PHOTO COURTESY OF BASHAS'

safety information are all relevant pieces of information that make for great additions to any type of packaging."

7. Build Impulse-Grabbing Displays

The display strategy for sweet onions at Bashas' is simple and effective. Schuette details, "We offer sweet onions next to the regular onions as an important color break, but also to create a destination place for all related products. All onions, garlic, shallots, dried onions, and onion ring batter mixes are displayed together. One of our recent success stories for merchandising sweet onions has been with the use of tote bags. Why sell them one onion when you can sell them an entire tote bag?"

It's important to always remember that displays drive sales. Shuman Produce's Shuman asserts, "The best way to promote sweet onions is to display them in a large, noticeable, central location in the produce department."

Nothing says, "Buy Me!" like big, prominent bulk and consumer bag display. Keystone Fruit Marketing's Kamer adds, "End caps, stand-alones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift."

Kathy Fry, director of marketing for the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee, in Walla Walla, WA, acknowledges, "Sometimes it's the smaller retailers and independents that do the best and most creative job of building a display with our onions. Larger retailer chains are often restricted in what they can do, and I think this is a missed opportunity."

Market Basket features secondary displays of sweet onions. Maguire reveals, "Ninety percent of the time we'll also display them near the salad section. This assists with marketing by letting customers instantly know how they are best used."

"At Bashas'," adds Schuette, "portable 4- by 4-ft. display bins are a great way to get sweet onions in the front lobby where customers walk enter the store."

Display signage is another crucial element necessary to draw customers' attention to sweet onions. Bland Farm's Cameron shares, "Research has shown that two-thirds of consumers rely on in-store signage or package information to identify sweet onions. Something as simple as a small sign with a description of the product, its flavor profile, and some suggested uses goes a long way toward helping consumers recognize value."

Onions Etc. offers its new Poppa Sweet Onion Store Signage Calendar. "With a global market, consumers often get confused about what is in season," explains Kelso. "We have seen a tremendous progression of customer knowledge and understanding with this signage."

8. Cross Merchandise To Boost Basket Ring

The potential for cross merchandising with sweet onions is unlimited at the retail level. Identifying good product complements is critical. Crescent Fruit & Vegetable's DeBerry says,

"Tying sweet onions in with cookouts, salsas and other ethnic dishes along with seasonal recipes like soups, stews and spring salads has provided positive feedback."

Cross-merchandising sweet onions with avocados, tomatoes and mushrooms are a great way to increase category sales. Another great combination is onions and peppers. According to research commissioned by Bland Farms from the Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts Shopper Insights for the 52 weeks ending May 19, 2012, sweet onion buyers are 5.6 times more likely to have peppers in their basket than the shopper who doesn't purchase sweet onions. Cameron remarks, "These items are often featured together in recipes, so it makes sense to merchandise them together when possible."

9. Sell The Good-For-You Qualities

The mild flavor of sweet onions makes them easy to add to a variety of dishes. Peri & Son's Gibson contends, "This can help consumers to meet the MyPlate recommendation to fill half their plates with fruits and vegetables."

Sweet onions are a great source of Vitamin C; they're also sodium-, fat- and cholesterol-free. Curry states, "We feature some of these benefits on our packaging so it's easy for the consumer to find. In addition, these are a lot of great points retailers can use in their merchandising materials."

"Signage around the product, social media posts, and healthy recipe recommendations that include sweet onions are great ways to convey the nutritional benefits of sweet onions," adds Bland Farms' Cameron.

10. Promote — It's Not Just About Price!

"At Bashas', sweet onions are promoted with a strategic rotation of feature print ads that do not conflict with regular onion ads," explains Schuette. "We only feature sweet onions by themselves in promotional print ads. When lower cost prices dictate more regular onion print ads, we'll place sweet onions on a temporary price reduction to help ensure movement and turns."

Bashas' Eastridge adds, "Customers will prefer sweet onions over regular onions if the retail price is close."

"Since dependable supplies are available year-around, I think twice monthly promos are a sound idea, and many retailers are doing that to some degree," says Crescent Fruit & Vegetable's DeBerry. "It may not always be in print, but even at the store level a lot can be done with the different SKUs."

Georgians Believe Vidalia Onions Is The Standard By Which Others Compare

BY BILL MARTIN

Not a lot of vegetables have the name recognition of Vidalia sweet onions, and those who market this product grown in Southeastern Georgia take full advantage of a reputation that has been built and nurtured for decades. However, as John Williams, sales manager for Lyons, GA-based L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, says, "The name Vidalia can only take you so far. You have to have the quality." Continuing, Williams notes the Vidalia onion industry has done a great job of promoting the name, and admits the company, to some extent, "piggybacks on the job that's been done over the years of marketing the Vidalia name."

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce Inc., of Reidsville, GA, says it all starts with the onion variety itself, combined with the coastal region's sandy, loamy soil and favorable weather conditions. "If you are located two hours north of here, the climate is too cold, and if you are two hours south of here, the climate is too hot," he explains. He notes over the past 20 years different varieties of sweet onions have been introduced to the marketplace, but the Vidalia is consistently a sweet onion. "Onions grown in Peru are about as close to Vidalia sweet onions as we've found," he says.

Adam Brady, Shuman's marketing coordinator, adds, "We're very heavily invested in the Vidalia Onion Committee's *Sweet Vidalias Flavors of Summer* program and have created our own promotional programs that tie in and build upon the campaign, adding value through additional content and offers available only through the RealSweet brand."

At Hendrix Produce in Metter, GA, director of sales, Johnny White, says when folks compare sweet onions, the comparison is with Vidalia sweet onions. He adds this onion is the flat-shaped Granex variety. "Retailers like the classic Vidalia shape and color and want it year-round, he states. "I've had retailers tell me that, but some others stress price more and some prefer just domestic sweet onions."

Danny Ray is an owner in Ray Farms of Glennville, GA, who was recently named "Grower of the Year" at a recent event sponsored by the Vidalia Onion Committee. He unabashedly calls Vidalias the sweetest of sweet onions and "the leader of the pack."

President Steve Roberson of Roberson Onion Co., of Hazlehurst, GA, agrees, adding, "It is the taste factor separating Vidalia onions. It is still the best, although Peruvian sweet onions are close," he notes.

At Bland Farms of Glennville, GA, director of sales, John Cameron, states, "Vidalia sweet onions are a premium product with attractive margins for retailers. We know through our research, sweet onion consumers spend 32 percent more per year, on average, in the store than those that do not."

CROP DIVERSIFICATION

While it seems most Vidalia sweet onion growing operations have diversified their crops over the years as a hedge against poor markets, quality problems, etc., Bland Farms remains an exception. Cameron states, "Our focus remains entirely on sweet onions. Others have experimented and done well with other crops, but we're solely committed to sweet onions. We will continue to invest in finding the best ways for our customers to increase their sweet onion category sales."

As part of this strategy, Sarah Seebran was recently promoted to director of marketing, while Greg Smith was named the company's new marketing communications manager.

At L.G. Herndon, Williams says the company is expanding its imports of Peruvian sweet onions. "We doubled our imports of Peruvian onions from 2011 to 2012, and this year we are looking to increase it between 25 and 50 percent," he says. The company also handles sweet onions from Mexico.

At Roberson Onion, Brent Bryson, who joined the company about two years ago, has been promoted to sales manager. He points out that while Vidalias remain its biggest items, Roberson began handling North Carolina sweet potatoes a couple of years ago, and is also involved with blueberries out of Florida, Georgia and North Carolina.

Sweet onions remain at the core of the business at Shuman Produce. Its impressive growth in recent years not only features peak volume with Vidalia onions in May and June, but also provides a market window for national distribution from April until Labor Day. The company has a year-round onion deal, and in addition to Vidalia, is one of the largest importers of Peruvian sweet onions, as well as offering onions from Chile, Mexico, Texas and California.

Ray Farms has planted a few more red onions this year, known as Sweet Georgia Reds, which has a little later start than Vidalia sweet onions — around May 10-15. **pb**

Beyond price, Curry & Co.'s Curry recommends a three-prong promotional approach. "First, promote that they are here. For example, 'The Vidalia Sweet Onion season is here now. Enjoy the best sweet onions available.' Secondly, promote during the season: 'Vidalia Sweet Onions are at the peak of their season. Enhance your favorite burger, salad or entrée recipe with the great flavor of Vidalia Sweet Onions.' Thirdly, promote urgency at the end of the season, such as 'Buy your favorite sweet onion, Vidalia Sweet Onions, now before they are out of season!' By creating different messages during the season, you are always giving the consumer a reason to buy."

The Vidalia Onion Committee, headquartered in Vidalia, GA, will kick off its new *Taste of Summer* promotion starting in May, according to VOC's executive director, Wendy Brannen. "Our new annual program will feature summer-centric promotional partners such as Johnsonville Sausage, the National Mango Board and Gourmet Garden, and involve elements that include a consumer contest for best recipes and outdoor entertaining ideas, national public relations outreach, food blogger outreach and more," she describes. In addition, the VOC promotion will include themed packaging; POS materials such as bins, bin toppers, posters, shelf tags and price cards; and a retail display contest that will run from May 4 to August 1.

Bland Farms Cameron concludes, "The industry does a great job of focusing on the opportunity that Vidalia brings, but there are seven other months of the year to capture great sales and margins by getting just as excited about Peru Sweets, and regional programs like our Empire Sweet onions out of New York. We need to increase our focus on those seasons outside of Vidalia to fully capture the revenue potential of the sweet segment." **pb**

New And Colorful Tomato Varieties Pop Up In Produce

Wide ranging tomato variety sparks interest in the category. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

There's a type of tomato for every consumer, and retailers should stock a number of different SKUs to please them all.

Merchandising fresh tomatoes in retail food stores has taken on a new look. With tomatoes available from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe and other regions, retailers can promote tomato selections all year long. Once only field-grown tomatoes were available. Now new growing areas, and hot house and hydroponically grown varieties have expanded the market with greater tomato availability 12 months of the year. Round red tomatoes and mature green ones dominated the market. While they are still leaders today, tomatoes in odd shapes and sizes and in shades ranging from yellow to rich brown are diversifying produce displays. The growing array of tomato varieties is no longer found just in upscale markets. Retailers everywhere are enticing customers with bigger and more varied tomato offerings.

According to a 2011-revised report from the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center at Ames-based Iowa State University, a national information resource for value-added agriculture, per-capita consumption of fresh tomatoes has been increasing in recent years. Average per-capita consumption in 1981 was 12.3 pounds and it steadily increased to 18.5 pounds in 2008, according to the USDA Economic Research Service. Use of tomatoes in salads and sandwiches, improved varieties and a growing population of immigrants with preferences for high vegetable diets are some of the reasons given for the increase. Tomatoes have also been marketed as a nutritional food, promoted as a good source of vitamin C, vitamin A and antioxidants and a possible preventative against specific cancers. With the increased concern over obesity, interest in the health values of tomatoes should only increase.

Non-Refrigeration Is A Priority

"To maintain the tomato's flavor, keeping it between 50 and 55º F outside of the refrigerator is one of the most important things in handling tomatoes," says Dick Spezzano, president of Monrovia, CA-based Dick Spezzano Consulting Service.

Adrienne Young, marketing/communications associate for Sacramento, CA-based California Tomato Farmers, a cooperative composed of members whose field-grown tomatoes are grown for or by The DiMare Company, Gargiulo, Inc., Live Oak Farms, Inc. and San Joaquin Tomato Growers, strongly recommends merchandising tomatoes on non-refrigerated dry tables. "Cold temperatures destroy the flavor," she warns. "Tomatoes should also be rotated, keeping the bright red product toward the front. Display tomatoes stem-up to prevent bruised shoulders and remove bruised and over-ripe tomatoes daily."

"We carry a wide variety of tomatoes and never refrigerate them," states Fabrizio Casini, director of produce and floral at Hiller's Markets, an eight-store chain headquartered in Southfield, MI. "They are usually displayed in the middle of the produce department."

Round Field-Grown Tomatoes Provide Important Foundation

"With so many new items entering the marketplace, the tomato category is the most complex and competitive category in the produce department," asserts Samantha Daves, director of education and promotion for the Maitland-based Florida Tomato Committee. "Florida tomatoes' versatility makes them quite unique and valuable at the same time for busy moms trying to plan nutritious meals. Since field-grown Florida tomatoes provide such versatility to shoppers, as well a solid foundation contributing to the growth and strength of the tomato category, it is important that retailers keep them readily available in their merchandising mix."

A new variety of the large, round, red tomato, Tasti-Lee, has been developed at the University of Florida. It is notable for its potential as a vine-ripe harvest with great flavor. It

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has a high level of health-promoting lycopene and rich red color inside and out, with a firm texture and juicy flesh. It was recently demonstrated in-store at ShopRite stores in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

"Our product, the field-grown tomato, is set apart in the tomato category by its meaty texture," says Young of California Tomato Farmers. "It's great for slicing, dicing and stuffing. California has the perfect growing conditions for field-grown tomatoes: warm days and cool nights provide just the right temperatures."

Tony Smith, merchandising manager at Harveys Supermarket, a 73-unit chain in Nashville, GA, reports, "Slicing tomatoes are big business for us because of our southern location. When we have slicing tomatoes on ad for 99-cents a pound, we create a big display of the tomatoes in a six-pack. In addition to that, we always have a loose, bulk display. We do find we need to be careful of bruising the fruit in our displays."

Eli & Ali's Organic and Specialty Produce, a Brooklyn, NY-based importer, packer and distributor, offers a wide variety of tomatoes. "One we specialize in is the round, field-grown Beefsteak tomato, both red and yellow varieties," details Peter Kroner, director of business development. "Everything we market is under our label and every tomato carries a label. We've found that Beefsteak tomato in-store demonstrations and promotions with Beefsteak tomato waterfalls are very effective."

New Flavors, Shapes And Colors Tempt Consumers

Today's consumers are finding that while they can enjoy the attributes of the round field-grown tomatoes, they can also appreciate the wide selection of other tomato varieties, which add interest and flavor to their menus and may be used in different ways. "Tomatoes are about half our business and we handle all the different varieties, including being the exclusive distributor of the tomatoes from Santa Sweets, Inc., headquartered in Plant City, Florida," shares Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA. "Our emphasis is on flavor, and we find that the vine-ripened tomatoes seem to be more flavorful. We are always working to improve what we do and trying new tomato items is part of that process."

According to Harold Paivarinta, director of sales for JemD Farms, located in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, "The specialty and snacking tomatoes are the fastest growing segments of the category. Variety and flavor is what today's consumers are demanding, and we've made it our top priority. We continually scour the globe in search of varieties that push the flavor envelope."

"We carry five different tomato varieties, including organic," shares Jay Sizer, director of produce for one of 21 Rosauers Supermarkets Inc., in Spokane, WA. "Tomatoes on-the-vine are the most popular with our customers."

Village Farms, headquartered in Eatontown, NJ, a marketer of greenhouse hydroponic grown tomatoes, has several exclusive varieties with unique qualities, according to Douglas Kling, senior vice president and chief sales and marketing officer. "First and foremost is the Heavenly Villagio Marzano, know for its old-world flavor and incredible taste," he says. "This authentic Mini San Marzano variety was developed and trialed with our seed/genetic partners in the Netherlands. We believe it will expand in a dynamic manner within the next two years, due to its exceptional flavor and shelf-life."

Growing and marketing a wide variety of tomato types, Mastronardi Produce Ltd, based in Kingsville, Ontario, Canada, has a greenhouse dedicated to research and development and trial more than 200 different varieties annually year. "We successfully bring to market at least one to three varieties each year," reports Nancy Pickersgill, event planning and communication manager. "Our Sunset Campari brand cocktail tomato continues to be our signature tomato, with its true tomato flavor."

Retailer And Supplier Cooperation Is Key

Merchandising tomatoes can be both exciting and challenging with the many varieties offering new shapes, colors and package innovations. "There are differences among retailers and among their individual stores so that no one system fits all," declares Feighery of Procacci Brothers. "We like to work with our retail partners on their merchandising efforts, but believe there is a fine line in how we do it. We have suggestions to share with them, but they know their markets and what has been successful, so we certainly do not tell them how it should be done. We are ear-marking money for special customers for in-store promotions that we believe will help move the product."

One successful program for the company and its retail partners is selling Uglyripe Heirloom and grape tomato plants in the spring. "It's up to the retailer where to position the plants — in floral or in produce," adds Feighery. "We think the promotion works well in the center of the produce department, where customers can purchase the ready-to-eat tomatoes and then take a plant home to grow some tomatoes themselves. It provides a beautiful display, and

Field-grown stacks up nice

Nearly seven in ten Canadian shoppers believe that there is a difference in taste between hothouse and field-grown tomatoes, and of that group, the majority believe that field-grown are superior.

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Leger Marketing, California Tomato Farmers Canadian Consumer Survey (Online) July 10th, 2012

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the aroma of the plants is very appealing."

"Application ideas and serving suggestions are paramount to the successful launch of new tomato products," explains Paivarinta of JemD Farms. "For example, a brown tomato may not be the most eye-catching or visually appealing, but when you tell its story and provide serving suggestions to connect with customers, success is all but assured. A lot of our new labels peel back to provide recipe ideas. We've been receiving an overwhelming amount of positive feedback via our website from consumers thanking us for introducing the new varieties to the marketplace."

"Tomato displays should resonate with consumer demographics, whether it's based on a specific recipe, locally grown products, promoting a health message, or a particular local event," reminds Kling of Village Farms.

Hiller's Markets sometime sells a variety of tomatoes marked with the same price. "We like this promotion because there is no confusion," states Casini. "Consumers like it, too, and it helps assure the correct ring at check out."

That is an advantage Spezzano sees with the hot-house-grown tomatoes. They are high flavored and the packaging helps maintain the correct ring at check-out. It also offers a surface for marketing messages, and usage information or recipes. "It provides a great way to get out messages to consumers, such as the risks of refrigeration," he adds.

In addition to seeking out new and unique tomato varieties, Mastronardi looks into packaging trends, sustainability and what stands out on retail shelves. "Our signature line, comprised of brand leaders like Campari and Kumato (a dark brown to golden green tomato) provide customers with recipe suggestions on top of the label," Pickersgill points out. "Equipped with an innovative three-ply label, the interior panel contains brand-specific nutrition information, and the third panel contains information to further distinguish the item."

Locally Grown Tomatoes Remain Popular

Locally or regionally grown tomatoes are increasingly being incorporated into retail tomato merchandising plans. "We look for the locally grown tomatoes and really consider Florida tomatoes, as well as those grown in Georgia, in our promotions," states Smith of Harveys Supermarket. "We actively support the programs of the Georgia Department of Agriculture during the locally grown tomato season."

Some markets are finding that highlighting local growers really hits home for customers. Consumers like to have more information about where and how their tomatoes are grown.

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Heirlooms: What's Old Is New

Heirloom tomatoes, especially the Beefsteak, have become increasingly popular with greater availability. The Heirloom tomato, sometimes called a Heritage tomato, is a non-hybrid (open-pollinated) Heirloom cultivar of tomato. It is known for its taste, and believed by many to be better than the modern tomatoes. It does have a shorter shelf-life than the newer varieties, and lacks a genetic mutation that gives a uniform red color so the colors of the fruit will vary.

Probably one of the best-known heirlooms is the UglyRipe, so called for its wrinkles and misshapen appearance. The fruit is hand-picked and hand-packaged into individual foam sleeves to protect the delicate skin. The tomato has a meaty beefsteak flesh with a hearty flavor. Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., in Philadelphia, PA, is the exclusive distributor of the UglyRipe tomatoes from Santa Sweets, Inc.

The Heritage Beefsteak tomato marketed by JemD Farms, located in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, has visual characteristics similar to an UglyRipe or Heirloom tomato, with backyard flavor and good shelf-life. Eli & Ali's Organic and Specialty Produce, in Brooklyn, NY, also offers a selection of Heirloom tomatoes among its organic and traditional tomatoes. Village Farms, headquartered in Eatontown, NJ, includes Heirloom tomatoes in the products grown on its owned and operated facilities in Texas and British Columbia.

Fabrizio Casini, director of produce and floral at Hiller's Markets, an eight-store chain in Southfield, MI, shares, "Heirloom Beefsteak tomatoes are one of the most popular tomatoes with our customers." **pb**

Sampling is also a drawing card, especially during the locally or regionally grown season. Hiller's Market promotes tomatoes many times during the year, including featuring locally grown items during the summer months.

Organics Are An Important Facet Of Tomato Merchandising

Organic tomatoes have grown in popularity during recent years. Where to display the organic varieties seems to be a merchandising question that varies with the individual markets. Sizer of Rosauers reports his organic tomatoes are displayed in a separate organic section.

It is more difficult to merchandise organic and regular tomatoes when they are sold in bulk, due to the regulations defining the separation that is necessary. When bulk tomatoes and packaged ones are displayed together, you do not have the same problems. Studies show that selling all the tomato varieties together, when possible, is best for sales. When the tomatoes are not packaged, some markets display regular tomatoes on the bottom shelf with the organic ones arranged above, according to Spezzano.

"We sell the organic tomatoes in both places," reports Casini of Hiller's Markets. "We have some with the conventional varieties and we also offer some in the organic section. That way, we reach both the customer who shops only for organic produce and the one who may prefer organically grown items but likes to compare prices, appearance and selection," he explains.

"There seems to be a debate around consumer awareness and choice regarding organic, locally grown and U.S.-grown tomatoes," acknowledges Fried De Schouwer, president of Greenhouse Produce Co., in Vero Beach, FL. "All of these options, in addition to the availability and competitive positioning within the supermarket environment, creates an interesting challenge. This is an ongoing produce debate that somehow remains mysterious."

Cross Merchandising Adds Interest And Builds Sales

Cross merchandising with tomatoes can often be an effective way to move more than one produce item. "The red color of Florida tomatoes is eye-popping to shoppers when they are placed in displays alongside the contrasting green of peppers, limes, fresh cilantro and avocados," details Daves of the Florida Tomato Committe. "We have tear-off 3 x 5 recipe pads with an adhesive back that sticks right to the display, which is perfect for a secondary display."

"The opportunities to cross merchandise with tomatoes are endless," states Paivarinta of JemD Farms. "Tomatoes pair well with every protein and vegetarian/vegan meals. Participation in recipe demos is something we actively pursue. For an example, we worked with bacon, bread and lettuce companies in *Build a Better BLT* promotions. We market tomatoes year-round so we believe cross-merchandising with holiday menu or barbecue items can be winners for the produce department."

California Tomato Farmers thinks cross-merchandising displays should be built with the customer in mind. What other products are the customers purchasing? If they are buying lots of limes, avocadoes and cilantro, make shopping easier by placing tomatoes close to those items. "Whole Foods does a good job of merchandising their field-grown tomatoes," says the company's Young. "You often see fresh Buffalo mozzarella and basil next to the tomatoes. It makes shopping easier for the customer."

According to Casini, Hiller's Markets like to cross-merchandise tomatoes with cucumbers and other salad ingredients, along with deli items, such as mozzarella cheese for Caprese Salads.

Mastronardi has found working with retailers, suppliers and other industry professionals has led to some cross-promotions with tomatoes. "We are working with a dressing company to launch a spring promotion," discloses Pickersgill. "We've also worked with a sea salt company, Buffalo mozzarella cheese and olive oil companies in the past."

Retailers Get Merchandising And Educational Support

To help retailers move more fresh tomatoes, many suppliers provide merchandising support. Village Farms has recipe cards, banners, wraps and various POS materials that are broad-based or can be developed specifically for a retail customer and/or a special theme. The Florida Tomato Committee can provide promotional posters, shelf cards and recipe cards for tomato promotions.

Mastronardi offers bin shippers and display-ready units that are easily shipped and assembled. "Recently, we have patented our new Zima and Kumato pop-up display box," shares Pickersgill. "The bottom of the box has a perforated header card that can be punched out and affixed to the side of the box as a display header. This is a convenient way to have a ready-to-display box equipped with a header to write in pricing or product features."

Having a well-trained and knowledgeable staff is key to successful retail merchandising programs. Tomato suppliers recognize this and many work with retailers to help increase the expertise of their staffs. The Florida Tomato Committee has a retail kit called "Ten Steps to Grow Your Tomato Category Sales." The kit was developed from a combination of several research projects completed over a two-year period. The California Tomato Farmers provides its Canadian retail customers with color charts that help when ordering, storing, handling, or merchandising fresh tomatoes. **pb**

The March Of The Mushrooms

Mushrooms of all varieties continue to have a strong showing at restaurants across the nation. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

PHOTO COURTESY OF USC DESIGN STUDIO

Following the idea of "swapability", the University of California has created a burger that combines both meat and mushrooms.

To say that mushrooms' appearance on restaurant menus are increasing doesn't begin to tell the whole story. These favorite fungi are listed on the menus of 69 percent of operators, up from 67 percent in 2009, according to the *Mushrooms on the Menu* study published by Foodservice Research Institute (FSRI) on August 29, 2012, on behalf of The Mushroom Council, in San Jose, CA. What's more, 48 percent of chains list a dish with mushrooms, followed by 52 percent of non-commercial establishments such as colleges and universities, and 74 percent of independents. The numbers only get better! This same report reveals that approximately nine out of 10 casual eateries include mushrooms on their menus, while mid-scale chains lead the pack by offering as many as eight mushrooms items, with fast-casual chains a close second with seven selections that include mushrooms.

Stefano Cordova, executive chef and senior vice president of food and beverage innovation for Au Bon Pain, a fast-casual bakery café chain in Boston, MA, explains what makes mushrooms attractive to chefs. "It's all the different kinds and versatility," he says. "They elevate the rest of the food on the plate; they work well with a variety of ingredients. Then, there's the umami factor. It's the icing on the cake."

From Tried-And-True To What's New

Mushrooms appear on restaurant menus most frequently in a prepared entrée (22 percent) and center of the plate (18 percent), followed by on pizza (14 percent) and in sandwiches (11 percent), according to the FSRI report.

True to trend, Bertucci's, a 95-unit casual Italian-themed chain based in Northborough, MA, offers Grilled Chicken Marsala with roasted white mushrooms in the sauce as an entrée, a new Roasted Mushroom and Asiago Pizza that is topped with Portobello and white mushrooms, and for lunch, a rustic-style sandwich with a grilled Portobello, fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, field greens and basil mayonnaise tucked into an oversized toasted roll.

Jeffrey Tenner, vice president and executive chef for the Bertucci's Corp., says, "We also serve Garlic and Herb Roasted Mushrooms as a small plate offering or as an entrée add on.

According to Kathleen Preis, marketing coordinator for The Mushroom Council, "Growth categories for mushrooms are pizza, breakfast foods and soups."

Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms, Inc., in Watsonville, CA, can attest to the huge growth of mushrooms in QSR chains. "Virtually all of them have some type of mushroom burger, whether it's a regular menu item or limited-time offer, and it's been a big success for them," he says. "Breakfast is now the big growth area. Some chains are moving beyond the typical sausage biscuits and experimenting with items such as breakfast burritos made with cheese and mushrooms. We're even seeing more fresh mushrooms on omelet bars in colleges and universities."

Au Bon Pain added a new mushroom-based soup to its line-up late last year. Its Harvest Mushroom and Wheatberries soup features Portobello and white mushrooms. The chain also offers a Wild Mushroom Bisque made with Oyster, Shiitake and white mushrooms.

J.V. 'Joe' Salvo, president of Ponderosa Mushrooms & Specialty Foods, located in Coquitlam, B.C., Canada, says, "We continue to see usage increase and evolve to include a more varied range of mushrooms on the menu. There's everything from a Portobello Mushroom Burger at Wendy's and A&W, to

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANTIQUE TACO

Mushroom usage is growing in Mexican cuisine, witnessed in the Market Mushroom Taco served at Chicago, IL-based Antique Taco.

Matsutake at fine-dining and Shimejji at the university level."

Many foodservice operators are expanding their mushroom repertoire with the use of medleys or blends that contain more exotic varieties such as Oyster and Shiitake. Paul Frederic, senior vice president of sales and marketing for To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms LLC Inc., in Avondale, PA, states, "Great applications for blends are in soups and sauces where they can enhance the overall flavor of the dish. A sautéed medley can be served over a baked potato, vegetable or center-of-the-plate protein."

Kevin Donovan, national sales manager for Phillips Mushroom Farms, in Kennett Square, PA, says, "Shiitake and Oyster mushrooms are moving beyond use only in Asian dishes to European and many other cuisines."

Virtually 100 percent of Asian and Italian dinner houses, casual theme/bar chains, pizza chains and family dining chains feature mushrooms, while 90 to 95 percent of steakhouses and seafood chains include the popular category, according to the FSRI report. Among independents, 100 percent of Italian, Cajun, southwestern, vegetarian, Irish, Mediterranean and Asian restaurants menu mushrooms. The lowest penetration is barbeque, Indian, Greek and Mexican eateries. However, The Mushroom Council's Preis points out, "The fastest growing cuisines for mushroom usage are in Mexican, South American and Caribbean food."

Examples of this include a Market Mushroom Taco served at Antique Taco, in Chicago, IL, that uses Crimini, Shitake and Oyster mushrooms. The Gaucho Grill in Brentwood, CA, offers a starter of white mushrooms sautéed with white wine, garlic and parsley, and Caribbean-themed Bahamas Breeze, a 33-unit chain based in Orlando, FL, serves Tostones With Chicken, an appetizer made with fried plantains, peppers, onions, cheese, tomato salsa and mushrooms, and a Jerk Chicken Pasta

where fresh asparagus and mushrooms are tossed in a Parmesan-herb flavored cream sauce.

Swapability is potentially one of the biggest future mushroom trends in foodservice. Bill Litvin, vice president of sales for Giorgio Foods, in Temple, PA, explains, "There is a lot of excitement about swapability, or the use of fresh mushrooms to enhance flavor and reduce the fat content of meat products like burgers. According to The Mushroom Council, several major chains are proving that they can now serve healthier versions of guest favorites without sacrificing taste. In addition, a recent study conducted by the University of California at Davis shows that many guests prefer the flavor of meat-mushroom blended concepts," he reports. "The swapability trend is evident in the new flatbread, taco, meatball, pasta and burger options appearing on menus that offer great-tasting meals for customers and potential cost savings for restaurants."

The Next Portobello

The wildly successful popularity of the Portobello mushroom in foodservice applications has prompted many to look for the next varietal hit. Yet many industry experts note Portobello sales are still in their prime. "The next Portobello is the Portobello," says Preis. "It is not yet totally saturated. It has a long way to go. Portobellos are the biggest, meatiest mushroom. They are the 'meat' in meatless. They can be stuffed, used in a sand-

The Hottest Mushrooms On The Menu

Here's a look at a few mushroom varieties and some of the ways chefs are putting them on the menu.

PORTOBELLOS:

- ***Red Lobster:*** Wood-Grilled Chicken with Portabella Wine Sauce
- ***Cosi:*** Stuffed Portobello Bowl
- ***Perricone's Marketplace & Café***, Miami, FL: Portobello Mushroom Torta

PORCINI:

- ***Chapeau!***, San Francisco, CA: Porcini Crusted Veal Sweetbreads (Oyster and King Trumpet mushrooms, baby carrots, turnips, truffle sauce, fried leeks and white truffle oil)

SHIITAKE:

- ***Cheesecake Factory:*** Vietnamese Shrimp Summer Rolls

TRUMPETS:

- ***Bistro du Midi***, Boston, MA: Celery Root Soup (chestnuts, Black Trumpet mushrooms, parmesan, bergamot)
- ***Bibou***, Philadelphia, PA: Escargots (snail ragout, Fava beans and Trumpet Royale mushrooms flavored with tarragon)
- ***Acadia***, Chicago, IL: Stonington Lobster (pommes dauphine, arancini, Black Trumpet mushrooms, sour cream pastry, carrots, Cippolini onions and bisque)

SHIMEJI:

- ***Gary Danko***, San Francisco, CA : Risotto with Lobster, Rock Shrimp, Shimeji Mushrooms and Butternut Squash

wich or on a burger. Restaurants that want to serve a double patty can use one burger patty and one Portobello 'patty.'"

Jane Rhyno, director of sales and marketing at Highline Produce, Ltd., in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, agrees, adding, "Our foodservice business has continued to see double-digit growth in Portobellos."

The key to making the most of Portobellos on menus is to look at expanded usages, suggests Monterey Mushroom's Caldwell. "At first, Portobellos were limited to stuffed caps and sandwiches," he recollects. "But now, chefs are now experimenting with new ideas and dishes. One application we've seen is cubed Portobello for use in soups, sauces and on skewers."

If there is indeed another variety waiting in the wings to capture some of the Portobello sales, it is the Baby Bella or Crimini. Gary Schroeder, president of Oakshire Mushroom Sales LLC, in Kennett Square, PA, shares, "The Crimini is being used in place of white mushrooms as a flavor-enhancer in dishes such as pasta and rice pilaf. They have the same meaty flavor of a Portobello, but are smaller, and thus more flexible and versatile to use."

Chef's Choice: Whole Or Fresh-Cut?

Au Bon Pain's Cordova prefers to source whole mushrooms, rather than sliced or diced, from foodservice distributors. "This gives us the option to use the mushrooms in a variety of ways," he explains. "Mushrooms aren't difficult to handle or slice; there's no special training required unless you're talking about wild mushrooms. In that case, we have someone who is specially trained to handle them."

There is a trend back to ordering whole mushrooms at foodservice, acknowledges Phillips' Donovan. "That's because chefs want to see what they are getting," he explains. "They want to check the quality and it's easier to do this with a whole mushroom."

Caldwell agrees, adding, "We primarily get foodservice requests for whole mushrooms, unless they're going to be used as a pizza topping or in a salad bar. Whole mushrooms offer the most versatility.

Yet, a fresh-cut product can offer advantages, notes Fred Recchiuti, general manager of Basciani Foods, headquartered in Avondale, PA. "For one, we're seeing chains make an investment in different styles of cuts either to enhance presentation or create a distinctive look. Examples are a wedge or angular cut. Second, a pre-cut product can reduce labor costs. Third, having us slice the mushroom for them can prevent food safety concerns such as

cross-contamination."

The time needed to prep and the cost of labor versus the incremental cost of purchasing a sliced mushroom is a key consideration. Rhyno adds, "Along with that, volume and usage need to be considered. Operators want to minimize shrink, so for a slower volume product that is used in multiple recipes, it might make sense to slice in-house to ensure they turn that product quickly, keep it fresh and reduce their shrinkage costs."

Promotions: Salads, Soups, Pizzas And Burgers

The Mushroom Council works with a number of foodservice chains to put mushrooms on the menu. One scrumptious outcome of this work is the new Spinach Power Salad introduced by Panera Bread, a quick-casual chain, headquartered in Sunset Hills, MO. The salad incorporates baby spinach, a roasted mushroom and onion blend, diced egg, Applewood-smoked bacon, frizzled onions and a smoky Vidalia onion vinaigrette.

At the end of 2012, Au Bon Pain added its first new mushroom product in four years with the introduction of its Harvest Mushroom and Wheatberries Soup. Cordova explains, "We were looking to develop a soup that had great flavor, and mushrooms came to mind right away because of the umami factor. We also wanted to incorporate a whole grain. We launched it on the menu as a promotion during the holidays and it was so well received that we've made it a regular item." Au Bon Pain advertised the new mushroom soup to its customers via a color photo on its menus and on-site POS materials, via an e-mail blast to customers, on its website and in other in-house marketing methods.

Last October, Bertucci's launched a three-month promotion that paired four of its newly developed health-conscious pizzas with four Samuel Adams-brand craft beer products. the most popular selection, a Roasted Mushroom and Asiago pizza made of Portobello and white mushrooms on a multi-grain crust with Asiago cheese and fresh sage, is roasted in the chain's signature brick oven. Tenner says, "The success of the mushroom pizza blew us away. It wasn't so much that is was mushrooms, but that it was a vegetable topping. The industry thinks that meat sells pizza. The mushroom sold 2:1 over the other three pizzas: Butternut Squash and Blue Cheese, Potato and Bacon, and Spicy Salami pizzas. Due to its popularity, we added the mushroom pizza to our regular menu."

The reason why Tenner created a pizza using

PHOTO COURTESY OF AU BON PAIN

Au Bon Pain's Mushroom and Wheatberries soup includes Portobello and white mushrooms.

Portobello and white mushrooms is that these two varieties were used in other dishes and already part of the chain's inventory. "It's our job as culinary professionals to use what we have and make it taste delicious in a new and different way," he explains. "We roast the white mushrooms with garlic, thyme, olive oil, salt and pepper, while we rub the Portobellos with olive oil, salt and pepper and then roast them. This way, we've built great flavor into the ingredients before we've even layered them on the pizza."

The swapability concept translated into a delicious success at the University of California, in Los Angeles, CA. Eric Ernest, executive chef of USC's auxiliary services hospitality, created a basic burger using a meat and mushroom mix. Ernest explains, "Through trial-and-error, we found that the best ratio for an 8-oz. burger was five to six ounces of Angus beef and two to three ounces of what we call our umami mushroom mix, or a duxelle of minced and sautéed Portobello mushrooms, onions, shallots and herbs. We used Portobellos because they have a meat-like texture. The result is a burger that is meaty, moist and flavorful with a good mouthfeel, but has 20 to 30 percent less fat and calories. There's a cost benefit, too."

The swapability burger was introduced at two of USC's dining locations, during the weekend USC hosted over 100,000 visitors for the *LA Times* Book Fair. One location featured the meat/mushroom burger topped with aged cheddar cheese and Applewood bacon on a Challah bun, while the other offered a mushroom/meat "Smash" burger, where the patty is smashed and cooked under a weight and had three variations: Applewood-smoked bacon and cheddar; a double patty burger topped with cheddar, bacon, guacamole, fried onion rings, lettuce and tomato; and a make-your-own burger option.

Success has inspired Ernest and his team to experiment by adding the mushroom duxelle to other meats. New burgers variations are in the works, too, like a mushroom and turkey Asian-style burger with Portobello French fries. **pb**

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PHOTO ON RIGHT COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS CORP.

Peel/reseal lids, children's size and packages designed to fit in car cup-holders are just a few of the trends hitting the market.

Convenience Is Key In Fresh-Cut Packaging

Packaging plays a principal part in decision-making for health-conscious consumers looking for on-the-go snacks.

COMPILED BY MADELINE MESA

As consumers continue their busy lifestyle, they are demanding fresh and healthful snacks that answer the call for convenience. Packaging is a key player in this game, and fresh-cut fruit and vegetable snacks have come a long way. Today, consumers can find fresh-cut produce in myriad varieties of handy packaging options, many of which are designed expressly for car cup-holders, can be resealed and even include eating utensils. No longer relegated to on-the-run lunches and snacks, time-starved consumers are also finding helpful products to use at home. Packages that go directly from the fridge to the microwave — some of which can even be used as a serving vessel — prevent messy counter tops and extended clean-up time.

PRODUCE BUSINESS talked to four experts in the field to get details on trends and R&D efforts in the field. They include: Kari Dawson-Ekeland, director of marketing, strategic programs for Sealed Air's Cryovac food packaging division, based in Elmwood Park, NJ; Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging, Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL; Noam Temkin, sales manager at Temkin International, Inc., located in Payson, UT; and Jack Tilley, market research manager for Inline Plastics Corp., headquartered in Shelton, CT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEAR LAM PACKAGING, INC.

PRODUCE BUSINESS: What are the latest trends in packaging for salads and value-added vegetables?

Kari Dawson-Ekeland: Trends in packaging for fresh produce remain similar to what we've seen over the past several years. If anything, customers' demand for packaging that enhances convenience is becoming more entrenched. A key component of this trend toward more consumer convenience is portioning. Consumers want help in proper portioning for meals, and demand for snack-sized portions is growing, as well.

We also continue to see demand for packaging that enhances meal preparation, most notably helping consumers with busy lifestyles save

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time in the kitchen. The average working American spends more time on the round-trip commute each day than preparing the family meal, even in this era when more meals are being served at home, compared to the period prior to the recent recession. Packaging that goes straight from the refrigerator to the microwave and that can be used as the serving vessel to further reduce kitchen clean-up time is growing in popularity. Sealed Air's Cryovac Simple Steps packaging for produce is one example of packaging designed to address these preferences.

Roman Forowycz: Current trends include packaging that addresses various market demands such as food safety, tamper evidence, recloseability, easy to use multi-packs and sustainability. The produce market is seeing more packaging with the peel/reseal lidding film system, which eliminates the need for traditional rigid lids and PVC shrink bands. The key benefits of peel/reseal are reduced trucking and warehousing costs, due to cubing improvements, and an easy-to-open container for consumers. We are also seeing growth in snap-apart style multi-packs for veggie and fruit snacks.

Noam Temkin: We are seeing trends that are focused on consumer convenience. We are seeing smaller individual snack packs in many value-added vegetable programs. We see retailers that are pushing for grab-n-go options. We are seeing packaging transform and serve multiple purposes. It is a vehicle for transportation; a means for the retailer to scan the item; a billboard for media; a means to extend shelf-life; a way to educate consumers about the origin of their produce, and much more. QR codes, websites, recipes, and information about the produce you are buying is on almost every value-added package. The trend is taking us further in that same direction. Technology is changing to allow the consumer to have complete traceability of the food they are consuming and that information is being carried on by packaging. Packaging is designed to be more direct to the target audience. We are seeing grab-n-go specifically designed for children. The price war of how cheap can we sell

produce is changing to a competition of differentiation via packaging.

Jack Tilley: We are seeing more cut-fruit and vegetables being offered in car-cup-size containers. This is in response to consumers' desire to have options for healthy snack items in convenient packaging for snacking on the go. We have seen interest for both retail and processor customers for Inline's tamper-resistant car-cup containers.

PB: Are retailers demanding any particular packaging for fresh-cuts that are new, such as more clamshells for spinach, or are packaging innovations pushed through by the suppliers?

Dawson-Ekeland: It has been some time since the Cryovac brand has introduced new packaging dedicated to the fresh-cut produce market, so we are unable to comment on this topic.

Forowycz: Retailers are working on offering more cut fruits and vegetables in packaging that provide portion control and portability. The multi-pack concepts that yogurts use are being incorporated for 4- or 6-packs that are targeted toward both children and adults. Retailers also need new packaging to prevent leaking in distribution to eliminate sticky containers on the shelf. Tamper-evidence is important as well. The new peel/reseal packaging styles eliminate leaks and provide tamper evidence.

Temkin: We see retailers welcoming new ideas and new packaging mediums. We see not only specialty stores, but also everyday chain stores and big box stores push for innovation. With that said, retailers can be hesitant to jump on board of a new concept that may be an increase in cost from their current put-up. Change can be scary at times. There are some retailers that are leading the way in packaging innovation. Suppliers are pushing for efficiencies in packaging to reduce their costs and increase their margins; retailers are pushing for longer shelf-life, adding value for their customers while increasing their sell-through. It is when both suppliers and retailers come together and agree on innovative change where the most success is had.

Tilley: Packaging innovations can be driven on both the retailer and supplier levels. We are getting a lot of interest in non-traditional supermarket channels, such as convenience stores, on offering fresh-cuts that are packaged for grab-and-go shopping. They see the benefit in rigid clamshell containers to protect the produce better than flexible packaging.

PB: How many years or months from introduction to the market does your R&D focus on?

Dawson-Ekeland: We can't discuss the duration of R&D efforts.

Forowycz: The development cycle for many of the new packaging styles ranges from six to 18 months, depending on level of complexity.

Temkin: We are working on R&D projects that are to be introduced in the next couple of months; we are looking at many new projects that would be ready in time for an October release during the Produce Marketing Association's annual trade show. We are also working on some long-term changes with deadlines into 2014 and beyond. Obviously, the main focus is for Temkin International to stay ahead of the curve and be the leader of packaging innovation and to be able to get that innovation into the hands of our customers as quickly as possible. **pb**

Walnuts: No Longer Just A Holiday Item

Recently recognized as a superfood, walnuts are becoming more and more popular as healthy, on-the-go snacks. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

Lately, many consumers are finding walnuts to be a delicious and heart-healthy snack that can be enjoyed on the go.

As word about its great taste and culinary versatility has spread, the humble walnut's popularity has soared. And it sure doesn't hurt that walnuts consistently rank high as a "superfood," a coveted designation for nutrient-dense foods that contribute mightily to health and wellbeing.

"Walnuts are up 60 percent compared to five years ago, when we were only selling them at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter," says Greg Calistro, executive director of produce and floral at Save Mart Supermarkets, based in Modesto, CA. "Walnuts are the No. 3 selling nut behind two pistachio items."

Most stores see a seasonal surge in walnut sales from Thanksgiving through Christmas. Nuts in the shell evoke home, hearth and tradition during this special time. Even non-bakers will whip up a batch or two of homemade holiday cookies dusted with sugar and studded with walnut bits. Gleaming bowls of healthy nuts-in-shell remain an attractive and traditional table centerpiece. "There's probably five times more walnuts sold during the holidays," predicts Tim Walthall, store manager at Fiesta Mart Inc., in Austin, TX, an independent chain with 50 stores.

But walnut sales after the holidays are beginning to pick up steam as more consumers see them as a healthy and versatile food.

Beyond Seasonal

California Walnut Commission surveys reveal that six in seven consumers are well informed about the health benefits of walnuts, and a majority knows they are rich in the plant-based Omega-3 essential fatty acids required by the human body. In addition to omega-3s, walnuts also rank high in anti-oxidants and provide a convenient source of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals.

"Walnut sales do tend to slump after the holidays, but as the health aspect of walnuts continues to grow and people use them in salads more, that will happen less and less," says Richard Sambado, president at Primavera Marketing, headquartered in Linden, CA.

Leslie Barth, co-owner of the family owned Esparto, CA-based Capay Canyon Ranch, agrees, adding, "We do have a little bit of a lull before people start using walnuts again. They start picking up again in mid-February."

Close to three-fourths of consumers say the American Heart Association seal makes them more likely to buy walnuts, and nowadays, nearly as many consumers use walnuts for healthy, out-of-hand snacks as well as for baking. "A lot of the meats go for baking, but more people are aware of the health benefits of walnuts," acknowledges Sambado. "People are using them in salads; everybody is becoming more health-conscious."

The increased use of walnuts in supermarket bakeries also helps pique consumer interest in the meats, according to Sambado. And along with superior taste and natural nutrition, consumers appreciate product portability and convenience. "Our Orchard Valley Harvest brand of nuts is offered in stand-up resealable bags, which consumers prefer," details Howard Brandeisky, vice president for global marketing and customer solutions at John B. Sanfilippo & Son, located in Elgin, IL. "They are merchandised in the produce department, and made with no artificial ingredients."

Supplies of walnut meat should increase in the coming years due to developments in the orchards of California's Central Valley, which produces well over 95 percent of the nation's

walnuts. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, three-fourths of the walnut trees planted in recent years have been of the Chandler variety, as growers look to serve higher end market demands of light-colored walnut meats.

Sambado confirms, "The Chandler variety has a lighter colored meat and cracks well. It also has a high yield of meat content. With some of the older varieties, you might only get 35 percent meat content, so you sell them in shell. With Chandlers, it's above 50 percent meat content and you have a lot of halves, so you can sell the meats," he explains.

Another recent development points to increased walnut acreage in the state. California's walnut production has nearly doubled in a decade, and shows no signs of slowing down. In the past ten years, Central Valley growers have added 40,000 more acres of walnuts and they are not done yet. Commercial tree nurseries reported at the beginning of the year that they had already sold out for 2013, were backed up for 2014 and were starting to take orders for 2015.

"They're on the upswing in terms of plantings and worldwide demand. Growers like tree nuts because you don't need a lot of labor," Primavera's Sambado explains. He figures the supply of nuts from California's Central Valley will continue to increase because growers are attracted to a crop that is mechanically harvested and requires relatively little labor.

Packaging And Display Options

There are many options for merchandising walnuts, from bulk to a wide range of packages. For Save Mart's Calistro, "Seventy-five percent packaged and 25 percent bulk is optimum."

And then there are packaged nutmeats or nuts in the shell." There's really two commodities," details Sambado. "There's in-shell, and you have the meats, which go all over the world. A heavy percentage of walnuts are exported."

"Walnuts are up 60 percent compared to five years ago, when we were only selling them at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Walnuts are the No. 3 selling nut behind two pistachio items."

— Greg Calistro
Save Mart Supermarkets

The produce nut category is currently about a third in-shell, according to Sanfilippo's Brandeisky, with much of that being peanuts. Pistachios are also a large and growing part of the category, with close to one-quarter of the category volume. Walnuts are closer to about 10 percent of the overall category.

A something-for-everyone strategy offers consumers choices at a number of price points. "Sometimes you can tray them up; people tend to pick them up that way more than in bulk," says Walthall of Fiesta Mart. "Use a small tray to keep the price down. Sell them at $2.99 or $2.49 in a pound or a 1½-lb. tray," he suggests.

Calistro also stresses the importance of choices for consumers. "We sell 1-lb. and 12-oz. bags of shelled walnut halves in our produce departments year-round," he says. "Twelve-oz. bags are $4.99, 1-lb. bags are $7.99, and bulk in-shell are $2.99 a pound. We sell bulk walnuts by the pound during the fourth quarter only. The shelf-life is usually a minimum of one-year, and that is more than sufficient as we turn our displays regularly when new product comes in. We treat it just like fresh produce."

Consider sampling. For example, a bite of walnut teamed with a sliver of Bosc pear or Gorgonzola crumble can turn a nut-newbie into a loyal walnut fan. "Walnuts are good to sample if you can; people like them," says Walthall. "Put them in a high-profile area and cross-merchandise them with complementary items."

Pairing appealing flavors gives consumers the chance to try out new tastes. "The bagged walnuts are displayed in our departments in a minimum of two places," details Save Mart's Calistro. "They are cross-merchandised with fresh produce displays and also on our year-round dried fruit and nut gondolas in-line. They are two bags wide on the in-line displays and three to four bags wide when tied in with fresh produce displays."

And with such a healthful and delicious "superfood" to promote, don't be stingy with signage. "All displays should be well-signed, with health benefits attached if possible," adds Calistro. "Promotions happen during the fourth quarter and Easter, with in-store price reductions occurring in January when people are eating healthier as well as spring and summer when people are on the go and they want a healthy snack option."

Some suppliers offer shippers and promotional materials to help draw consumer attention to this superfood snack. Sanfilippo's Brandeisky notes, "We offer a full range of merchandising vehicles, including in-store shippers and displays to help retailers merchandise the line." **pb**

MARGIN CREEP

As retailers, we have all experienced an encounter just like this: The boss comes into your office first thing Monday morning after the third week of the period, and says, "We are going to need an extra $100,000 in profit from you for this period." He then turns and walks out of your office leaving you stunned and your mind racing for solutions to meet this demand. Perhaps we are to blame for this type of approach from management, as over the years produce has generated additional profitability quicker than any department in the store, and the more often we have done this the more often management requests that we do it again. However, the solution to this challenge is not without major consequences to the overall produce operation. Again, management cannot see the consequences, and therefore, "They just don't get it!"

The options to meet this demand for additional profit are limited given the short time frame to the end of the period the following Saturday. One way is to simply examine your pricing strategy and raise prices on key, non-advertised items to generate additional revenue. Another is to lean on the suppliers to get better costs for the product in transit arriving this week. The last alternative, which requires much more work and effort, is to find opportunities for special weekend sales of key seasonal or volume items that can generate additional sales and profits. Most often, the first or second alternatives are used, sometimes in combination with each other to meet this demand. The consequences of this action are obvious: First of all, you become less competitive in your marketplace. Secondly, you damage your relationship with the suppliers by demanding lower costs after the prices have already been settled.

There are other far-reaching consequences of this type of reaction that can affect the produce operation for many periods to come. The worst of these is what is termed "margin creep," which is the increasing of margin and generating additional profits by raising prices without corresponding increases in cost. One can see by the results in the industry over the past couple of years that have shown that the increase in sales dollars is higher than the increase in pounds sold. This is a dangerous practice as it is a reciprocating spiral that continues to increase the price and decrease the volume, and thus the margin, until prices reach the point of being totally noncompetitive. Once this level is reached, to continue to deliver the sales, and most importantly, the profits demanded by management, one would then have to really lean hard on the suppliers to get reduced costs. However, this is also short-lived as there is only so much that can be squeezed out of the suppliers. The result is that you now find your operation in an untenable position. The only way out is to sacrifice a great deal of margin to regain your competitive posture by cutting prices back to a competitive level. This will result in a large shortfall of not only margins, but also sales during the period you have to make this adjustment.

We referred to the third alternative above, which takes far more effort and requires a commitment and dedication of resources to accomplish. However, given the scenario we just walked through on the consequences of "margin creep," it is a far more desirable solution. Challenge your buyers to come up with the best opportunities for driving weekend sales from commodities with high consumer demand and reasonable cost. Once the buyers uncover opportunities and you have determined the promotional prices, you can then challenge your stores to build promotional displays of this product in the stores that reflect the value, and thereby, drive the sales and ultimately, the profits needed. While labor is tight, with this type of execution you can prove to upper management and store management that this allocation of labor resources is the best way to go and will yield the results they desire while you maintain your competitive balance. Plus you will help to grow top-line sales, which we all know is the lifeblood of retail.

Challenge your buyers to come up with the best opportunities for driving weekend sales from commodities with high consumer demand and reasonable cost. Once the buyers uncover opportunities and you have determined the promotional prices, you can then challenge your stores to build promotional displays of this product in the stores that reflect the value, and thereby, drive the sales and ultimately, the profits needed.

When challenges like this arise at retail, the easy solutions are often not the best for the continued health of the operation and cause more harm than good. While the best solutions often take additional effort and resources, they always yield the best results in the short term and in the long run. By executing this type of strategy successfully over and over, you can begin to educate upper management as to the best ways to confront and overcome a shortfall in margin. It is a way that you can teach them and prevent them from staying in the same old mindset of "They just don't get it!" **pb**

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a 38-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com

WIDER EU MARKET ACCESS THROUGH GLOBALG.A.P. CERTIFICATION

While the European Ministers of Agriculture just passed a resolution to allocate an increasing amount of their farm budget to sustainability measures, retailers in Europe have long been pushing for a greener produce department. For a significant number of them, GLOBALG.A.P. certification has come to be synonymous with high standards of food safety, product traceability and environmental and social responsibility. It is the standard that European retailers seem to rely on the most to help them deliver the quality of products consumers demand.

For U.S. exporters to the EU, which ranks 5th as an agricultural export market for the United States, this means that following the developments of GLOBALG.A.P. may become more important. EU importing companies are increasingly being required to prove to retailers that their suppliers hold a valid GLOBALG.A.P. certificate, where, in the past, other North American certificates have been considered adequate.

EU importing companies are increasingly being required to prove to retailers that their suppliers hold a valid GLOBALG.A.P. certificate, where, in the past, other North American certificates have been considered adequate.

Traceability

European retailers demand full traceability of imported products, and as such, some are developing in-house software and user interfaces to connect directly to the GLOBALG.A.P. database.

To facilitate faster delivery processing, optimization of costs, product traceability, and supply chain transparency, International Produce Limited (IPL), the buying office and subsidiary of ASDA UK, a Wal-Mart group company based in the United Kingdom, is in the process of introducing an automated interface linking directly to the GLOBALG.A.P. database. IPL feels the time has come to move away from PDFs, spreadsheets, and the emailing of certificates. Instead, IPL will now have instantaneous access to delivery and certificate information that resides on the GLOBALG.A.P. database, ensuring ASDA is immediately aware of any changes to a producer's certificate or their shipment.

This harnessing of technology allows retailers to connect directly with production processes like never before, which, in turn, connects consumers to the safe and sustainably produced food products they desire.

Social Responsibility

Good Agricultural Practice is not just about products; it's also about people. Producers supplying the EU will experience increasing demand to demonstrate their social compliance to EU retailers.

There are several solutions for social compliance; most of them are extensive and require very professional social auditing skills. These are more adaptable at the processing level, so GLOBALG.A.P. developed its own approach to be functional for smaller growers. The GLOBALG.A.P. Risk Assessment on Social Practice (GRASP) was developed to give farms that are already GLOBALG.A.P.-certified a simple method to achieve awareness of social issues and offer a risk assessment to their clients.

GRASP helps producers establish a good social management system on their farms. It offers buyers added assurance and it helps protect one of the farm's most important resources: it's people.

Environmental Responsibility

GLOBALG.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) already includes a large number of environmental GAP checkpoints. Not only are food safety, traceability, and social compliance fundamental requirements in GLOBALG.A.P., but environmental sustainability is also increasingly strengthened. The GLOBALG.A.P. members drive this process.

Water supply is inextricably linked to food production and Good Agricultural Practice, and therefore, the European Water Stewardship (EWS), in collaboration with multiple groups including GLOBALG.A.P., developed a sustainable water module. GLOBALG.A.P. encourages the use of the module as an add-on to the IFA certification, similar to the GRASP assessment.

By choosing to comply with food safety, traceability, social and environmental protocols, U.S. fresh produce exporters will increasingly find markets opening up in EU countries. Producing according to the GLOBALG.A.P. IFA standard is the simplest way producers can ensure their products will be attractive to the EU market.

GLOBALG.A.P. is a platform organized like a trade association, and hereby invites any stakeholder to get engaged and comment to its processes. Only in this way will the organization continue to succeed. An elected industry board is responsible for the final decision-making. The election process for a new board has just begun and will continue until mid-April. **pb**

By Dr. Kristian Moeller

Dr. Kristian Moeller is the managing director of GLOBALG.A.P. North America, based in Cologne, Germany.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

A LIVING LEGACY

As the third generation of Everett, MA-based Community-Suffolk Inc., co-owner, Tommy Piazza, has memories to last a lifetime. "My brother, Steven, and I would come in before school started in the morning and work the market," he recollects. "I started unloading broccoli cars. In the old days, they would blow the ice into the broccoli cars, so we had to first shovel the ice out before we could even get to the boxes. We all started in the trenches and worked our way up."

With only a fifth-grade education, Tommy's grandfather, Larry Sr., started the business as a pushcart peddler in Boston's Faneuil Hall. "He was integral in building the New England Produce Center, but we needed more space, so my grandfather, father, and other investors in the business built the Boston Market Terminal," says Piazza. "We take up about a third of that building. It's a great advantage for us, because the commodities we handle are all large-volume items."

Many of those commodities are still offered by Community-Suffolk today, such as its Rosebud brand of spinach, which, back in the 1960s, when the photo at right was taken, was treated quite differently than it is today. Once arriving from the fields, the spinach loads were dropped into a hopper, which shook the rocks and dirt out. That was followed by a thorough rinse in stainless steel bath, where jets of rushing water helped push the spinach along. The next step, depicted above, was a slow-moving conveyor belt where workers manually culled out the bruised leaves or weeds. Finally, the spinach was dried in a large centrifugal drum spinner, released into stainless steel tubes, and into 10-oz. or 1-lb bags for retailers. "We were one of the first, if not *the* first, to process spinach this way," notes Piazza. "We still market our Rosebud brand of spinach, but today, it's packed at the shipping point. We've also added a Mesclun mix and salad mix."

Piazza is well aware that when his grandfather created Community-Suffolk, he created a living legacy. "He taught us to be fair, to both growers and shippers," says Piazza. "You want to sell as much as possible, both you as a shipper, as well as your customers. You want them to do as well as you are doing. Our success is thanks in part to the family values of honesty and trust that my grandfather instilled in all of us."

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of Produce Business. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com

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