

inside... PUNDIT LOOKS AT QUALITY ISSUES • FALL AVOCADOS • TAILGATING • GIFT BASKETS • ORCHIDS • ONIONS • RAISINS
TRADE PACKAGING • COLORADO PRODUCE • WASHINGTON APPLES
MARKET PROFILE: CHICAGO • MUSHROOMS • ORGANIC HERBS

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Ethnic Guide
starts on page 59

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER:



Mima Leal
Commodity Buyer
Third Coast Fresh
Houston, TX

Mirna Leal joined foodservice distributor Third Coast Fresh seven years ago as a customer service representative. Before long, she had worked her way up to a local produce buyer, and recently, she was promoted to commodity buyer. "I started here because I was looking for an office job that would work with my school schedule," she admits. "But I liked it so much, I just stuck around."

Leal is in charge of ordering fresh produce for the company's foodservice customers, which take the form of restaurants, hospitals, hotels and schools, and loves the sense of community that pervades the produce industry.

While Leal has seen PRODUCE BUSINESS floating around her office for years, she admits she just recently started reading it. "The other day, the president of our company, George Finch, brought me the 40-Under-Forty issue," she recollects. "I had just been promoted and he told me to read the cover story for inspiration. Not only did I get inspired, but I even won a prize! I'll continue reading the magazine to learn about new vendors out there, such as Rock Garden and Coosemans, who, thanks to the magazine, I've recently started working with."

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

WIN AN ADJUSTABLE UMBRELLA SPORTS CHAIR

A perfect solution for sitting through steamy summer sports games, this portable, weather-resistant chair comes with an attachable umbrella that rotates 360° and tilts 180°, effectively blocking sun, rain or wind from any direction. A padded seat, lumbar support, cup holder, two zippered pouches and built-in UVA and UVB protection rounds out the package.



QUESTIONS FOR THE AUGUST ISSUE

- Name four products that Mann Packing offers? _____
- What is the name of the production manager at the Produce for Better Health Foundation? _____
- How many varieties of bananas does Turbana sell? _____
- When are Curry & Co's Hermiston Sweets available? _____
- What movie franchise is Sun-Maid partnering with beginning this month? _____
- What is the phone number for Anthony Marano Company? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____

Company _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
AUGUST QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

President & Editor-in-Chief • JAMES E. PREVOR
JPrevor@phoenixmedianet.com

Publisher/Editorial Director • KEN WHITACRE
KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

Special Projects Editor • MIRA SLOTT
MSlott@phoenixmedianet.com

Assistant Editor • AMY SHANNON
AShannon@phoenixmedianet.com

Assistant Editor • JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER
JKramer@phoenixmedianet.com

Circulation Manager • KELLY ROSKIN
KRoskin@phoenixmedianet.com

Executive Assistant • FRAN GRUSKIN
FGruskin@phoenixmedianet.com

European Bureau Chief • ROBERT ZWARTKRUIS
RZwartkruis@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Director • DIANA LEVINE
DLevine@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Leader • JACKIE TUCKER

Production Department

FREDDY PULIDO
JOANNA ARMSTRONG

Director of Online Communications

JASON KAHAN

Trade Show Coordinator • JACKIE LOMONTE
JLoMonte@phoenixmedianet.com

Contributing Editors

MEREDITH AUERBACH, CAROL BAREUTHER, THERESA BRAINE, JULIE COOK RAMIREZ, SANDY LEE, BOB JOHNSON, JACKIE LIEBERMAN, BARBARA ROBISON, LISA WHITE, BRYANT WYNES, JON VAN ZILE

Advertising

ERIC NIEMAN, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
ENieman@phoenixmedianet.com

SANDY LEE
SLee@phoenixmedianet.com

BILL MARTIN
Martinmedia45@peoplepc.com

Colleen Morelli
cmorelli@phoenixmedianet.com

ELLEN ROSENTHAL
ERosenthal@phoenixmedianet.com

Floral Department Marketing

E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN
SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to:

PRODUCE BUSINESS

P.O. Box 810425
Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425
Phone: 561-994-1118 Fax: 561-994-1610
E-mail: info@producebusiness.com

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NOVEMBER 9-11, 2010
NEW YORK CITY

CONTACT INFORMATION:

FOR REGISTRATION

Fran Gruskin

Ph: 212-426-2218

E-mail:
register@nyproduceshow.com

FOR BOOTH SALES AND SPONSORSHIPS

*Eric Nieman, Ellen Rosenthal,
Bill Martin, Sandy Lee,
Shaunn Alderman*

Ph: 212-426-2218

E-mail:
exhibit@nyproduceshow.com

EASTERN PRODUCE COUNCIL

John McAleavey

Ph: 973-564-6295

E-mail:
jmcaleavey@comcast.net

PRODUCE BUSINESS

Ken Whitacre

Ph: 561-994-1118, ext 101

E-mail:
kwhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com



WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

SUBMITTED BY STEFFANIE SMITH, CHAIRMAN • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION



Making a Difference in Washington

Making a difference on a critical produce industry issue can take years of hard work. You have to start somewhere, and often it begins with a friendly greeting in a surprisingly small Capitol Hill office. Next comes a handshake, a smile and a welcoming invitation to have a seat for a few minutes of conversation.

You should be ready to answer questions from the congressman; he or she will want to know your views on issues currently in play in the House or Senate. "What's been your labor availability this season? What do you think are the best strategies for improving access to fresh produce in schools? Do you favor food safety rules that apply to everyone, regardless of size? I'm hearing so much lately about locally grown produce, what's that about?"

But before this line of questioning, the lawmaker will almost surely ask where you live. Translation: where do you vote — are you one of my constituents? You're not required to be one of his or her voters, but it sure doesn't hurt to keep the attention piqued. It's democracy, right?

If this outstanding Capitol Hill experience is happening during the United Fresh Washington Public Policy Conference, September 14-16, you can also expect the same at meetings with staff at FDA or USDA, except perhaps without the same keen interest in your voting precinct. Either way, the level of dedication and expertise is impressive. You're in a room having a productive dialogue with smart and powerful people, and the conversation is about the future of your business. These meetings with smart and powerful people don't just include elected officials; they also involve produce industry leaders just like you. That's the real advantage of participating in the WPPC — there's so much talent, so many bright people who come from every part of the produce industry to make a difference.

Considerable clout comes with being part

of United's Washington conference, which is why attendees will have the opportunity to hear from Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan, who is known as the architect of the administration's "buy local"

The conversations aren't transactional...they are much more focused on bigger issues and solutions — the kind of decisions that can have a profound impact for many years to come.

movement. We're also proud to have Sen. Lindsey Graham and House Minority Leader Rep. John Boehner speaking as part of United's conference.

United's Washington Public Policy Conference is probably one of the industry's best business networking venues, too. The value of sharing your message with dozens of lawmakers and administration officials is clear, but there is just as much value in rubbing shoulders with a few hundred of our industry's most powerful and influential executives. It's definitely not a trade show environment, and that's the point. The conversations aren't transactional, not about another sale or two — they are much more strategic, focusing on bigger issues and solutions — the kind of decisions that can have a profound impact for many years to come. Our promotional message for the conference is "The Industry's Most Powerful Public Policy Event," but, truthfully, we could just say it's the industry's most powerful event, period.

We also like to say that "being United makes all the difference," and that's espe-

cially true when it comes to bringing every segment of the produce industry together working for common goals. United is so serious about it that we've created four market segment boards that focus keenly on the issues facing specific sectors of the industry: grower/shipper, wholesaler/distributor, fresh-cut processor and retail/foodservice. Every segment has representation, bringing a multitude of voices to our Washington, D.C. presence and creating a valuable format for exchanging ideas and advancing the state of the industry in a way that no other event can match. Washington's policymakers know that a meeting with United's members will yield straight talk, with balanced and comprehensive viewpoints about the issues.

Improving childhood nutrition by dramatically increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables in schools is a top issue for United. United's Salad Bar in Every School Campaign is placing salad bars in schools in cities across the country, including New Orleans, the site of United's 2011 convention. WPPC attendees are invited to catch the spirit of United's 2011 New Orleans convention and support the Salad Bar in Every School campaign by participating in an exclusive excursion aboard *The Cherry Blossom*, a beautiful 19th century-style Victorian sternwheeler. The cruise will include Dixieland jazz, dinner, drinks and spectacular views of Washington, D.C. and Old Town Alexandria. Best of all, proceeds will support salad bar donations in New Orleans schools as part of the Salad Bar in Every School campaign.

Join us for the stimulating meetings, top-level networking and just to be part of this incredibly powerful experience in Washington, D.C. September 14-16 at the Gaylord National Hotel on the Potomac River. Visit United's Web site at www.unitedfresh.org and see details about all the value this conference has to offer. Your attendance can make the difference for your business and the produce industry.



at the **Crowne Plaza Hotel,**
in **Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico**
August 25th, 26th & 27th

Third Technical/Business Convention

"THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST PRODUCTIVITY"
and Ordinary General Assembly 2010

www.amhpac.org

• What is it?

AMHPAC's third technical/business convention will bring grower/shippers, packers, produce buyers, distributors, marketing & sales reps, quality assurance people, government officials and industry researchers and teachers to discuss the future of the protected horticulture industry. Entitled "The Search for the Lost Productivity" the event will focus on exploring issues of productivity and orderly growth for the protected horticulture (greenhouse) industry.

• Who is AMHPAC?

AMHPAC is the Mexican protected industry's active association and represents 200 growers. Members are involved in the production, packaging, distribution and marketing of fresh produce grown under greenhouses and other covered structures from 25 of the 32 states in Mexico. The best and most responsible growers are well integrated in the organization and account for 70% of Mexico's horticulture exports to the U.S. and Canada. The association's members represent a combined production area of 11,362 acres with an annual output of 900,000 tons (35% of the total production).

• Who will be speaking at the event?

- **Nancy Tucker** Vice President Global Business Development - PMA (USA)
- **Juan Antonio Aguila** Doctor in Human Development - ITESM (MEX)
- **Francisco Gutierrez** CEO - STRATEGA (MEX)
- **Mark Munger** Vice President of Marketing - Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce (USA)
- **Constantinos Kittas** Professor (Agricultural Constructions) - University of Thessaly (Greece)
- **Evangalina Medrano** Senior Researcher at the Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Fisheries and Food and Organic Production - IFAPA (SPA)
- **Víctor Manuel Loaiza Mejía** Production Manager to production greenhouse - Eurofresh Farms (MEX)
- **Jaime Chamberlain** Chairman of the Board - FPAA (USA)

• Who will I be meeting/networking with while at the show?

AMHPAC membership's best! 200 growers/shippers/packers will be in attendance as well as a diverse representation of the entire supply chain interested in protected agriculture including marketers, distributors and grower shippers from four countries. From researchers and academia to government to buyers, you'll meet a wide variety of people with direct impact on the business coming together to discuss crucial issues affecting the future of protected agriculture.

• Why should I go?

If you are involved in any way with protected horticulture in Mexico, you won't want to miss this opportunity to explore first-hand the future of the industry with a wide variety of experts and industry leaders. The specific information discussed at this event as well as the networking opportunities are unparalleled in any other venue with respect to protected horticulture.

• Where and when is it?

The event will take place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Guadalajara, Mexico, from August 25 to 27, 2010.

• What is the schedule?

- Wednesday, August 25 - Convention for members and associates: AMHPAC's 3rd Ordinary General Assembly that seeks to define the course of the association for 2010/2011.
- Thursday, August 26 - Business Convention
- Friday, August 27 - Technical Convention

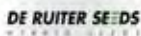
• How do I register or get more information?

Go on-line to www.amhpac.org or email karina@amhpac.org

The future only makes room for those growers that will be productive
"THIS WILL BE THE DECADE FOR BUSINESSMEN"



SPONSORS





Is NRA Really Serious About Doubling Produce Usage?

When the CEOs of the Produce Marketing Association, the National Restaurant Association and the International Foodservice Distributors Association stood together at PMA's annual Foodservice Conference last year in Monterey, CA, and announced an initiative to double fresh produce use in foodservice over the next ten years, we were enthused but cautious.

The enthusiasm was for "the big, hairy, audacious goal" that potentially could transform the produce industry while helping the health of Americans. The caution was because we doubted that NRA and IFDA would really sustain interest in the initiative. The problem is that the membership of these organizations is fundamentally "product neutral" — if consumers want beef, they will get beef and if consumers want chicken, then chicken it is, and if consumers want salads, then salad offerings are what will be provided.

Yes, of course, a few white tablecloth restaurants may define themselves as presenting the personal selections of a chef and thus educating consumers as to what is good. The vast majority of chains, though, are looking to figure out what consumers like and offer it, not direct consumers as to what they ought to like.

Thus, the interest of NRA and IFDA in the whole initiative really draws from a public relations/government affairs perspective. With obesity as America's premier public health problem, the restaurant operators don't want to be seen as a part of the problem; they want to be seen as part of the solution. Thus the alliance with PMA gives them a powerful club to use when asked by reporters or in Congressional testimony what the foodservice industry is doing about obesity.

Because the goal is not to be reached until 2020, NRA and IFDA have at least kicked the can down the road and, who knows, by then, we may discover that we have a different problem.

We had no doubt that PMA would stay focused on the goal — its membership is solidly supportive. But what we were primarily looking to see at this year's PMA Foodservice Conference, one year out from the announcement, was what NRA and IFDA were doing to show their commitment to this initiative.

Dawn Sweeney, president and CEO of NRA, and Mark Allen, president and CEO of IFDA, were AWOL this year, apparently not thinking that a conclave with the foodservice produce supply base was a productive use of their time.

If you go to the website of NRA, you will notice that there is not one word on the home page about this supposedly important initiative. Same thing with the IFDA. And if you search the two sites, the last mention you find of the whole initiative is the press release

from last year. Except, of course, for speeches. So when Dawn Sweeney addressed the 2010 Nutrition Summit, hosted by the Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Agriculture, she mentioned the initiative.

Of course, that line doesn't show that the partnership is bearing fruit at all. It just shows that NRA sees value in being associated with fresh produce. Yet it seems reasonable to expect a big button on the Web site: Produce 2020 — sign up now! There should be lots of educational programs, care-and-handling and procurement tips and consumer promotion advisories. Why shouldn't restaurants sign up for the initiative and get special window decals to show their consumers that they are committed.

There is a lot that could be done. It is nice to have IFDA on board, but presumably its members will distribute whatever their customers buy. NRA, however, can make a big difference because it has a direct connection with restaurants — but so far, it seems more interested in using the produce industry for political cover than actually doing anything to increase fresh produce usage.

PMA is clearly dedicated. However, there are practical problems that will make the initiative challenging if not resolved. We were hoping to get a one-year-from-launch update on how the initiative was doing, but that didn't happen. Foodservice operators buy direct from growers, through brokers, through distributors, through terminal markets; some buy from warehouse clubs and even fill in from conventional supermarkets. Nobody has a way to tie this together. The closest we came at the conference to quantification was that somebody counts the mentions of avocados on menus and that number, apparently, was up. If we can't get a starting point, how will we know if we meet our goal for doubling foodservice usage of produce by 2020?

There is one other roadblock lying ahead. This is an initiative about fresh, yet probably the easiest way to increase foodservice consumption of fresh produce is to switch those users who now use frozen or canned product to fresh. Get the pizzerias putting canned mushrooms on the pizza or buying frozen broccoli spears to convert to fresh. This is easiest because it requires no change in consumer eating habits, only industry procurement habits. This would help PMA members, but probably wouldn't serve the interests of NRA very much as the nutritional content of restaurant meals would change only slightly.

NRA allowed PMA to present some workshops at NRA's national convention; it issued a joint press release a year ago; but it is going to take a lot more effort to make anything important happen. This is the year to see how serious NRA really is about this initiative. **pb**

This is the year
to see how
serious NRA
really is about
this initiative.

HISTORY

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Reader Service # 2

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SEALD SWEET VISALIA, CA

Selina Reeve has joined the sales department. She is a seasoned veteran with more than 15 years of sales experience with citrus, deciduous and stone fruit. In addition to her sales experience, Selina also has more than 10 years experience in the food-service arena.



GOLD COAST PACKING INC. SANTA MARIA, CA

Brent L. Scattini was hired as vice president of sales. He has 20 years of experience in produce sales and marketing and has spent the past 12 years as director of sales for the Western region for Grimmway Farms. He will head all sales and marketing operations.



WALTER P. RAWL AND SONS INC. PELION, SC

Sarah Farra was hired as executive assistant and will mostly be working on a variety of marketing and sales projects. Sarah has over eight years of experience in sales, management and marketing at several different companies.



MICHIGAN APPLE COMMITTEE DEWITT, MI

Tony R. Blattner, an apple grower from Lowell, MI, has been appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm to serve as the newest board member of the company. He has grown apples for four decades and has previously worked at Gerber Products Company of Fremont, MI, for 18 years. He currently works for BelleHarvest Fruit of Belding, MI, as director of field operations.



THE PERISHABLES GROUP CHICAGO, IL

David Wojdyla was hired as retail program director. He will manage all aspects of the company's retail data services and supplier category management program. He has experience in leading strategic programs, leveraging data to identify opportunities and identifying market challenges.



DRISCOLL STRAWBERRY ASSOCIATES INC. WATSONVILLE, CA

Oscar Ramos has assumed the role of general manager of Driscoll's of Chile. Previously the director of operations in Jalisco for Driscoll's in Mexico, he has extensive experience in operational and production activities.



TAVILLA SALES CO. LOS ANGELES, CA

Chris de Lorimier was hired as sales assistant. He will be helping Nancy Betancourt, national sales manager, with the overall business development of the Hispanic category and the pineapple program. His experience includes working at the retail level in the Southern California market.



PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION NEWARK, DE

Dr. Bob Whitaker has been appointed by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to the National Advisory Committee for Microbiological Criteria of Food. His selection reflects the leadership Whitaker has brought to the industry's food-safety efforts since he was hired in 2008.



NEW PRODUCTS

MVP GROUP'S GO-3 GOES GLOBAL

MVP Group, QC, Canada, has launched the GO-3 Ozone Purification Systems with four unique models. The systems use a sanitation technique proven to kill bacteria 3,000 times faster than chlorine and are shown to be more effective over a wider spectrum of micro-organisms.



Reader Service No. 301

SQUEEZABLE GARLIC CONDIMENT

Spice World Inc., Orlando, FL, has introduced new squeezable garlic as an ingredient and condiment. This new packaging offers consumers convenience in handy 9.5- and 20-oz. bottles. Squeeze flavor into any dish without waste, mess or cross-contamination with utensils.



Reader Service No. 302

ZESPRI KIWIFRUIT SHOW HITS THE ROAD

Zespri, Redwood, CA, has launched its road-show programs, deploying mobile merchandising teams in Milwaukee/Madison, WI; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; New York, NY; and Northern and Southern California. The road shows promote Zespri's Great Kiwi Adventure consumer sweepstakes and include kiwifruit-wrapped vehicles, demos and tastings.



Reader Service No. 303

DEL MONTE LAUNCHES BANANA CAMPAIGN

Del Monte Fresh Produce Co., Coral Gables, FL, has launched its Buy a Bunch. Loose a Bunch campaign, which engages consumers with the motto "Eat Healthy. Live Healthy." The program focuses on bananas as an affordable diet staple to lose and maintain a healthy weight.



Reader Service No. 304

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

FISHER CAPESPAN ADDS CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS

Fisher Capespan USA LLC, Gloucester, NJ, has added fresh California avocados to its product line. The move into the avocado business complements the company's existing product line-up and allows it to increase its points of contact within its customer and supplier base.



Reader Service No. 305

CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS AND CHEESE TEAM UP

Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA, and the California Milk Advisory Board, South San Francisco, CA, have partnered to cross-promote two California agricultural products: fresh California avocados and real California cheese. One million instantly redeemable coupons for 55-cents off any purchase of Real California cheese will be affixed to Calavo avocados sold by the bag.



Reader Service No. 306

MANN PACKING LAUNCHES SUMMER SLAW PROMOTION

Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA, kicked off its Annual Summer Slaw Spectacular promotion. More than 200,000 \$1 instantly redeemable coupons will be applied to Mann's Broccoli Cole Slaw and Rainbow Salad. The promotion lasts through December 31.



Reader Service No. 307

NATURESWEET LAUNCHES YELLOW SUNBURST TOMATO

NatureSweet, San Antonio, TX, has launched Sunburst tomatoes – bite-sized yellow tomatoes grown specifically for snacking. Sunburst tomatoes are packaged in a resealable container.



Reader Service No. 309

A&A ORGANIC ADDS PURPLE GARLIC TO LINE

A&A Organic Marketing Inc., Watsonville, CA, has added organic purple garlic to its garlic line-up. In addition to a traditional 30-lb. bulk box, the company is offering it in a 25-by-3 count sleeved garlic.



Reader Service No. 310

WHOLE FOODS HOSTS CHERRY FEST

Whole Foods Market, Austin, TX, held its first ever Cherry Fest in stores by offering fresh cherries at a special price. The nation-wide jubilee spotlighted this summer fruit with in-store competitions, sampling, recipe tips, online contests and giveaways.



Reader Service No. 311

U.S. RECEIVES FIRST SHIPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN CITRUS

The Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), Citrusdal, South Africa, announced that the first of the reefer vessels carrying South African Navels and Clementines for the 2010 summer season has docked in Philadelphia, PA. The shipment included the first consignment of South African grapefruit to ever enter the United States.



Reader Service No. 312

VOC LAUNCHES MAJOR ONLINE MEDIA INITIATIVE

The Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA, launched a new online media initiative designed to emphasize the culture of the Vidalia onion and promote the sweet onion's appeal among social media fans and younger audiences. A new, thoroughly overhauled Web site was launched with an interactive approach to social networking.



Reader Service No. 313

NJDA INTRODUCES NEW LOGO

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture, Douglas H. Fisher, announced the Made With Jersey Fresh logo is now available to companies that make food items using New Jersey's agricultural products. Jersey Fresh is a well-recognized 26-year-old brand synonymous with fresh, nutritious and locally grown.



Reader Service No. 314

OCEAN MIST CREATES LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, has introduced an innovative employee leadership program designed to develop the company's future senior leadership team from within. Three to six Ocean Mist employees will be selected to participate in the program each year based on job performance, recommendations and interest in the program.



Reader Service No. 315

LITEHOUSE ACQUIRES GREEN GARDEN FOODS

Litehouse Inc., Sandpoint, ID, has acquired Green Garden Foods, Seattle, WA. The addition will allow Litehouse to facilitate expanded growth and innovation through new production capabilities and product knowledge.



Reader Service No. 316

SUPERIOR INTRODUCES NEW GRAPE BOX

Superior Sales, Nogales, AZ, introduced a new grape box as part of its first shipment of Sonora spring grapes. Featuring a colorful, bold logo along with fruit art, the box received favorable comments from retailers after its first week on the market.



Reader Service No. 317

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

ALSUM PRODUCE CHANGES NAME

Alsum Produce Inc., Friesland, WI, has changed its name to Alsum Farms & Produce Inc. to better reflect its long-term growth plans and commitment to locally grown produce. The company will continue its growth through developing innovative new potato products, expanding offerings in fruits and vegetables, and building awareness of Wisconsin potatoes.



Reader Service No. 318

PBH DEVELOPS NEW MARKETING TOOLKIT

Produce for Better Health Foundation, Hockessin, DE, has teamed up with American Greeting Properties and Cookie Jar Entertainment to feature Strawberry Shortcake characters on its Web sites to promote fruit and veggie consumption among children.



Reader Service No. 319

CAL. GIANT RELEASES VIDEOS

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, has released several videos featuring professional chef, Julia Myall (right) in an effort to connect with consumers buying California Giant berries. The 2-minute videos focus on specific berries, key tips for selections and easy recipes.



Reader Service No. 320

PAIA DEVELOPS CATEGORY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA) has developed its 2010-2011 *Category Management Plan Outline* for fresh Peruvian asparagus. The plan includes statistics relating to market summaries, trends, nutritional facts, consumer positioning, food safety, category and merchandising goals.



Reader Service No. 321

NYAA OBTAINS LICENSE TO NEW APPLE VARIETIES

New York Apple Growers, Albion, NY, has completed negotiations with Cornell University to obtain the exclusive license to two new apple varieties. The two varieties, currently known as New York 1 and New York 2, have been developed by the Cornell Apple Breeding program led by Dr. Susan Brown.



Reader Service No. 322

MASTRONARDI'S SUNSET KUMATO TOMATO WINS AWARD

Mastronardi Produce, Kingsville, ON, Canada, received the International Superior Taste Award from the International Taste and Quality Institute, Brussels, Belgium, for its Sunset Kumato Brown tomato. The tomato was also named Best Specialty Variety and received the People's Choice Award last year.



Reader Service No. 323

UTAH ONIONS ADDS ORGANICS TO LINEUP

Utah Onions Inc., Syracuse, UT, has added organics to its lineup of onions. The grower/shipper will now be offering a variety of yellow, red, white and sweet organic onions certified under the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) guidelines.



Reader Service No. 324

NEW LEADERS TAKE HELM OF FPA

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPA) held its annual membership meeting in Nogales, AZ. Jaime Chamberlain of JC Distributing assumed the chairman position and Alejandro Canelos of Apache Produce Imports was named chairman-elect.



Reader Service No. 325

PFK INTRODUCES IDEAL MEALS

Produce For Kids, Orlando, FL, kicked off its annual Get Healthy, Give Hope campaign to raise money for local childrens' hospitals and Children's Miracle Network-affiliated hospitals. More than 35 participating fruit and vegetable growers will make a donation to local childrens' hospitals based on fresh produce sales.



Reader Service No. 326

USPB CAMPAIGN FINDS SUCCESS

The United States Potato Board, Denver, CO, has found success with its Peel Back the Truth online advertising campaign, which was launched with integrated advertising programs on AllRecipes.com and MyRecipes.com. These programs build on the campaign by debunking the myth that potato dishes take a long time to prepare.



Reader Service No. 327

HASS AVOCADOS GAIN FOODSERVICE FANS

The Hass Avocado Board (HAB), Irvine, CA, commissioned a menu tracking study using the Foodservice Research Institute's (FRI) MenuMine database. Its purpose is to substantiate and quantify avocado menu mentions in both commercial and onsite segments.



Reader Service No. 328

GIUMARRA DEBUTS NEW APPLE VARIETY

The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, introduced Divine, a new apple variety, to its lineup of New Zealand pipfruit. Divine is a disease-resistant Golden Delicious-Grive Rouge cross breed grown by Heartland Fruit NZ Ltd. Over time, Divine will also be available as an organic apple.



Reader Service No. 329

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Kids Just Wanna Have Fun...

and DO on FoodChamps.org!

Activities



Raoul

Kids, aged 2-8, or kids at heart, are guided through this interactive site by Fruits & Veggies Color Champions™, helping them learn in a fun way about all forms of fruits and vegetables and why they are important to eat.

Games



Yaz O'frazz

Coloring Pages



Greta

Easy-to-Make Recipes



Winona

Art Gallery



Happy Birthday!

Big Pauly

Birthday: July 2
Favorite snack: Fruit kabob
Favorite activity: Skate boarding and skating on fruit kabob!
"Trust me, fruits & veggies taste great, they're great for you and there are so many to choose from!"

www.FoodChamps.org

If your company is not already involved, and you'd like to learn more about Fruits & Veggies—More Matters, give us a call or send us an email. We're always looking for some new friends, too!

For more information, contact Toni Eaton, Production Manager, at 302.235.2329, ext. 316 or teaton@pbhfoundation.org



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1201-0610 (Produce Business - August)

www.FruitsAndVeggiesMoreMatters.org

Produce for Better Health Foundation
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Consumers Interested In Dining Out And Eating Healthfully

Most industries and families have seen monumental changes over the past two years as the country adjusted to the impact of the challenged economy. Restaurants experienced the same storm, adjusting to a climate where consumers were in search of more affordable dining-out options or, worse, not eating out at all.

According to consumer survey research conducted by Market Force, a global leader in customer intelligence solutions, these precarious spending trends were at their highest in December, 2009. In that time period, more than half of the survey respondents were fearful of the struggling economy and said they planned to eat out less than they had in prior months.

That picture changed dramatically over the past six months, with Market Force's research showing a more than 180-degree. When the same question was posed to consumers in June, one in four said they expect to eat out more this summer, and just 8 percent said they would dine out less. Sixty-seven percent expected their eating out patterns to remain the same.

In 2010, there appears to be a shift in food trends from the "hunker down and don't spend" collective mindset to a public that is a little more relaxed about spending and has a new focus on making food decisions around personal health. The evidence is everywhere:

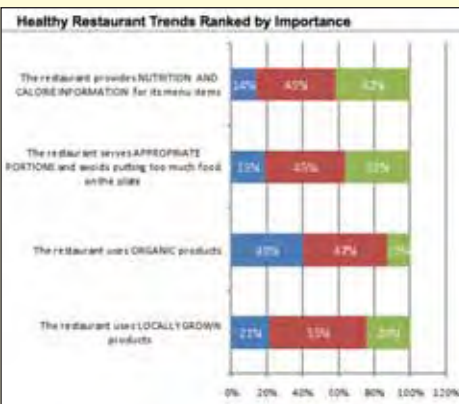
- Michelle Obama launching her "Let's Move" initiative to eliminate childhood obesity in America.
- Whole Foods Market, based in Austin, TX, introducing its "Health Starts Here" community outreach programs that educate consumers about healthful eating.

With the growing prevalence of health and

Market Force Information is a provider of global customer intelligence solutions for business-to-consumer companies including major retailers, restaurants, grocery and convenience stores, financial institutions, entertainment studios and consumer packaged goods companies.

wellness educational programs, more and more consumers are discovering the direct link between diet and disease and are factoring it into their food choices.

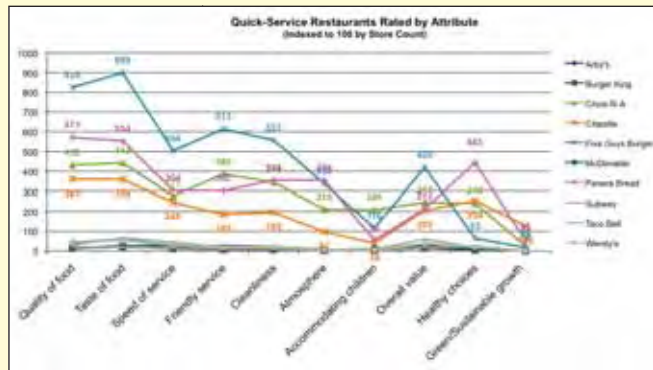
Market Force's restaurant study showed that 42 percent of consumers believe it is extremely important for restaurants to provide nutrition and calorie information, and about one-third placed equal importance on portion



Graph 1

control. Surprisingly, given expansion of the organic market in recent years, only 13 percent said that a restaurant's use of organic products was extremely important. This could be attributed to cost-conscious diners wondering if the taste and health benefits are worth the expense. It was more important that restaurants used products that were locally grown, perhaps because post-recession consumers are concerned about rejuvenating their local economy. (See Graph 1)

The Market Force restaurant survey also asked participants to rank their favorite quick service restaurants (QSRs) and casual family restaurants, and then to rate them in the fol-



Graph 2

lowing attributes: Quality of Food, Taste of Food, Speed of Service, Friendly Service, Cleanliness, Atmosphere, Overall Value, Healthy Choices and Green/Sustainable.

The responses revealed that the quality and taste of the food mattered most, even more than the service. Five Guys, in Lorton, VA, was named the favorite restaurant on the QSR front, and it outscored the other contenders in seven out of the 10 attributes. St. Louis, MO-based Panera Bread, known for its healthful meal options, also fared well in the rankings, taking the second spot overall. (Graph 2)

In the casual family dining restaurant category, the Cheesecake Factory, in Calabasas Hills, CA, came out on top with 13 percent of the vote, outscoring the competition in six out of the 10 attributes — including the top score in healthy choices.

The restaurant survey was conducted May - June 2010 among Market Force's network of 300,000 independent mystery shoppers and merchandisers across the country, dubbed The Force. The pool of 4,600 consumer respondents ranged in age from 18 to 72 and reflected a broad spectrum of income levels, with 60 percent reporting incomes of more than \$50,000 a year. Eighty percent work full- or part-time. Seventy-six percent were women — the primary household consumer purchasers. Half of the participants said they have children at home.

Graphs courtesy of Market Force Information

Don't Bet The Farm On Rapid Shifts In Dining Behavior

Watching the ebbs and flows of consumer opinion is always intriguing. The question, for those trying to make a living in the food industry, is what significance to place on these reports? Not too much we would say. After all, if consumer sentiment can shift dramatically and become more positive in six months, it can suddenly become more negative just as easily. So, perhaps the useful lesson we can draw from such rapid shifts is that one would be foolish to place much stock in such ephemeral reports.

It is also important to match consumer claims and actual behavior. That is the advantage of repetitive polling — after a long time one can start to match results with reality. So political pollsters, for example, typically publish reports based on “likely voters” because decades of experience have taught them that many who will answer a pollster’s question won’t bother to vote.

Without lots of historical data tracking the claims of consumers who say they eat out more or less versus their actual behavior over time, such consumer expressions are more curiosities than useful guides to behavior.

Equally, it is important to not confuse the admonitions of politicians, intellectuals and various instruments of persuasion with consumer behavior. So it may be a prod to new behavior when the First Lady launches an initiative, or when physician committees decide to promote a course of behavior, or when upscale lifestyle markets promote a course of behavior — or it may not matter at all. For all we know, people may rebel against the nanny-like quality of all these power sources in society trying to tell the common man what to do.

Although people may, in fact, be “discovering the direct link between diet and disease and are factoring it into their food choices,” one would be hard pressed to look at data on

obesity and note any way in which this “factoring” is actually solving any problem.

When consumers claim that they find it “extremely important” to get nutrition and calorie information, one wonders if this isn’t just the consumer thinking that is the “politically correct” position to take. After all, the restaurant industry is highly competitive and very close to the consumer. If getting easy access to such information really motivated consumers to select one restaurant over another, one suspects there would be a lot more nutrition information, far more prominently displayed.

Speculating about what might motivate consumers is fun, but it is important to recognize that it is, just that, speculation. So when consumers ask for local, it might mean they want to support the local economy, but it could also mean that consumers identify in the word “local” a series of attributes that they hope to acquire when they eat local. PRODUCE BUSINESS has done many focus groups in this area, and consumers seem to expect local to be A) Less expensive, because it should save on transport, B) Better tasting, because it can be picked riper C) Fresher and crisper, because it just came from the vine, tree, bush or field.

It is always advisable to do qualitative research before undertaking quantitative research. This enables one to find out what consumers mean when they use certain words. Is an Idaho potato any potato grown in Idaho? Or is it any long russet-type potato grown anywhere?

Market share expansion can also be a tricky matter, and one should be careful about attributing changes made on the production side to consumers. So, for example, a lot of retailers have found it useful to offer only organic on smaller volume items. This saves the retailer from having to offer two types of basil, for example. This is a big boost for organic, but tells us little about demand for

Speculating about what might motivate consumers is fun, but it is important to recognize that it is, just that, speculation.

organic. The whole point of such a switch is that a small group may demand organic, whereas almost everyone will accept organic.

It is interesting to note that the restaurant survey identified Five Guys as the favorite restaurant on the QSR side of things. This may offer a clue as to the way consumers interpret personal health advice. The burger, hot dog and french fry chain may be “healthful” in the sense that the french fries and beef are fresh, never frozen, there are no trans-fats and the fries are cooked in pure peanut oil. So if you are going to eat hamburgers and fries, this is, as quick service restaurants go, high quality. But, healthy? Well, a “regular” burger that has two patties has 800 calories; a large order of fries has 1,500 calories, and we haven’t even considered a Coke, cheese, bacon or any other add-ons!

Besides, considering that there are only about 500 Five Guys units, as opposed to 30,000 McDonalds, it is pretty obvious that being a “favorite” is not the same as being the restaurant one eats at most. For business people, there is a lesson here: Maybe everyone’s favorite toy store is FAO Schwartz, but maybe the same people who say that buy most of their toys at Wal-Mart.

We Have Our Own Selves To Blame For Poor Growth In Consumption

From Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit
July 20, 2010



JIM PREVOR'S

PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Last year, the proposal to bring a national generic marketing program to the produce industry was a big focus of contention. We ran many articles, received many letters, but of all we wrote about, one letter hangs with us.

It was a note sent from Bill Vogel, President at Tavilla Sales LA, in Los Angeles, CA. We titled the piece, *Pundit's Mailbag — Generic Promotion Plan Does Not Allow For Differentiation*. His letter went as follows:

The Produce for Better Health Foundation might have had more success in increasing consumption if we would have produced a cantaloupe that actually tasted like the muskmelon I have eaten as a kid instead of like the cardboard we now often experience; or if the consumer would have picked up a peach from Chile that wasn't tasteless and brown in the center; and yes, even in our (my) business with mangos, there is nothing more tasty than a ripe mouthwatering Kent, yet the demand is for the hard, fibrous Tommy variety.

Point is the industry has not helped much. However, there are signs that point to the direction we need to take. Look at the increase in consumption of ripe avocados, or the "Summeripe" fruit program, and yes, even in our mango business this year with the yellow Ataulfo tasty mango and the support of the National Mango Board. Increases here are off the charts.

So, I agree with you — the industry needs to go back to the drawing board; we need to look at the taste and flavor of the product we are delivering and after we have done all this, then we need all segments of the industry at the table to discuss the concept of generic promotion.

Good job here!

— Bill Vogel

President

Tavilla Sales LA

Los Angeles, California

The point of the letter is that increasing consumption is not just a matter of clever promotional schemes; it has to do with having a product that consumers will enjoy, value and want to purchase again. Part of this is some of the long term issues that Bill mentions — what varieties we grow and promote.

Yet we would say that the produce industry is often its biggest enemy. The thirst for short-term boosts in sales leads both producers and retailers to enter into a kind of "unholy alliance" in which consumers wind up getting substandard product.

Recently, the Jr. Pundits were in a neighborhood SuperTarget store with Mrs. Pundit and thought they had found nirvana: The store featured

a large display of apples — a Jr. Pundit favorite — packed in appealing boxes covered with the *Toy Story 3* characters. As this movie is the current rave in their demographic, there was little chance that Mrs. Pundit was getting out of that store without a box or two.

Unfortunately, the apples went uneaten. Part of the problem was that the beautiful box that attracted the Jr. Pundits also obscured the fruit, so the bruises and soft spots weren't obvious. But also, the apples had no crunch and were mealy. There are few things worse for the industry than disappointing children with the quality of our products. How can we avoid this in the future?

The first problem is that it is not clear that these apples, marked as Washington Extra Fancy Gala apples, which means they would have been harvested last September, are being properly re-inspected for quality. The Washington Apple Commission Web site lists Galas as being "stocked September through May" and out of season in July and August.

We have no way of knowing when these apples were sold to Target or by whom. The shipper could have sold them two months ago and they could have been sitting at Target or at a wholesaler deteriorating. Or they could have been sold right from the shipper last week. If they were shipped in the same condition that we bought them, this is unforgivable. It is guaranteed to disappoint customers and is an indication that



the industry in Washington State needs a better mechanism for ensuring quality on end-of-season shipments.

Finally, there is the issue of why this mega-display of apples is sitting on the floor outside of refrigeration. Maybe this was Target's idea or maybe a shipper, anxious to move these old apples before the new crop, offered special incentives for an order too large and too prominent to be accommodated on the refrigerated display.

This is always questionable. Frieda Caplan gave a speech years ago to the Washington state apple growers asking, in light of the many millions spent to refrigerate apples at warehouse and in transport, how could the industry tolerate displays at retail out of refrigeration?

Yet, even if peak-of-condition apples in venues with rapid movement can get away with dry display without affecting the consumer experience, it really is not arguable that at this late date, refrigeration would enhance the shelf-life and quality of these apples. That being the case, a requirement for refrigeration should be non-negotiable.

That it is obviously negotiable explains a great deal about why it is so hard to move the needle on consumption. As Shakespeare wrote:

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves..."

22ND ANNUAL MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

CLEVER CAMPAIGNS

Creative Consumer And Trade
Outreach Programs — Many Utilizing
New Media — Highlight This Year's Contest



BY JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER
AND MADELINE MESA

Who says you can't market directly to consumers in the produce industry? Yes, the trade buyers are still the ultimate decision-makers in determining whether to carry a certain item, but consumers are also important recipients of effective marketing campaigns. Some brand marketers, such as the Idaho Potato Commission, Litehouse Foods and the Vidalia Onion Committee, chose to focus their outreach on children, knowing that kids have quite a bit of influence over the primary household shoppers. Regardless of who the intended audience was, 13 out of 17 winning entries had a major consumer outreach component.

Social media was an important focus as well, with 10 out of 17 winning entries using the Web as an integral part of their promotions. Whether that translated into fully developed Facebook and Twitter pages, as in the case of Dole Fresh Vegetables and Earthbound Farm, or original videos posted on YouTube, like those created by The Avocado Producers and Exporting Packers Association of Michoacán (APEAM) and the National Mango Board (NMB), these organizations recognized that for a campaign to be a success, it must take on a life of its own and go viral.

PRODUCE BUSINESS is pleased to recognize the following Marketing Excellence Award winners, listed in alphabetical order by company, for their ingenuity and service to the produce industry.

2010 WINNERS

The Avocado Producers and
Exporting Packers Association
of Michoacán

California Giant Berry Farms

Columbia Marketing
International Corp.

Dole Fresh Vegetables

Earthbound Farm

Idaho Potato Commission

Litehouse Foods

National Mango Board

Ocean Mist Farms/Wegmans

Pandol Brothers Inc.

Tanimura & Antle

University of Massachusetts

Vidalia Onion Committee

THE AVOCADO PRODUCERS AND EXPORTING PACKERS ASSOCIATION OF MICHOACÁN (APEAM)

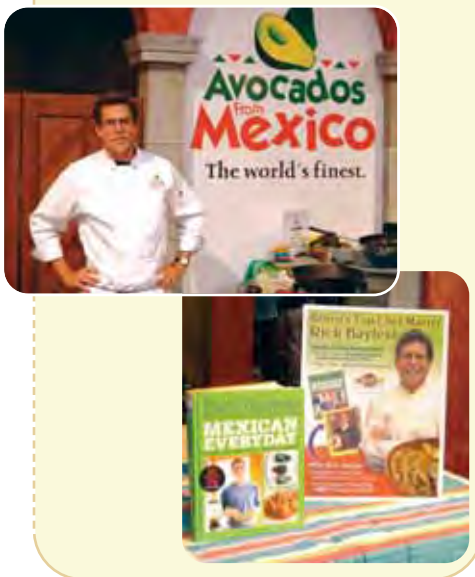
Los Angeles, CA

PMA Promotion

OBJECTIVE: To educate retailers on the unique qualities that make Avocados from Mexico the world's finest, and, to reaffirm Mexico's position as the worldwide category leader; to build existing and new relationships with retailers and wholesalers; to secure media exposure in key trade publications; and to instill pride amongst APEAM members.

CAMPAIGN: With the help of its agency, Integrated Marketingworks, APEAM secured the appearance of celebrity chef, Rick Bayless, at the APEAM booth for a live cooking demo of Mexican dishes in collaboration with his PBS cooking show, "Mexico: One Plate at a Time," as well as signings of his latest book. Short- and long-lead press releases, media alerts and press kits announced APEAM's presence at PMA. An ad campaign in various trade publications highlighted APEAM's brand positioning, along with its presence at the show.

RESULTS: As of October 13, 2009, PR efforts executed by IMW resulted in 84,696 targeted impressions. APEAM business development managers made an estimated 120 new contacts with retailers and wholesalers at the show. The in-store POS display area at the show was highly effective in generating orders for POS materials; HEB ordered 300 secondary displays at the show alone. More than 150 people lined up for an autographed copy of Rick Bayless' cookbook.



THE AVOCADO PRODUCERS AND EXPORTING PACKERS ASSOCIATION OF MICHOACÁN (APEAM)

Los Angeles, CA

Consumer Broadcast Advertising

OBJECTIVE: APEAM's goal in this promotion was four-fold: to educate consumers about why they should prefer Avocados from Mexico; to increase everyday/anytime usage of Avocados from Mexico; to increase demand for Avocados from Mexico; and to obtain trade support.



CAMPAIGN: APEAM's new agency, Integrated Marketingworks, developed alternative positioning statements and conducted focus group research within Houston and Dallas, TX in June, 2009 to gain consumer insights about existing and competitive creatives to further strengthen future communications efforts. Research results lead to the creation of new advertising using specific key words and phrases, such as "authentic," "original," "perfected over generations" and "from the land they first came from," which provided a more meaningful and distinct message.

Further research was done to pare down the results and hone in on a specific message that resonated most with consumers. The "Distinctly Different" campaign was selected due to its appeal, communicating the strategic message best and motivating consumers to want to buy Avocados from Mexico.

RESULTS: Creatives were produced, including bonus spots/billboards, online banners, e-blasts and multiple display ads, and 159,519,134 total impressions were reached, exceeding estimations by 32 percent.

THE AVOCADO PRODUCERS AND EXPORTING PACKERS ASSOCIATION OF MICHOACÁN (APEAM)

Los Angeles, CA

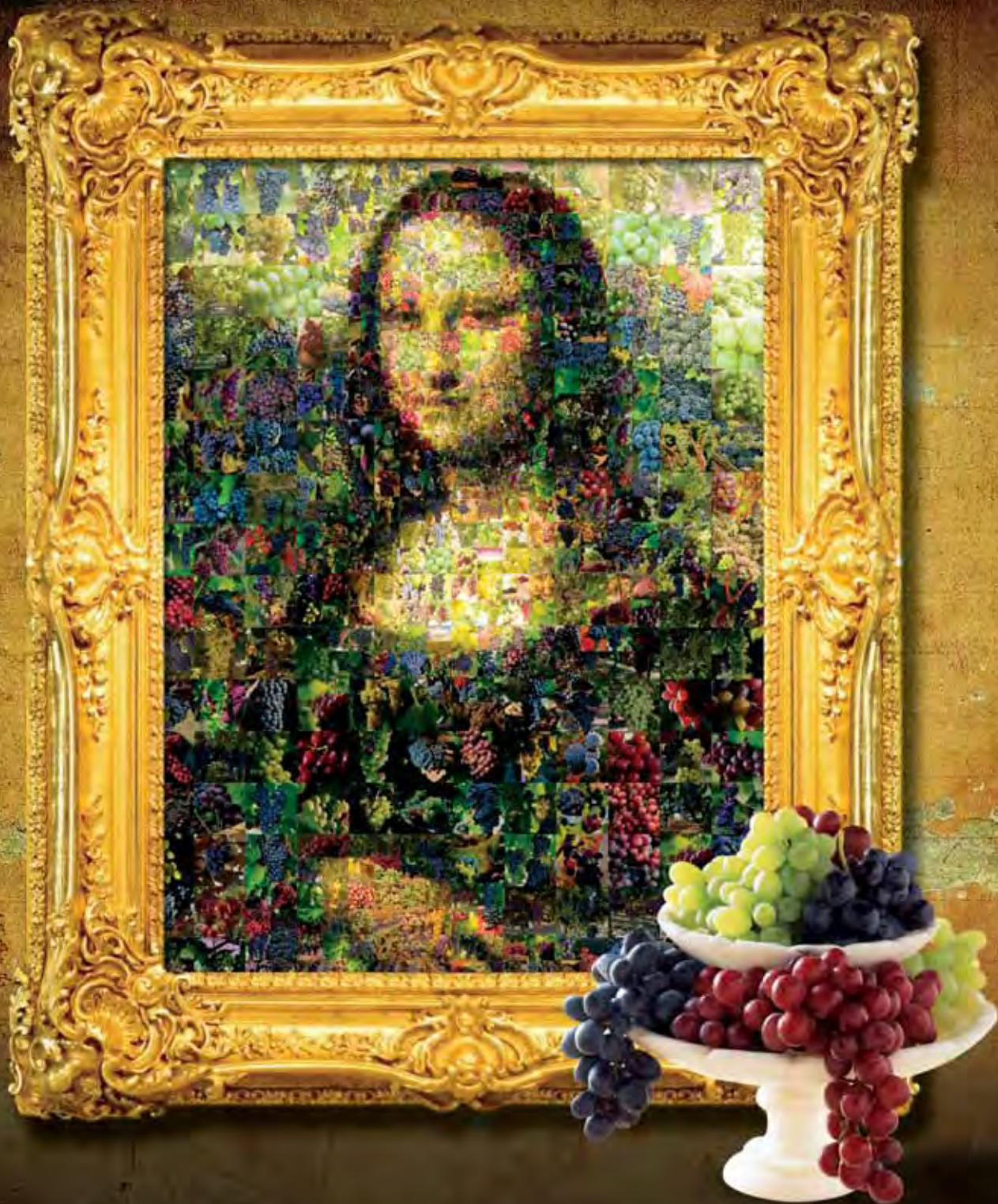
Ontario Avocado Promotion



OBJECTIVE: To clarify the selection and preparation of avocados and ultimately increase retail sales of avocados from Mexico in Ontario by 50 percent during fall 2009; to increase consumer and media awareness of avocados From Mexico; to promote avocados from Mexico as a versatile and fresh cooking and baking ingredient; to increase consumer purchase of product and Web site hits to www.missavacado.com

CAMPAIGN: In order to demystify avocados for Canadians, APEAM, in collaboration with Faye Clack Communications, created a spokesperson, Miss Ava Cado, to personify the brand and garner attention in the marketplace. She became the star of her own YouTube *telenovelas*, or mini soap operas, and was used in all communication tools, including the launch event in downtown Ontario, a microsite, a consumer contest, in-store sampling, POS materials and social media outreach. An actress was also cast to bring the character to life at the launch event at Union Station on Mexican Independence Day. The event featured a tasting, a 20,000-avocado giveaway, a live Mariachi band and Mexican dancers. Also, 25 "gauc-packs" were delivered to key bloggers and online media outlets.

RESULTS: Overall average avocado sales increased 157 percent, exceeding the goal by more than 300 percent. All Toronto-area news outlets covered the launch events and 15 radio stations promoted it. More than 28 million impressions were made, exceeding the goal by 3x what was expected. Retail POS material was used in 155 stores across five banners including Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Longo's and Wal-Mart.



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CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS

Watsonville, CA

First Day of Spring

OBJECTIVE: To promote the peak season of strawberries to key new media and consumer audiences in 25 target markets across the United States; to position California Giant as a trusted brand in the produce department; to drive traffic to new Web site and build Facebook fan base; and to communicate to media and consumers that California Giant berries are naturally delicious and support a healthful lifestyle.

CAMPAIGN: California Giant and its agency, McDill Associates, collaborated with Hearst Media to develop a unique first day of spring promotion. Online ads and a direct mail piece were developed around the first day of spring — the peak season of strawberries — and sent out to 25 key regions. Flats of strawberries, along with marketing information, were delivered to the news directors of Hearst Media stations in each of the 25 regions. That same day, an online ad was placed on the homepage of the same 25 Hearst Media news Web sites to reach consumers.



RESULTS: Although news directors were not obligated to mention the strawberry delivery on air, nearly half — 10 out of 25 — did so. Traffic to the California Giant Web site increased as a result of the online ads. Hearst Media repeatedly expressed excitement over the promotion, as it was the first of its kind.

COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL CORP. (CMI)

Wenatchee, WA

Daisy Girl Organic Branded Program



OBJECTIVE: To launch Daisy Girl Organics brand under the CMI label, which has been a strong advocate of organic

growing for many years. To offer consumers an organic choice and provide the best possible organic apples, cherries and pears.

CAMPAIGN: The launch of the Daisy Girl campaign was inspired by the concept from “our backyard to yours” with the image in mind of a child in an organic orchard setting. Running with this theme, the new attractive packaging, which includes apple bags, tote bags, POS materials and boxes, as well as 2-box display shipper. The displays ship with live fruit and the master shipping box actually becomes the base that holds the display and fruit in place so there is no waste and the produce associate has exactly the right amount of fruit needed to build the display. Eye-catching graphics get consumers’ attention in a sea of more than 700 produce items available.

RESULTS: The promotion results have been outstanding with two of the retailers carrying organics for the first time ever and reporting huge sales. Additionally, retailers and consumers like the bright, fresh graphics.

DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES

Monterey, CA

Rejuvenating the Category — Dole Packaged Salads

OBJECTIVE: To help consumers try new salad creations instead of purchasing the same one over and over again by re-launching the Dole salad line with new, consumer-friendly on-pack elements.

CAMPAIGN: In an effort to change the shopping habits of packaged salad consumers, Dole created a brand-new packaging line with educationally based visual cues so consumers may easily understand how salad varieties differ in taste and texture, and whether they prefer a mild, bold, tender or crunchy salad. Part of this is a sensory scale that provides consumers information on the relevant sensory aspects of their salad choices. In addition, there are on-pack “pairs well with” suggestions on salad dressings, fruits, vegetables and other fresh ingredients, and new, pinch-and-pull, easy-open bags.

RESULTS: Consumers overwhelmingly prefer the Dole design compared to the old design. They are interacting with the products more and are motivated to try new salad blends. Shoppers appreciate the new taste and texture scale and are spending more time in the packaged salad section.

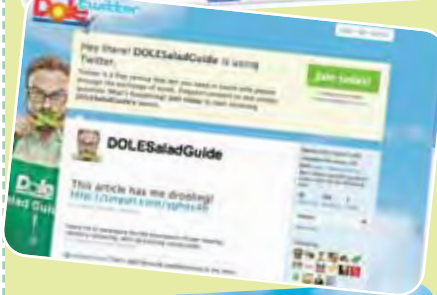


DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES

Monterey, CA

Consumer Communications

OBJECTIVE: To publicize the launch of the new Dole Packaged Salads to the trade and consumers, and to begin to educate consumers on the packaging enhancement.



CAMPAIGN: The launch of the new salad packaging was introduced with one of the most comprehensive multimedia marketing launch ever for a salad line. The campaign was highlighted by the Dole Salad Guide, the first salad spokesperson dedicated to inspiring and educating consumers on how to expand their salad creativity. In addition to appearances at PMA, the Salad Guide spokesperson appeared in national television, print, outdoor, in-store, online and social media elements.

RESULTS: Media made more than 4 billion impressions in the United States. The PR plan obtained more than 300,000,000 impressions. Forty-thousand brand enthusiasts were engaged through a social media presence.

EARTHBOUND FARM

San Juan Bautista, CA

Earth Month Campaign

OBJECTIVE: To increase consumer engagement with Earthbound Farm and build brand equity online and in stores during the month of April, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. Also, to provide retailers with a timely, consumer-centered promotion that adds value to their organic program and offers saving and incentives to their shoppers.

CAMPAIGN: The month-long campaign was four-fold. Internet users who became a fan of Earthbound Farm on Facebook or followed the company on Twitter got the inside scoop on how and when it gave away 50,000 coveted reusable shopping bags on the Earthbound Web site. Visitors to the Earth-Bound Kitchen section of the Web site learned how to incorporate greener choices in their kitchen to further benefit the environment.

The company donated 25 cents from every specially marked package of Earthbound Farm organic Heirloom Lettuce Leaves sold in April to four eco-charities including American Forest, the Environmental Working Group, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pesticide Action Network. Consumers could vote online to decide which organization received the largest share of the donation. Finally, all 5-oz. clamshell packages of Earthbound Farm Organic Mixed Baby Greens prominently featured an on-pack instant redeemable coupon good for \$1.00 off any two Earthbound Farm organic produce items.



RESULTS: Total sales lift for Earthbound Farm organic produce was 7 percent in April and sustained the 7 percent lift through May. The Earth Day campaign garnered more than 12.6 million media impressions. In a comparison between before Earth Day and after Earth Day, Earthbound Farm gained 8,903 fans on Facebook, 336 Twitter followers and 21,392 eNews Subscribers during the campaign.

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

Eagle, ID

Idaho Potato Harvest Online Video Game and Sweepstakes



OBJECTIVE: The goal of this promotion was four-fold: to generate awareness of the 2009 Idaho potato harvest among consumers of all ages; to educate consumers on the difference between Idaho potatoes and potatoes grown in other states; to promote the nutritional profile of potatoes, especially among children; and to encourage consumers to look for the "Grown in Idaho" seal every time they purchase potatoes.

CAMPAIGN: With childhood obesity on the rise, the IPC was inspired to launch its first major educational tool targeting children and young adults who are beginning to make their first independent nutritional choices. To do so, the IPC, along with its PR agency, EvansHardy+Young (EH+Y), launched the Idaho Potato Harvest Online Video Game and Sweepstakes just as kids were heading back to school and the potato harvest was in full throttle. The game, which was hosted on the IPC Web site, educated kids about the Idaho potato harvest process and focused on the all-around value of potatoes for both waistlines and wallets. Everyone who finished the game was automatically entered into a sweepstakes for a chance to win a \$10,000 cash prize, split 50-50 between the individual winner and a school of his or her choice. The game and sweepstakes was promoted through traditional public relations initiatives, social media venues, such as Twitter and Facebook, and in IPC's bi-monthly newsletter. Additionally, an email announcement was sent to thousands of school superintendents across the country.

RESULTS: The game received more than 9.4 million media impressions and 7,900 entries from children, parents and educators. The winner was a 14-year-old boy from Davenport, IA, along with his school, Assumption Catholic High School.

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

Eagle, ID

Comic Book Campaign

OBJECTIVE: To reinforce and grow the reputation of Idaho potatoes as America's highest quality No. 1-selling potato. Also, to increase retailer support for Idaho potatoes, thus driving volume and growing the potato business throughout the country.

CAMPAIGN: The Comic Book campaign touts the selling power of Idaho potatoes through tales of a heroic produce manager who repeatedly saves a shopper from life-threatening situations orchestrated by an evil villain trying to stock "no-name potatoes." An internationally known comic book artist drew the artwork by hand, which appeared throughout retail trade publications in 2009/2010 as colorful, full-page ads, in addition to a number of print teaser ads, online ads, direct mail and premiums and a super-charged PMA trade show booth. The IPC field staff, which were featured in the Comic Book, reached out to retailers and industry press with two premium giveaways including



a Produce Man Hero USB credit card and an insulated coffee mug displaying the Episode 1 ad.

RESULTS: The Comic Book campaign has won widespread recognition through its humor and powerful approach. In offices throughout the nation, the IPC's retail customers proudly display the comic books. Though branded potato sales are impossible to track, based on the amount of retailer feedback and support, Comic



Book has dramatically improved Idaho's reach to the trade through a consistent, integrated approach and a touch of humor.

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LITEHOUSE FOODS

Sandpoint, ID

Monsters vs. Aliens Movie Promotion



OBJECTIVE: To partner with Pixar to publicize the *Monsters vs. Aliens* movie, promoted via Litehouse caramel dips in retail packaging; to develop a thematic PMA booth based around the movie and drive traffic to it; to use the *Monsters vs. Aliens* theme to also draw attention to other products.

CAMPAIGN: Litehouse established a partnership with Pixar to promote the studio's *Monsters vs. Aliens* movie on Litehouse caramel dips. To take this partnership to the fullest extent, Litehouse collaborated with McDill Associates to develop a thematic PMA Fresh Summit booth and pre-show mailer. Using the approach of a movie premiere, the Litehouse booth included "paparazzi" silhouettes taking pictures of the product and famous movie posters featuring Litehouse products. Bob the Blob from the movie made a special red carpet appearance and a movie-themed pre-show mailer was sent to trade show attendees to drive booth traffic.

RESULTS: The booth at PMA saw a steady stream of traffic as a result of the mailer. Sales and marketing representatives received great feedback to the theme and graphics from customers and other trade members.

NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

Orlando, FL

Holiday with Latin Flair

OBJECTIVE: To encourage consumers to use mangos year-round by focusing on a non-traditional mango season.

CAMPAIGN: Holiday recipes were presented beginning in May with a television segment featuring Ingrid Hoffman demonstrating a mango recipe at the Food & Finance High School in New York City. Other holiday recipes were presented in videos including Mango Holiday Dip, Mango Coconut Rice and Merry Mango Flan. In addition to the recipe, tips about preparation, storage and use were included in the videos, which were promoted on the NMB Web site, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Every time the video was viewed online, the NMB donated \$1 to the Food & Finance High School. In addition to the video, the NMB hosted editors from some of the major national consumer publications for a luncheon with Ingrid Hoffman at the high school.



RESULTS: The campaign garnered 35,801,320 impressions, totaling 320 impressions per dollar spent. Mango coverage was included in a number of publications, including *Prevention*, *Bon Apétit*, *Cooking Light*, *Food Network Magazine* and *Real Simple*, among others. The Food and Finance High School received a check for \$5,000 from the NMB.

OCEAN MIST FARMS/WEGMANS

Castroville, CA

Artichoke-palooza

OBJECTIVE: To educate Wegmans' consumers and its produce executives about how to use artichokes. Specifically, to meet this goal, the company sought to increase Wegmans staff's knowledge about artichokes and drive sales of the category overall.



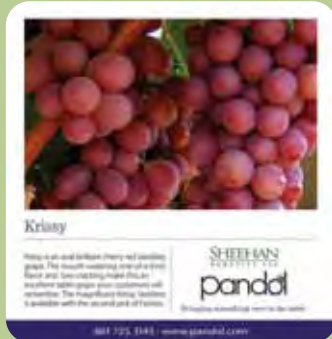
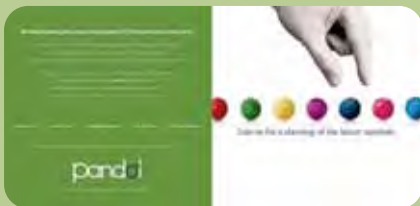
CAMPAIGN: Ocean Mist Farms partnered with Wegmans on a four-week promotion during the peak volume production time period for artichokes. To complement aggressive retail pricing, the campaign had several elements that involved both Wegmans' associates and retail shoppers. "Artichoke 101" classes were held in April to educate produce employees about artichokes prior to the season's peak. In addition to a 60-minute video, which showcased the artichoke making its field-to-fork journey, associates learned about the artichoke consumer with demographic profile information. Ocean Mist Farms provided photos of ideal artichoke displays as well as suggestions for items that could be cross-promoted with the vegetable. Wegmans' staff experienced hands-on training regarding how to prepare, cook and serve an artichoke, which is useful information they can pass on directly to the consumer. Wegmans also used the Chefs Unplugged feature in its *Menu* magazine to spotlight artichoke recipes.

RESULTS: During the six-week promotion, sales of Ocean Mist Farms' artichokes increased 800 percent over the same period of time compared to a year ago.

PANDOL BROTHERS INC.

Delano, CA

New Grape Varietal Introduction



OBJECTIVE: To successfully launch new grape varieties in the marketplace, generating industry interest and sales, and further strengthening Pandol's positioning as an innovator and pioneer in marketing new varieties.

CAMPAIGN: The promotion, which revolved around communication pieces such as brochures and e-blasts, primarily targeted retail buyers, wholesalers and brokers, but also had a secondary audience of the produce industry at large. A tasting event for local inspectors, buyers and media reinforced the previous mailers and ads. Materials, samples and imagery incorporated the same message into the company's PMA booth.

RESULTS: The promotion generated quite a bit of interest in the new varieties. Retail buyers called in to request samples; media representatives wanted to be involved with the tasting event and our breeders were very pleased with how the company was able to position their varieties and bring attention to them. The intended audience is still talking about and requesting these varieties and is interested to hear what Pandol is working on for the upcoming season.

TANIMURA & ANTLE INC.

Salinas, CA

Live From Tennessee

OBJECTIVE: To introduce the company's hydroponically grown Living Lettuce to the geographic region east of the Mississippi.

CAMPAIGN: Tanimura & Antle partnered with McDill Associates to develop this product and regional-specific promotion. The promotion was launched with a regionally targeted premium direct mailing and subsequently supported in regionally focused print media and electronic media. The mailing, which was shipped in a unique triangular box to 150 produce executives, included a microphone/speaker with a pre-recorded message on an MP3 player directing recipients to a microsite where they could learn more about the product.

RESULTS: Living Lettuce is now sold to 13 new accounts that previously did not purchase the product. Of accounts that were already purchasing the product, Tanimura & Antle has experienced up to a 200 percent increase in individual account sales volume.



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

Amherst, MA

Asparagus Introduces Spring

OBJECTIVE: To double consumption of fresh produce and create excitement and variety in campus dining along with educating students on the nutritious aspects of asparagus and increasing the night traffic at the dining commons within the University.



CAMPAIGN: The dining program at the University partnered with the California Asparagus Commission and celebrated chef and cookbook author, Betty Rosbottom, to create a week-long marketing event from March 22 to March 26, 2010. Fresh California asparagus was featured all week in delicious and creative breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes including Asparagus and Mushroom Filled Crepes and Asparagus and Rock Shrimp Risotto. On one day during the week, Rosbottom joined the dining team to showcase some asparagus recipes from her *Big Book of Backyard Cooking*, which were then served in the dining halls.

RESULTS: A total of 2,464 pounds of fresh asparagus was used throughout the week in a total of 10 new asparagus recipes. Despite the fact that the food cost per meal increased by only 3 cents, the average traffic count was up 12 percent, or 1,135 students per day, compared to other weekly specials and the customer satisfaction rating increased to 8.5 on a scale of 10.

VIDALIA ONION COMMITTEE

Vidalia, GA

Ogres & Onions

OBJECTIVE: To capitalize on the appeal of the popular *Shrek* movie franchise to sell more Vidalia onions. Specifically, to utilize likeability of *Shrek* with adults — particularly parents trying to make good food choices that also please their kids — who have existing purchase power to sell more Vidalia onions in the short-term. Also, to associate *Shrek* imagery and appeal with the Vidalia name to establish and solidify Vidalia brand equity with future shoppers — particularly younger demographics — to sell more Vidalia onions in the long-term.

CAMPAIGN: The VOC signed an agreement with DreamWorks Animation SKG Inc. to feature Shrek in all of its national marketing and on-product packaging for 2010. The campaign was announced at the 2009 PMA Convention, where Shrek made special appearances at the VOC booth. The all-encompassing campaign included many retail elements such as POS materials in the

form of tear-off recipe/contest pads, a retail display contest, POP radio, Shrek packaging, Shrek bins and ½-bins, retail newsletters, retail sales tools, circular ad artwork, paid advertising, trade editorial, Web site redesign and DreamWorks and partner promotions

RESULTS: Mainstream media outlets had a field day with this promotion and coverage was included on CNN, in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *LA Times*, just to name a few. A majority of the Top Ten retailers and all but one of the Top 15 packers are participating, making it the most industry-wide participation in a VOC program since the formative days of the Committee in the early 90s. Not only have retailers embraced the promotion by utilizing the VOC Shrek POS materials, they are also branching out with their own promotions, for example, integrating the onions with a *Shrek* DVD purchase. At press time, 11,000 Shrek bins, 2.25 million Shrek bags, 10,000-plus floor stands and box toppers, 20,000-plus recipe pads and 20,000-plus price cards had been distributed.



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Five Strategies For Increasing Avocado Sales

Fall used to be a pretty slow time for avocados. Not any more. Make the most of the season with fruit from three countries.

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

In spite of all the economic news thrown at us every day, a billion is still a big number.

Yet, for the past several years, avocados either grown in or shipped to the United States have exceeded a billion pounds on a consistent annual basis. That's a lot of production, consumption and opportunity.

There's something remarkable going on with this once specialty fruit. Due to production in California, Mexico and Chile, Hass avocados, the primary variety and type representing 91 percent of total avocado retail volume in the United States, are now readily available year-round. When one source is down in size or volume, chances are another source has a bumper crop. This year, California has a large crop extending its season; Chile's season is taking off and Mexico, the biggest producer, can now market year-round to the United States.

Consumption has moved beyond the coasts and southern border states, beyond Cinco de Mayo and the Super Bowl, beyond Hispanic populations and way beyond guacamole. In the past two years,

every region of the country has increased avocado usage, and according to the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB), category usage increased to 64 percent of U.S. households.

Hass avocado promotion organizations, including Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC), the Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAIA), in Coral Gables, FL, the Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA), located in Washington, D.C., and the HAB make up the federal marketing order. Assessments are funneled to one place — the Hass Avocado Board — and allocated for promotional use to organizations representing the three sources to help build demand throughout the year. The Avocado Producers Exporting Association of Michoacán (APEAM), headquartered in New York, NY, which represents Mexican growers with additional promotion funds, works more independently. All the organizations have shown unique cooperation in their efforts to jointly increase U.S. consumption of avocados. The total sum of the available funds has substantially increased the level of Hass avocado promotion.

Avocados are clearly an opportunity category for retailers, not only in traditionally strong markets, but also those relatively new to the big revenue and profit growth avocados generate when effectively merchandised and sold.

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

Perhaps the biggest news is the lack of it. Going into fall 2010, Hass avocados, the preferred variety in U.S. markets, have good supply of all sizes, no changes in packaging, significant promotional support from associations and wholesalers, an ever stronger nutrition message and, thanks to television and internet programming and great visibility from the foodservice market, an ever more curious and adventuresome consumer eager to try new uses. What more could a retailer want?

Bill Tarleton, director of marketing and communications of Mission Produce Inc., in Oxnard, CA,



Avocados From Mexico has teamed up with actress and mother, Holly Robison Peete, to promote healthful eating habits.

Photo courtesy of Avocados from Mexico

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Reader Service # 17



Photo courtesy of Brooks Tropicals LLC

asks, "If 90 percent of California households buy avocados and other Southeast markets top 75 percent household penetration, what are the growth opportunities in other markets? We believe they are huge and extend beyond Hispanic consumers."

Great merchandising really comes down to knowing your customers and using that knowledge to develop the classic strategies of assortment, pricing, promotion and display. Effective communication with customers is the final and best strategy to leverage category growth.

Below are five strategies to make the most of the year-round avocado crop.

STRATEGY #1: ASSORTMENT

Bob Kirch, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Caito Foods Service Inc., a major fresh produce distributor located in Indianapolis, IN, says, "We look at our retail customers in a 10-state region and find that a large avocado, size 36 to 40, is the foundation a retailer can build on; additional sizes can go up or down depending on demand, season and promotion. We service good consumption markets like Chicago, that can support a number of sizes, to smaller Midwest communities, where avocados are underdeveloped as a category. Bags of smaller avocados can attract new customers or smaller households who want a fresh avocado to use every day."

Equally as important in selection as size is ripeness. When a customer steps up to the display, consider the rapid stream of thought that occurs: "Oh, avocados, that would be great on a salad tonight....we could invite the neighbors to watch the game this weekend and make guacamole....I could try that recipe I saw on the Food Network." Every one of those thoughts has a different

requirement: Ripe tonight; ripe this weekend, ripe sometime in between. The best avocado merchandisers have all those bases covered with a three-stage ripeness choice for customers, each carefully differentiated and signed or stickered.

Florida presents a unique opportunity with its green, thin-skinned avocados, branded as Slimcados. Mary Ostlund, director of marketing for Brooks Tropicals LLC, headquartered in Homestead, FL, reminds retailers, "Our green, thin-skinned avocados represent about 9 percent of the market and provide the lower fat and lighter taste that many consumers seek." It's one more way to call attention to avocados and expand consumer choice.

STRATEGY #2: PRICING

Kirch encourages retailers to vary pricing according to size, "For some, selecting avocados by price point can be wise," he suggests. "An example might be sizes 48 to 60 to develop incremental sales."

APEAM marketing director, Emiliano Escobedo, advises retailers to run promotion discounts from 11 to 30 percent of the regular retail price, noting, "Including bulk and packaged avocados in the same promotion still allows different price points and stronger value for consumers."

STRATEGY #3: PROMOTION

As the biggest avocado sales event holidays — Super Bowl and Cinco de Mayo — are long past, new season promotions have been developed by the various promotion boards. Suppliers and wholesalers also support individual retail promotions. Increasingly, promotions center around nutrition and sports, providing themes for retailers to use in-store and in their ads. Jackie Bohmer, director of marketing for the MHAIA, reports, "We will run a national consumer,

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Reader Service # 39

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ChileanAvocados.org/retail



So Good. So Many Ways.

retail baseball and World Series promotion again this year involving a display contest, a consumer recipe contest and television advertising to build avocado demand during this transition period of time."

Maggie Bezart, director of marketing for the CAIA, notes that Chilean avocados will also be promoted throughout the fall, tying in with the final stretch of the Major League Baseball season and with the full season of college football. The organization also supports youth soccer. In terms of tactics, she says, "Avocados are a good profit item for the produce department and a strong supply means there are values available for the consumer. We recommend multiple sales promotions such as 10-for-\$10, 99¢-each, and using multiple sizes of fruit and price points to increase the front end ring."

Escobedo concurs, adding, "The best way for retailers to maximize sales is to promote alternative avocado usage by displaying avocados next to healthful items they could partner with in meals and recipes. Display avocados with pre-cut salads and with ideas for easy platters and sandwiches." He reports, "MHALA studies conducted in September of 2008 found that 90 percent of all light and non-users said they would purchase more avocados once exposed to

health benefits."

With its strongest markets in the West and Southern border states of Arizona and Texas, CAC's vice president of marketing, Jan DeLyser, remarks, "We can position California avocados as the local choice, a theme that resonates with California consumers and is judged by the large Western markets as qualifying. We're urging consumers and retailers to view avocados as an any-time-of-the-day choice in foods as diverse as omelets, soups and even pizza.

Retailers may not all be seeing growth or be taking full advantage of available promotion and merchandising assistance. Jose Manzano, produce director at the three-store retailer, Dorothy Lane Market, located in the underdeveloped market of Dayton, OH, reports a stable but not yet growing demand for Hass avocados. "For us, fall just isn't a big avocado period," he admits. "We stock a size 40 conventional and a size 60 organic, but no bags. We promote several times during the fall, but I can't say avocados are showing big growth."

In contrast, for Vince Mastromauro, produce and floral director at Sunset Foods, a four-unit chain in the Chicago, IL, metro market, avocados are part of his Top Ten list, and growing. "We only use a size 48, but place

them with tomatoes for our primary set and put a secondary display next to salads. We work through our supplier for promotional support, but don't really participate in the national promotions and display contests."

STRATEGY #4: DISPLAY

Avocados, by and large, are still an impulse purchase. Apart from guacamole, they seldom appear on a consumer's shopping list. Media advertising and speaking to consumers is made stronger by what happens in-store. Display location can act as a suggestion for use. "Increasingly, retailers have found that grouping the main avocado display with tomatoes and onions increases sales," reveals Doug Meyer, vice president of sales and marketing for West Pak Avocado Inc., in Temucula, CA. "Focus on cross-merchandising. It really works if you make everything convenient for the shopper."

The promotion groups agree that sales improve when there are multiple displays, especially those with three-stage ripeness strategy in place. APEAM's Escobedo is more specific, citing, "Our research shows that ripe avocados outsell unripe fruit by 2-to-1. Keep ripe and unripe fruit separate and use clear signage or labels to indicate ripeness levels to help minimize consumer

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Reader Service # 49

Avocado Merchandising Task List

- Offer multiple sizes with multiple price points; don't neglect bags.
- Implement a three-stage ripeness program: Firm; breaking; ripe and ready-to-eat tonight.
- Use lots of visual suggestions for uses beyond guacamole.
- Promote often during the fall period and sometimes promote multiple avocado items, including bags, at different price points.
- Consider the national and regional themed promotions available; check with your supplier for help.
- Include nutrition information in signs, ads and recipes.
- Use display sizes that match sales and movement.
- Group main display with tomatoes and onions; build secondary displays with complementary healthful foods and cross-merchandise.
- Find ways to utilize social media.
- Help customers find good information on avocado web sites:
www.theamazingavocado.com;
www.avocadosfrommexico.com;
www.avocado.org;
www.chileanavocados.org;
www.avocadocentral.org
- Talk to your customers about avocados. **pb**

handling and shrink."

MHAI's Bohmer describes the effectiveness of a freestanding tower that is part of the organization's Big Hit 2010 baseball promotion. "Layered openings allow retailers to present different sizes or different stages of ripening in the same display," she details. "It also enables retailers to present avocados in different locations — by the meat or deli department or close to checkout."

STRATEGY #5: COMMUNICATION

In today's fast-paced world of instant messaging, social media, 24/7 internet and portable, hand-held computing, the produce world needs to get better faster at communication with their customers. If the 50-plus population shies away from this technological revolution, the younger generation expects to be able to instantly get information, opinions and the popular preferences

of their friends and acquaintances.

Meeting those expectations for information has also become, in part, a retail responsibility. If retail staff is not in a position to answer the latest cooking or nutrition questions, they must be able to provide appropriate Web site addresses. Additionally, knowing how to select, ripen and store produce department products are important skills and critical to building the store's reputation for service.

Mission's Tarleton points out, "For example, many retailers are not taking full advantage of the nutrition story of avocados. As a

business-to-business company, we stay on top of consumer discussions online and measure topics and 'hits.' Using social media, we're up to over 2,000 followers for avocados this year."

For stores large and small there are resources available to help. Tap into the information available on producer and supplier Web sites and make consumer sites available to your customers. See if there is a merchandising representative that covers your area. Make sure an ever-changing selection of easy recipes and appetizing photos of quick ideas are part of your displays. **pb**

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Washington Apples Add Flair To Produce

Whether stocking newer club varieties or those that are tried-and-true, retailers continue to get high rings with Washington apples.

BY THERESA BRAINE

Washington is known as the trendsetter and the harbinger of what apple season will bring in terms of varieties and trends, and this year is no exception.

From Honeycrisp to new club varieties such as Ambrosia, sweet is in, and Red Delicious, that icon of the American apple, is slowly being pushed aside by Gala, Fuji and other new varieties. Club, or niche, varieties are big, too; their limited numbers made up for by the diverse array of flavors.

NEW VARIETIES PLUS TRIED-AND-TRUE

Honeycrisp is the most planted variety this year, according to Rebecca Baerveldt-Lyons, export marketing manager for the Wenatchee-based

Washington Apple Commission (WAC). There's a push toward higher-colored strains of Fuji as well, she adds. "In addition, a number of club varieties is gaining momentum," she says. "Although quantities of each are limited, the huge variety makes up for it."

On the retail level, at Associated Food Stores Inc., in Salt Lake City, UT, new varieties this fall include Jonagold and Honeycrisp, with the latter flying off the shelves. "Honeycrisp is an amazing apple," exclaims Leigh Vaughn, director of produce and floral. "Typically, it's the most expensive, but it doesn't matter. Customers love it because it's the best apple — probably the best eating apple there is."

Similar trends are in evidence at Redner's Markets, which has 40-plus stores in Eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware, says the chain's produce director, Richard Stiles. "We probably carry 12 to 15 varieties at a time," he reports. The best-selling are Gala and Red Delicious, though "when we can get it we can sell all the Honeycrisp that they send us," he adds. "That'll surpass a lot of the others in sales."

Fuji volumes are also increasing. "Every year they get a little bit more popular," Stiles notes. "We advertise those quite a bit — more so than we have in the past. Another apple that's doing very well for us, too, is the Cameo."

Gala and Fuji are also popular sellers and are year-round. Associated sells "quite a few" Pink Lady apples, Vaughn says. "They're getting some more traction, but the Honeycrisp will take over the world."

Meanwhile, both old and new standbys are gaining ground, Baerveldt-Lyons-Lyons notes. "Gala will continue to be planted and eventually make up 25 percent to 30 percent of our entire production," she reports.

Growers are seeing trends along similar lines. "We grow all the varieties — Reds, Golds, Grannies and Fujis, Braeburns, Jonagolds — we have all sorts of varieties," says Chuck Sinks, president of sales



Braeburns continue to be a popular choice, especially when cross-merchandised with caramel dipping sauce.

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and marketing for Sage Fruit Co. LLC, headquartered in Yakima, WA. "Overall they're projecting a big crop this year." Even with hail affecting some growers, there will be plenty of apples, he adds. "I'd say we'll probably have close to seven million cartons of apples this year," Sinks says of his company's production. "That's up a little bit from last year."

Pink Lady, the trademarked brand name for Cripps Pink, will also see higher yields this season, reveals Alan Taylor, marketing director of Pink Lady America LLC, the Yakima, WA-based company licensed to grow the apple under that brand name in the United States. "We've been slowly increasing," he says. "This year, we had a record crop, but only by a few boxes. It's not like it's a giant leap. And projections are looking toward continued increases — nothing dramatic, but the increases are there."

As far as popularity, "Red delicious continues to lead the category, but Gala is rapidly approaching as the No. 1 apple, and then Fuji is also a very close second to the varieties," says Sinks. "Red is still No. 1, but these other two apples are definitely closing on it."

Several growers, including Sage, are importing Galas and other varieties in addition to growing them so as to extend the season. "We have our own Galas, but we also bring in offshore Galas to complement our other apples so we have a year-round supply of Galas as well as other varieties," Sinks discloses, naming Chile and New Zealand as sources.

Bob Mast, vice president of marketing at Columbia Marketing International Corp. (CMI), a Wenatchee, WA-based grower, reports similar trends. "As far as trends for newest varieties, I think that Galas and Fujis have been two of the faster-growing in the United States," he says. "Apples with a little bit of a sweeter palate have been performing well. They've always performed well out in the Midwest and have continued to move toward the East Coast, which has traditionally been more aligned with tart varieties. We have seen sweet varieties pick up everywhere."

In addition, "Newer strains of Fujis are higher strains," Mast notes, "so quality of fruit overall is getting better, and I think consumers are recognizing that."

Two other varieties are also making waves: Kanzi, from outside the Netherlands, is on the horizon. "We just did some test marketing; last year was our first season," says Mast. "This one has a unique appearance and a very distinctive, intense flavor. It does extremely well in Europe, and our initial feedback here in the United States was



Photo courtesy of Rainier Fruit Co.

Allocating prime retail space to a new variety with excellent signage, a Kroger store in Michigan showcases Lady Alice apples from Rainier Fruit Co.

very favorable. It's kind of got a sweet-tart flavor, a very intense flavor for the palate, so we're just marketing that one."

Another variety that CMI is test marketing is the Rubens — out of Europe — "and we're actually test-marketing those along with Chelan Fresh, in conjunction with them, and that's an apple that has a fairly unique appearance and a sweet-tart flavor as well," Mast remarks. "So we've got two really sweet apples — Ambrosia and Aikiku — and the sweet, tart Kanzi and Rubens." Each has its own distinctive look from a branding standpoint, he adds, "so they give us an ability to offer retailers something unique in their marketplace, unique to them and their stores."

Pink Lady, a variety originating in Western Australia, is also gaining in popularity. "This year we came in at around three million for fresh, probably closer to four million total, which is 3 percent of the state's total fresh crop," says Taylor.

Rainier Fruit Co., in Selah, WA, also has seen the rise of Gala and Fuji, especially since innovations mean an improvement in color, according to Suzanne Wolter, the company's director of marketing. Pink Lady and Honeycrisp are also big, and club varieties have also been a focus for the state, she says.

When it comes to October-through-December sales, Honeycrisp is the fastest growing variety, says Wolter. "Rainier Fruit is the only supplier of Honeycrisp past January due to our volume and storage capabilities. Additionally, Pink Lady, Fuji and Club varieties in general are seeing good growth." Although she won't share exact planting volumes, "I can tell you we've been ahead of the curve when it comes to shifting our production from Reds and Golden to the newer varieties for the past 20 years," Wolter says.

For Stemilt Growers LLC, based in Wenatchee, WA, "The two fastest-growing varieties are Gala and Honeycrisp," says marketing director Roger Pepperl. "Gala has a huge head start, but Honeycrisp is gaining steam. Fuji is also another apple that is getting a great deal of attention and will continue to grow as the Midwest and East Coast retailers continue to embrace it."

SWEET CAN'T BE BEAT; CLUBS ADD EXCLUSIVITY

All growers, as well as the WAC, acknowledge the nation's increasing taste for sweet apples. Besides the standard varieties — Red and Golden Delicious, Gala, Fuji, Granny Smith, Braeburn, Jonagold and Pink Lady — "there has been a lot of excitement recently about Honeycrisp, and production is increasing so that consumers will start to see better availability."

"Also, the growth of exclusive club varieties — produced and sold by a limited number of grower/shippers — means that there are more apple options than ever for retailers and consumers," WAC's Baerveldt-Lyons-Lyons says.

Niche or club varieties are also making an appearance. "These are typically managed varieties that are pulled by certain marketing organizations," says CMI's Mast. "The Ambrosia, which we've been marketing for several seasons is doing very well."

CMI also has exclusive rights to grow the Kiku apple, the brand name for a variety discovered in Japan, propagated in Italy and debuting across the country over the past few years. "It's a super-sweet variety; it's actually about the sweetest apple you can get," Mast describes. CMI has also licensed Applewood Orchards Inc., in Deerfield, MI, and Rice Growers, in Pennsylvania, to grow

“Over the past couple of years in terms of volume, Galas, Fujis and Honeycrisp have been the three fastest-growing.”

**— Bob Mast
Columbia Marketing
International Corp.**

the Kiku.

Rainier has entered the world of club varieties, as well. “Our own club variety is called Lady Alice, which we’ve been selling for the past four to five years,” reports Wolter. “In the past two years we changed our go-market-strategy because of its incredible storage capability, and although it’s harvested in the fall, we don’t pack it until March. It has been very well received with consumers and our retail partners.”

Sage Fruit Co. has introduced a couple of new varieties that are growing in popularity, Sinks says. “The latest variety we have is the Sonya. It’s a new apple that’s been out for a few years,” says Sinks. “Sonya is a cross between a Red Delicious and a Gala. It’s a sweet apple and stores very well and it’s firm, has a great crunch to it, and we’re moving a lot of that apple. People who try it really like it.”

The Rozlyn is another new variety being offered by Sage. “We don’t have a tremendous amount of that apple but it’s another new variety that many of our customers have heard about,” says Sinks.

“Over the past couple of years in terms of volume, Galas, Fujis and Honeycrisp have been the three fastest-growing,” says Mast of CMI. “Then when you talk about these club or managed varieties, Ambrosia has been one of the fastest-growing in the United States.”

According to Taylor of Pink Lady America, favorite brands among consumers include Honeycrisp and Jazz. “I would imagine that that would be continuing,” he says. “There are a number of other varieties; it seems that a lot of major shippers now are introducing their own varieties. We’ll see how those go, they’re small — volume-wise — at the moment as they seek their part of the market.”

Pink Lady led the charge in apple trademarks and continues to be a major player

today. Taylor remarks, “We were the first trademarked apple, and we’ve looked back very proudly on what we’ve done. We’ve built the brand now to the point where it’s one of the established brands in the produce department.”

“There are a lot of club or trademarked varieties that are in the ground,” says Stemilt’s Pepperl. “Stemilt has two trademarked varieties — the Pinata, which is really gaining steam in the marketplace and the Sweetango, part of the NBT co-operative’s strategy to bring this apple to market with strategic packer/marketer locations

across North America. Stemilt is the West Coast packer and marketer of this great apple,” he continues. “The company is also planting large numbers of Aztec Fuji, which is a new Fuji variety that has great color and flavor. It will compete very well against other Fuji plantings.”

MERCHANDISING APPLES THAT SELL THEMSELVES

The WAC works to appeal to “consumers looking for something new” by using the temporary “ins and outs” category to feature new apples such as Honeycrisp or club vari-

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Photo courtesy of Stemilt Growers LLC

CMI has the exclusive rights to market the Kiku, a supersweet strain discovered in Japan.

eties, which may only be available on a limited basis, Baerveldt-Lyons says. "The key is consumer education through sampling, signage and visibility," she explains. "Sampling is an excellent way to educate consumers on new varieties, along with signage that provides a taste profile and/or usage tips. Highlight new varieties in an end cap in the apple display, and better yet, place a secondary display at the front of the store to impact consumers as they enter."

Sage also does apple demos. "Build eye-catching displays at the front of the department to draw consumers' attention," says

Sinks. "We'll often have a display contest so that the produce manager is rewarded for building the best displays. We did a mystery shopper event around the Rozalyn. We had the retailer advertising it, and if a consumer was 'caught' buying the Rozalyn apple we'd pay his or her groceries up to \$50. I think we gave away close to \$500. So it was fun, and consumers were more than grateful, and the store group was excited to participate in that."

When it comes to merchandising Pink Lady, it "depends on where you want to start," says Taylor of Pink Lady America.

"We're concentrating on point of sale," adds. This includes social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and a nascent enterprise called Pink Lady Web. Moreover, Pink Lady is looking into three major promotions next season involving the pairing of different products, Taylor says.

Connecting Pink Lady to various holidays is also a key strategy. "The flavor profile of Pink Lady will go very well with wine and cheese for New Year's," Taylor points out. "And we're looking toward Valentine's Day, probably pairing up again with wine and cheese and flowers." For Mothers' Day they're looking at one of the major tea companies, "and again, flowers."

The part-time staff has a very small budget, "so we take our budget and usually work through our shippers," Taylor says. "We support them; we don't do a lot of direct work with the retailers themselves. So we're able to take what we can create and help support their efforts."

For Stemilt, timing is key. "The best way to merchandise apples is to introduce a selection in the produce department that reflects the best variety for that time of year," advises Stemilt's Pepperl. "Jonagold in the fall and Pink Lady in the winter are examples. Stores can only carry so many varieties at a time, which means the right

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“The best way to merchandise apples is to introduce a selection in the produce department that reflects the best variety for that time of year.”

**— Roger Pepperl
Stemilt Growers LLC**

selection to maximize the shelf space opportunity is important. Bulk is the most important category with it being 75 percent of the average purchases of apples,” he adds. “Bulk also shows better gross margins overall as well as better retail dollars per pound. Tote bags can build incremental purchase size by encouraging four pounds or more at a purchase. Building POS programs that tie the land and the farmer into the program is very effective and quenches the consumers need to know where their food was grown.”

As far as merchandising projects that are underway, “We are engaging in mobile marketing, which will allow customers to use their cell phones in-store to learn about new varieties,” Pepperl remarks. “The Web site is also good. Point-of-sale is a great tool when it gets up. We also engage in making great merchandising display pieces that promote new varieties. This is also a great method to promote organic apples that are growing rapidly as a category. Twenty-five percent of our apples are grown organically, and the consumer is looking for this category.”

Retailers like Washington apples because the season is longer than other U.S. regions for some varieties, giving consumers apple access year-round, or close to it.

Washington apples pretty much sell themselves at Associated Food, whose stores cover nine states. “They have massive brand equity, like Idaho potatoes,” says Vaughn. “That makes it a no-brainer, even though Utah has similar growing conditions to Washington — relatively cold nights, which increases the sugar content.”

Moreover, “they’re excellent for shipping; they hold up very well,” Associated Food’s Vaughn adds.

Another reason that Washington apples sell themselves is that the state is “spectacular” at marketing the fruit, Vaughn says, including not only in-store promotions but

also billboards. Tote bag programs move apples, particularly in the family-friendly regions in which Associated operates. “If you can get five to seven pounds of apples into a cart at \$1.49-a-pound, that’s a fantastic ring-up,” Vaughn says. The chain is also working with one of its suppliers to build portable pop-up cardboard bins that would hold tote bags in a peripheral display. Sometimes, they’ll put a coupon on the bags just for good measure.

Associated also uses social media for marketing, posting recipes on its Facebook page, Planet Produce, which offers new-item announcements, seasonal changes and

other news. It also held a display contest with retailers this year, Vaughn says.

At Redner’s, the apples don’t need much merchandising, though the chain does sell 3- and 5-lb. pound bags, with back-to-school totes being popular. Stiles says, “They’re such a staple item, like Idaho potatoes. You would be out of business if you didn’t carry Washington apples.”

Does the popularity of newer, sweeter varieties spell a death knell for the iconic Red Delicious apple? Not a chance, says Sage’s Sinks: “There’ll always be a use for the Red Delicious,” he says. “It’s just not as popular as it once was.” **pb**

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Tailgating Game-Changer

No longer merely a meat-lover's paradise, tailgating has opened up to produce in a big way.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

The kids have gone back to school; there's a crisp, cool feel in the air; and those long sunny summer days are now a thing of the past.

That can only mean one thing. It's tailgating time! Football season is upon us, and that means it's time to fire up the grill, grab some hot dogs, burger and buns, and head out to the stadium.

While tailgating is often viewed as a meat-lover's delight, produce is increasingly finding its way into the picture — both as a topper and a side dish. Asparagus, avocados, peppers and pineapple, even grapes, blueberries and bananas are making their way to the stadium parking lot, as consumers seek a fresher and more healthful approach to the foods they eat at the big game.

"A Sunday afternoon cheering on your favorite team is no longer an excuse to indulge and throw out a healthful lifestyle," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., based in Coral Gables, FL. "Fruits and vegetables, whether grilled or served fresh, are perfect for any tailgate celebration and have become popular on grills and tables outside stadiums across the country," he says.

In part, changing demographics are responsible for the increasing usage of produce in tailgating occasions. With more women getting into football — and women typically more interested in nutri-

tious food — that is paving the way for more fruits and vegetables, as they strive to remake tailgating into a well-rounded dining affair. Particularly when the kids are involved, women are dedicated to ensuring the foods being eaten at the tailgate are wholesome and healthy. "If kids are being brought along, there are going to be a lot more snack types of fruits and vegetables — grapes, carrots, things like that," says Julia Inestroza, marketing and merchandising manager at Gourmet Trading Co., located in Los Angeles, CA. "People are starting to realize that tailgating doesn't have to be all about meat; it's about the veggies, too."

To make it simple for consumers to incorporate vegetables into their tailgating occasions, Guadalupe, CA-based Apio Inc. promotes its ready-to-share Eat Smart party trays, featuring fresh-cut vegetables and dip "ready to grab from the market and take to your next event," remarks Cali Tanguay, director of marketing and technology. "Tailgating parties are all about the bounty — lots of people, lots of food and lots of activity," she adds. "Finger foods are a fantastic fit for tailgating because they lend themselves to grazing — eat a little, talk, walk around, eat some more, etc."

Mann Packing Co. Inc., in Salinas, CA, developed the Meat & Cheese Vegetable Platter, including fresh-cut veggies, beef bites and cheddar cheese cubes, along with a traditional ranch dip. According to research and development director Elena Hernandez, it's all about creating a no-fuss game day. "You don't have to worry about packing a cutting board or additional utensils," she says.

RAISING THE BAR

Avocados have long been associated with tailgating because of the popularity of guacamole as a chip dip. These days, however, avocados are being used in a multitude of ways on the day of the big game. Guacamole remains immensely popular, but it no longer serves only as a dip. Tailgaters are topping their burgers, steak sandwiches and hot dogs with it, sometimes even preparing it right there on-site. Other consumers are simply slicing open an avocado and then spooning some out when they need it. The nature of the product makes it easy for consumers to incorporate fresh avocado into their tailgating parties, emphasizes Maggie Bezart, direc-



Photo courtesy of Gourmet Trading Co.

Simple and nutritious dishes, such as grilled asparagus, are making their way to tailgating parties.

"The great thing about the avocado is it comes in its own container, so it's easily transportable. All you have to do is open it up and it's ready to use."

**— Maggie Bezar
Chilean Avocado
Importers Association**

tor of marketing for the Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA), in Washington, D.C. "The great thing about the avocado is it comes in its own container, so it's easily transportable," she says. "All you have to do is open it up and it's ready to use."

Taking a page from popular TV grill-masters like Bobby Flay, Guy Fieri and Tyler Florence, consumers are flexing their tailgating muscle, throwing every imaginable kind of produce on their grills. Jay Alley, vice president at Fort Worth, TX-based Fresh-erized Foods Inc., says he's seen everything from asparagus and corn on the cob to peaches, onion, eggplant and squash making its way onto tailgaters' grills.

For its part, Dole Fresh Fruit Co., headquartered in Westlake Village, CA, is promoting grilled bananas as the next big tailgating fad. According to communications manager Bil Goldfield, consumers have been surprised to learn how easy it is to prepare healthful, yet decadent dishes, such as Grilled Banana Boats. The recipe entails slitting an unpeeled banana lengthwise, then packing it with chocolate, marshmallows, caramel, and other favorite toppings before placing it on the grill. In just 10 minutes, tailgaters have a delicious dessert complete with its own bowl.

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Pompano Beach, FL-based Southern Specialties Inc., says the more color, texture and flavor, the better an item is for grilling. He points to such examples as a grilled baby squash kabob with red and yellow teardrop tomatoes and grilled mango slices with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar.

While such delicacies sound elaborate, they are deceptively simple. Not all stadium-based grilling need be elaborate, says Inestroza of Gourmet Trading. It could be some-

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thing as simple as asparagus with a little olive oil, salt and pepper, grilled right alongside traditional fare like hamburgers, hot dogs and steaks.

For the traditional tailgating guys who prefer meat and potatoes, the good news is that potatoes are increasingly finding their way onto the grill. Whether in the form of pre-cut potatoes — as in Mann's Sweet Potato Fries and Cubes — or elaborate potato bars set up right there in the parking lot, spuds are definitely a part of game day fare. "It can be anything you would serve at your house," says Alley. "After all, tailgating

is like a party you would throw at your house, except it's at the stadium."

Truth be told, tailgating need not even take place at the stadium. With a huge number of consumers staging big at-home parties on the day of the big game, "home-gating" is growing in popularity, according to Tracy Altman, vice president of marketing for Fresherized Foods. Fresherized is so convinced of homegating's huge potential, it has embarked on a major homegating promotion running from August through February. The company worked with a number of manufacturers to develop a web-

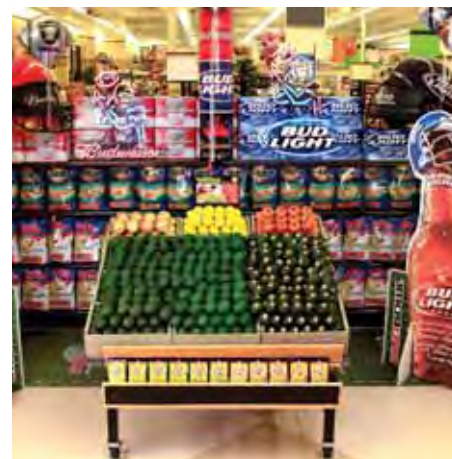


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based program that features coupons, recipes, serving suggestions and ideas for ways to get the kids involved in the festivities. "A lot of people focus on tailgating, but homegating has become just as important to consumers," says Altman. "There are more people that stay home and watch the game than actually attend it, so we need to make sure we focus on those consumers as well."

GETTING IN THE GAME

Whether they are stocking up for a tailgating or a homegating event, getting consumers to think produce falls squarely on the shoulders of retailers. Simply by featuring a variety of tailgating-themed cross-promotions and providing helpful serving suggestions, retailers can generate valuable produce department sales, according to Jose Luis Obregon, managing director of the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB).

Publix Super Markets Inc., in Lakeland, FL, seeks to become its customers "tailgating headquarters," providing complete meal options, according to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. Publix's tailgating displays feature produce, along with grilling tips, meal ideas, ready-to-eat options and serving suggestions.

"Adding fresh produce to retail tailgate displays can help educate consumers on the effortless ways they can add nutritious alternatives to the mix and inspire them to be more creative with their game day menus," remarks Del Monte's Christou. "It will also give retailers the opportunity to increase sales in the produce department and sales of related products."

Likewise, the produce department at Winn-Dixie Stores Inc., in Jacksonville, FL, partners with other departments to develop displays at the front of the store featuring key tailgating items, according to Mike Carter, senior category manager for pro-

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PROGRESSIVEPRODUCE

“People are starting to realize that tailgating doesn’t have to be all about meat; it’s about the veggies, too.”

**— Julia Inestroza
 Gourmet Trading Co.**

duce. These include avocados, bagged salads, tomatoes, fruit trays, berries, grapes, melons and peanuts. Not only do such products have to be merchandised for impulse sales, Carter says, they must be priced right, particularly in this tough economy.

While retailers are dedicating significant efforts to promoting produce for tailgating, Inestroza of Gourmet Trading says there’s always room for improvement. In fact, she’s displeased with the amount of floor space other popular tailgating products are receiving, often at the expense of produce. “During tailgating season, you see the chips and beer encroach upon the whole produce section,” she says. “There’s a lot of opportunity for produce managers to market to the tailgaters.”

Sometimes, it can be something as simple as being vigilant, noticing when someone rushes into the store wearing a team jersey on game day and making suggestions of produce items they may want to incorporate into their festivities, says Inestroza. Simply by suggesting they grab some mushrooms to grill up for a burger topper or some asparagus to serve as a side dish instead of chips, retailers can boost tailgating-related consumption and sales of produce items.

Inestroza also encourages produce executives to look for opportunities to partner with the meat department for grilling demo programs. Such promotions are often held at the start of the summer season, she says, but retailers can effectively promote products for tailgating by holding similar events in the fall. Incorporating more produce into such events can only benefit the department by opening consumers’ eyes to the role that produce can play in their tailgating parties. “Tailgating is an excuse to eat!” she says. “If we can get more healthful things into the hands of people to munch on, it would be a game-changer.”

pb

The Nut And Bolts Of Gift Baskets

Produce gift baskets are welcome, healthful gifts at any time of the year.

BY BARBARA ROBISON

Giving someone a produce gift basket is a wish of good health and perfectly reflects today's trend toward more healthful eating.

People enjoy giving a gift of colorful, ready-to-eat produce that is good for you equally as much as those who are receiving it. The gifts are perfect for numerous occasions. Birthdays, hostess gifts, hospital visits, graduations, housewarming, retirements and even corporate gifts are but a few times a gift of fresh produce is truly welcome.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-MADE GIFT BASKETS

"Produce gift baskets are a gift worth giving," asserts Rita Neczypor, marketing director at Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., based in Philadelphia, PA. "We have been supplying retailers pre-made gift baskets since 1956. Although we have seen a decrease in sales over the past three years, pre-made fruit baskets have remained a viable commodity with significant demand." The firm ships baskets on a regular

basis. To assure freshness, deliveries could be daily or several times a week.

It's true the struggling economy has dampened sales of produce gift baskets, especially the more elaborate gifts of years past. However, consumers still want to give a special gift on numerous occasions and a colorful, healthful gift of fresh fruit can fill the bill. "The less expensive lower rings are out-selling the higher rings by a wide margin," admits Mickey Yetishefsky, production manager at C & S Specialty Packaging, a division of C & S Wholesale Grocers Inc., based in Keene, NH. "The demand is still there, but it's changed. We market 35 different fruit baskets and have customers we are providing pre-made fruit baskets for every week."

"In any program, all gift baskets must contain fresh, premium quality produce," says Neczypor. "The container must have a perceived residual value — something the recipient would want to use again. The gift also must be packed in a professional manner, with a neat and attractive presentation."

Milwaukee, WI-based Fruit Ranch is known for its gift baskets and prides itself on the quality and freshness of the fruit used. "We are busy throughout the year, especially during the holiday season," says vice president Teri Gay. "The elaborate baskets of 15 years ago are gone, but business is good for the more modest priced gifts." The company finds the 10-inch, round wicker baskets are the most popular.

IN-HOUSE GIFT PREPARATION GROWING

Many markets are opting to prepare produce gift baskets in-house and supplement their own efforts with pre-made baskets during the busier holiday periods. This allows the market to include more perishable items, such as grapes, bananas and kiwis, or to custom-pack a gift for the consumer. However, it requires more in-house time and labor, along with staff know-how to produce quality gifts.

"Produce gift baskets are an impulse purchase," admits Steve Voigt, division vice president of Potter Inc., located in Bryan, OH. "To attract customers,



Photo courtesy of Procacci Bros.

An attractive presentation and the inclusion of ribbons, bows and gift cards make fruit baskets even more appealing.

the gift should be one that the market's produce staff would want to receive themselves. A fruit basket can be taken to a different level by something as simple as a hand-tied bow and a gift card." The company supplies a variety of baskets, containers and packaging materials. "Regardless of what the market's produce gift program is, ready-to-sell, pre-made gift baskets are important, especially during the busy holiday period," he adds.

Piggly Wiggly Midwest LLC, a 98-store chain headquartered in Sheboygan, WI, offers a variety of gift baskets throughout the year. It makes its own baskets in the produce department, but during the holiday period most baskets are pre-made. "We display the baskets in produce, sometimes in floral, or at the checkout stands," details produce director Dan Dippel. "The lower priced baskets sell best in our markets."

Some baskets and other containers are specifically shaped and sized for ease in holding a particular amount of fresh fruit. "Our most popular basket for produce gifts is one of the smallest, holding 11 pieces of fruit, plus grapes," says Rebecca Gibson, a sales and marketing associate for Basket Ease, in Prior Lake, MN. "It is easy to put together, and takes just two minutes, including shrinking. The patented baskets are

Containers for produce gifts come in various types, from wooden, raffia and tin to paper and plastics.

designed to hold the fruit in place so they don't roll around in preparation." The company provides training manuals and directions for making baskets and also offers seminars to its customers.

Containers for produce gifts come in various types, from wooden, raffia and tin to paper and plastic. The decision is based on the market's consumer demographics and the look it wants. Texas Basket Co., based in Jacksonville, TX, offers a selection of wooden baskets, including apple baskets in a peck, one-half peck and shallow-peck sizes. "Our baskets are all made in the United States, which many consumers appreciate," reports Martin Swanson, president and owner. "We also supply filler material and display racks."

SUPPLIERS HELP SOLVE GIFT BASKET PROBLEMS

With the trend for more produce gift baskets prepared in-house, suppliers of the necessary materials are ready to help. Domed shrink bags are one innovative idea. The bags are made of a rigid PVC (polyvinyl chloride) soft shrink film that stops shrinking on contact and will not crush soft items. Jetram Sales Inc., a gift packaging supplier in St. Louis, MO, markets a dome shrink film ideal for fruit baskets. "Our dome shrink wrap bag goes over the fresh fruit, sealing at the bottom," describes president Jim Zalaudek. "It is the largest selling item we market. The wrap shrinks at high temperatures, but repels heat and therefore is safe to use with cheeses or chocolates that are sometimes included with the fruit. Once a market's staff uses the product they see how easy it is and the excellent results we have with it."

It can be difficult for markets to please their customers with attractive produce gift baskets. Excessive labor costs, profit margins, staff training and varying consumer demands are among the things that can cause markets to delete or downgrade produce gift programs. Aware of these concerns, Willow Specialties, in Batavia, NY, a basket and packaging supplier, provides a packaging specialist to help retailers. "I work closely



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Turn This Into a Beautiful

Fruit Basket





Photo courtesy of Watson Trading Co.

with our market customers to develop programs, which take into consideration the market's major issues," explains Cheryl Thompson, a packaging specialist for the company. "We provide schematics for each gift basket idea. We also have a 'Willow Rack,' which allows someone who has never made a fruit basket to prepare one in half the time. Smaller baskets can be used and fruit can be built up, adding perceived value."

West Point Market, a gourmet market in Akron, OH, has been selling produce gift baskets for more than 40 years. "We have a gift basket department that sells them year-round," states president Larry Uhl. "We custom-pack with hand-selected fruit, usually

including 22 pieces, along with candy, a jar of preserves or other items. We promote the baskets in our customer newsletter."

A well-trained staff is an important aspect of preparing gift baskets or containers in a produce department. Watson Trading Co., a Hillsdale, MI-based supplier of baskets and packaging supplies, has detailed specifications for the gifts, which is paramount. "We work with the markets, providing schematic sheets on placing the fruit and helping retailers have better control of margins," explains Jeri Miller, director of marketing. "Also, a market is able to be more creative with a well-trained staff."

A selection of produce gift baskets is available to customers of Wilson Farm Inc., a Lexington, MA, family-run farm and market. "We developed a new look last October, providing a variety of fruit gifts at different price points," reports advertising manager Chris Previde. "Since then, our business has increased. We often combine different ingredients with the fruit and even have dried fruit and nuts in attractive gift containers."

Though still popular, baskets are sharing the gift arena with boxes and other containers. Interest in boxes is definitely increasing, with a wide variety of sizes, shapes and graphics available. "A market can select col-

ors and designs to go with their motif," notes Julie Privett, the showroom manager for Gift Box Corp. America, based in Carlstadt, NJ. "For fancier gifts, different sized boxes can be tiered with items such as nuts and dried fruit, similar to Harry and David's attractive gifts. Especially during the holiday period, when customers are willing to spend more, the upscale produce gift boxes can be sales winners."

MERCHANDISING BUILDS GIFT BASKET SALES

"Merchandising is key for a successful gift basket program," states Steve Rose, marketing communications coordinator for burton + BURTON, in Bogart, GA, a distributor of gift basket materials. He suggests increasing sales with prominent displays and cross-merchandising with other departments. Including wine, cheese, chocolates, nuts or perhaps a mug can build the gift's perceived value. "We are seeing a big growth in masculine themed gifts," he says. "Darker colored baskets or containers and cello filling and wraps, or the inclusion of mugs or other male-oriented items are helping expand the gift basket business."

"Produce gift baskets can provide good profits," says Mary Ann Jacobs, a gift basket designer and business consultant at Mary Ann Jacobs Gift Basket Videos, based in Tucson, AZ. "However, a program will be more successful if offerings are not just containers of fresh fruit. Adding a bit of creativity can set a market apart. It then becomes the destination when customers need a fresh fruit gift basket."

Tom Catanese, a gift basket business consultant for thomascatanese.com, based in Plymouth Meeting, PA, concurs that merchandising and making the fruit gift baskets unique are a crucial aspect of setting a market apart. "You need an innovative way to incorporate a more unusual fruit, a special foil-wrapped candy or other item. However, in some markets using a product from another department is frowned on due to scanning difficulties. These problems need to be ironed out for a successful and exciting gift basket program," Catanese suggests.

ORGANICS ARE AN IMPORTANT ADDITION

Organic produce gift baskets are another item for a market to consider. Lori Fischer, in organic/specialties/fruit basket sales for Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., states, "If a retailer has a good-sized organic section and a consumer demand for organics, then it would certainly want to offer organic produce gift baskets. We pack several organic fruit baskets at different price points." **pb**

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Paper Or Plastic?

In an effort to deliver a fresh product — from field to the store — the packaging of choice appears to come down to this basic question we hear every week at the supermarket.

BY BRYANT WYNES

Whether shipping Roma tomatoes from Baja to Maine or fresh blueberries from Michigan to Florida, growers, shippers and retailers alike are simply looking for the best way to increase pack efficiencies and reduce costs, with the ultimate goal of delivering a fresh, undamaged product to the consumer's dinner table.

These days, the decision of what type of container to use for transportation from field to store seems to be either corrugated cardboard boxes or reusable plastic containers (RPCs). To be sure, there are still some growers utilizing wood and wire boxes for select products such as sweet corn. But the line seems to have been really drawn at the “paper or plastic” question.

What are retailers looking for? A quick trip to the supermarkets in town will most likely turn up a mixed bag of shipping containers in use in the produce department. While some like Wal-Mart, Kroger and Stater Bros. appear to have committed to display-ready RPCs, others seem to prefer corrugated; yet some have no preference at all. “At the end of the day,

what we're looking for is a fresh, undamaged product that meets our original specifications,” says Teri Miller, produce category manager for Salisbury, NC-based Food Lion LLC. “For us, it's really that simple. We don't spec corrugated or RPC, and will accept product in both.”

This is also one of those unique merchandising decisions that engages retailer warehouse associates as the choice between RPCs and corrugated can impact handling. Indeed, Miller adds that often the company's distribution center (DC) managers will say they prefer RPCs as being easier to handle, especially with wet product. “If we get a lot of complaints, we'll get together with the supplier and DC associates to resolve the problem,” she adds. “Again, what we want is a delivered product that meets our specs — fresh and undamaged.”

SETTING THE SCENE

Corrugated cardboard containers are obviously everywhere, and they have been used for packaging and transporting produce for quite some time. According to Elk Grove Village, IL-based Corrugated Packaging Alliance, corrugated has been around in its basic form for centuries. In fact, the first patented corrugated in the United States appeared in the 1850s. It's basically a paper sandwich — an engineered paper structure sandwiched between two layers of paper. “It's an extremely durable, versatile, economical and lightweight material used for custom manufactured shipping containers, packaging and point-of-purchase displays,” explains Dwight Schmidt, executive director of the Corrugated Packaging Alliance.

Perhaps one of the biggest changes to impact the industry as it relates to packaging fresh produce was the introduction of what's known as the “common footprint,” which standardized corrugated packages into two, related sizes for easier stacking.

RPCs also are relatively new to produce packaging. These plastic bins appeared in the mid 1990s. “Use started slowly, but has grown at a healthy pace since 2006,” says Fred Heptinstall, president and general manager of the Houston, TX-based RPC Management Services Division at IFCO Systems Worldwide. “It now accounts for about 10 percent of



Photos courtesy of IFCO Systems

In addition to the stackability factor, which makes them easy to transport, RPCs have ventilation slots to enable optimal cooling and heat exchange.

all shipments from grower to retailer.”

As the name implies, they are re-usable containers. Growers/packers rent the containers from one of the various supply companies (with facilities around the country). Product is packed and shipped to distribution centers and/or retail stores. When emptied, the RPCs fold down and are returned to their owner to be cleaned and re-used via retailer reclamation centers. “It’s like renting a car,” explains Heptinstall. “That’s the best way to illustrate the process.”

So exactly how do these two options stack up against each other? As with most issues facing growers, shippers and retailers, the answers aren’t always simple. From the grower/shipper perspective, they want to provide product according to their retailer customers’ needs. According to Heptinstall, “Educating the retailer about how RPCs work is perhaps our biggest challenge.”

John Huston, field sales manager for Smurfit-Stone Container, headquartered in Creve Coeur, MO, agrees. “With corrugated packaging, there are many challenges,” he admits. “Today we’re selling innovation. Corrugated has moved beyond the simple brown box we all know.”

Following the process, from field to store, here’s a look at how each of these choices fit into the distribution pipeline.

AT THE GROWER/SHIPPER

Corrugated: Containers are ordered by the packer according to individual specifications. Sizes are infinitely variable, depending on product or retailer needs. Standard boxes are the cheapest — matching to the basic pallet footprint. “Common” footprint boxes fit one of two different sizes, 24” x 16” or 12” x 16”. These two sizes allow for easy stacking on standard pallets, with either five or 10 “down” per layer. Heights are variable. Custom containers are also possible to accommodate specific display needs, such as melon bins.

Most major suppliers offer full-service packages including assembly and packing equipment. “To help our growers and packers improve efficiencies, we have a variety of mechanical packing solutions and innovative designs,” says Huston.

Corrugated containers can also carry printed messages. (See “At The Store” below)

For special packing conditions, such as wet or iced shipments, waxed or coated corrugated is available.

RPC: Grower/shippers place an order with their supplier for a specific quantity of RPCs. Clean RPCs are delivered flat from the nearest distribution center to the grower/packer. RPCs are rented, compared to corrugated, which are purchased.

According to Heptinstall, IFCO maintains 102 million RPCs in 11 different sizes, and works with 1,000 different grower locations. Imported produce can be packed in RPCs in the country of origin.

According to its Web site, Georgia-Pacific, located in Atlanta, GA, which provides customers with both RPCs and corrugated, has a network of eight produce service centers to ensure that packaging is available when and where customers need it.

As with corrugated, RPC suppliers can provide automated RPC assembly equipment. Due to the fact that the containers are made of plastic, wet product is not an issue.

TRANSPORTATION AND DISTRIBUTION HANDLING

Corrugated: According to the Corrugated Packaging Alliance, corrugated’s light weight, high stacking strength and cube efficiency provide low shipping costs. “Corrugated offers excellent tear, tensile and burst strength to withstand shipping pressures,” notes the Alliance’s Dwight Schmidt.

It’s in the distribution pipeline that Schmidt believes the “common footprint” really shines. “The corrugated common footprint standard establishes recommended uniform footprint dimensions and inter-stacking features for corrugated containers to facilitate efficient loading, handling, storage and shipment of fresh fruits and vegetables on standardized pallets,” he explains. “The standard applies to corrugated containers used to ship produce from the growing or initial packing location to a retail location — usually through a distribution center.

“Among the unique features,” Schmidt adds, “is that the boxes share an interlocking tab/receptacle design that provides exceptional load stability. They won’t topple or cave in during transport or handling.”

“The common footprint addresses one of the toughest issues we have to work with in handling fruits and vegetables,” emphasizes Mike O’Brien, vice president of produce for St. Louis, MO-based Schnuck Markets. “The two different sizes interlock and work together.” The end result, according to O’Brien, is that there is better stacking of containers on pallets and less damage to produce.

RPC: Obviously, the rigid RPC design provides a stable structure for transportation, says IFCO’s Heptinstall. But there are other factors that the RPC industry maintains are equally important. “For example, ventilation slots designed into the RPCs optimize heat exchange, provide for quicker, more effective cooling,” he explains, also noting that RPCs are compatible with all current pallets and are highly suited to the

“The corrugated common footprint standard establishes recommended uniform footprint dimensions and inter-stacking features for corrugated containers to facilitate efficient loading, handling, storage and shipment of fresh fruits and vegetables on standardized pallets.”

— Dwight Schmidt
Corrugated Packaging Alliance

use of automatic storage systems as well as manual handling with handles on all four sides for stability.

The RPC industry believes that this all adds up to a significant reduction of damage to goods in storage and transportation, reducing shrink for the retailer and grower/shipper alike.

AT THE STORE

Corrugated: Innovations in packaging and graphics provide retailers with a variety of options at the store. Common footprint containers are specifically designed to display produce at the retail location. The Alliance’s Schmidt explains that major club retailers want a unit that can “walk out the store. They have adapted common footprint containers to in-store displays, or are developing their own container specifications that are consumer-friendly in their unique selling environment,” he remarks.

Huston of Smurfit-Stone notes that new capabilities in corrugated printing mark just one of the innovations they are excited to share with customers. “We have some unique capabilities in the area of POP displays that we can provide these days,” he remarks.



One advantage of RPCs is that they arrive display-ready, such as in the case of Wal-Mart, where RPCs create a consistent and effective backdrop for colorful produce on display.

New equipment makes it easier for corrugated printing companies to meet a variety of creative challenges in smaller runs. Previously, custom printing had to be completed on paper roll-stock prior to assembling the corrugated material. This meant that only larger runs were economical, and changes required a good deal of time. Using some of the newer equipment, creative, branding messages can now be printed after the corrugated "sandwich" has been assembled and before the containers are die-cut, making smaller runs economical.

With everyone along the chain looking for ways to make the most out of each customer visit, color and graphics on display containers can add the pizzazz that might make the difference.

RPC: Perhaps the biggest in-store advantage of the RPCs is that they are display-ready. They're designed to go straight from field to warehouse to retail shelf without any unpacking or repacking. This one-touch system promises labor savings in the produce department as one of its key benefits.

But there is another key selling tool — display uniformity — which really lets the product stand out. Wal-Mart's new inline produce set features an impressive bank of black RPCs that create a consistent and effective backdrop for the colorful fruits and vegetables on display. For retailers who wish to display produce in their RPCs but want to promote sales events, locally grown product or other branding elements, the current field of RPCs have slots or tabs that can accommodate different graphic cards on the side panels.

AFTER THE SALE

Corrugated: In 2007, 25.6 million tons of corrugated material was recovered and recycled in the United States. Corrugated

has one of the best recycling and recovery records of any packaging material on earth, says Schmidt of the Alliance. "More than 74 percent of all manufactured corrugated is recovered for reuse," he reports. Grocery retailers recycle an even higher percentage of the corrugated that comes through their stores, and they can generate additional revenue from the sale of OCC (old corrugated containers). The industry is quick to point out that this means there are no "back-shipping" expenses.

Of course, environmental concerns are of importance to most businesses today, as

consumers have expressed a willingness to do business with companies who show a high regard for green programs. "Sustainability is here to stay," says Schnuck's Mike O'Brien, whose company has a long-term program for all stores pertaining to recycling corrugated material.

One of the challenges facing the recycling of corrugated is how it deals with wet produce. Traditionally, some corrugated containers have been treated with wax coatings to provide moisture and vapor protection for safely transporting products requiring it (such as broccoli, which is usually

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packed in ice). Wax coatings, however, prevent the corrugated containers from being recycled because the wax does not dissolve in water, creating problems in the re-pulping process. The industry has worked diligently to develop recyclable alternatives to waxed corrugated, many of which are now commercially available.

International Paper has developed its ClimaSeries to meet customers' sustainability, recycling and economic goals, while still meeting FDA requirements for direct food contact. According to its Web site, Cli-

maSeries corrugated can be used in any box design, keeps graphics bright and clear and can be recycled in regular OCC bales.

Georgia Pacific's Lamilux packaging product consists of a polyethylene film laminated to a combined board during the corrugating process. It is not only recyclable, but also protects produce against abrasion and dehydration.

"Wax alternatives are just one example of the commitment to innovation that the corrugated industry has taken on," says Smurfit-Stone's Huston. "But there are oth-

"At the end of the day, what we're looking for is a fresh, undamaged product that meets our original specifications. For us, it's really that simple. We don't spec corrugated or RPC, and will accept product in both."

**—Teri Miller
Food Lion**

ers, too." One area he points to is addressing increases in roll-stock pricing by looking for ways to remove fiber from the corrugated stock — using less material to create products that are strong and effective. "Cost is always King! We've got to be constantly looking for ways to reduce expenses," he asserts.

RPC: Whether retailers display product in RPCs or stock their displays from them, once the container is empty it is folded flat and returned to the company's warehouse or reclamation center. The retailer notifies the supplier who picks them up and takes them to their own distribution center where they are washed, sanitized, dried, palletized and wrapped, ready for shipment to the next customer.

It's that simple, and that's exactly the message the RPC industry wants retailers to understand — the simplicity of the process. No trip to the compacter; no sorting waxed OCC from recyclable material.

It's clear that there are a multitude of trade, or secondary, packaging options available to growers, shippers and retailers today. The retail industry is interested in getting fresh, undamaged product to offer their customers. Along the way, there are labor, display, promotion and store/department layout opportunities. It seems evident that the packaging companies, whether corrugated or RPC, are focused on working with the growers and packers to ensure their fruits and vegetables get to the retailers effectively and efficiently. So what's it going to be? Paper or plastic?

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Colorado Produce Offers Ample Attractions

Diversity, freight advantage and organics draw buyers to Colorado produce.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Although prevailing cool and wet weather slowed the maturity of Colorado crops through the spring and early summer, sellers and buyers of the state's fruit and vegetables remain confident high quality and consistent volume will prevail as harvest progresses through the fall.

Colorado produce is indeed one of the treasures that contributes to the mystique and appeal of this popular state. The state provides a diverse variety that can satisfy the needs of the most innovative retail and foodservice buyers. Add Colorado's natural freight advantage, and the appeal of its fresh produce is relatively unmatched.

While Colorado's location in the middle of the Western half of the United States has consistently provided a freight savings to customers, buyers who had previously diverted their purchases to more

distant growing regions are becoming increasingly drawn to the state's offerings. Demand has escalated even further resulting from the push for locally grown and has added even more value to the Mile High State's produce. Some believe the state's high altitude, fresh air and clean soil help grow products that are even more nutritionally dense than the average federally established standards.

Onions and potatoes, two of the state's leading vegetable crops, are two of the more well known commodities, but they are only the beginning of the offerings. "Colorado vegetables have more flavor, they keep their freshness longer and the quality is great," asserts Ray Keegan, an owner of American Produce LLC, based in Denver, CO. Zucchini, yellow squash, carrots, eggplant, bell peppers and mixed leaf lettuce varieties are only a few examples of the plethora of items Keegan buys. King Soopers, Safeway, Albertson's, Super K-Mart and various Hispanic markets are among his key retail customers.

Carrots, sweet corn, beans, squash, mixed greens, cabbage, broccoli and tree fruit are also harvested and shipped from Colorado. Sellers say universal regard will maintain the popularity of Colorado fruit. Peaches, apples, Bing cherries, wine grapes, pears and apricots are among the mix of fruit grown in the Western Slope of Colorado. While in recent years, other regions of the country have focused on bringing back the lost flavor in stonefruit, Western Colorado orchard owners claim they have always maintained a practice of not harvesting fruit before reaching its flavor peak.

In the Arkansas Valley in the South Central part of the state, watermelons and the popular Rocky Ford cantaloupes began shipments in late July.

While fruit provides a popular niche, potatoes and onions are Colorado's leading vegetable crops. Colorado farmers have been producing potatoes for nearly 150 years, according to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee. Approximately 59,000 acres of potatoes are produced in Colorado. The Northeastern section of the state, surrounding Greeley, produces a



This onion field in Northern Colorado shows good health and maturity.

What's New In Colorado?

L & M COMPANIES INC., Rocky Ford, CO: The L & M Family of Companies, headquartered in Raleigh, NC, enhanced its year-round onion program when it finalized the purchase of Griffin-Holder Inc. earlier this year. More advantages to the acquisition have become apparent as L & M navigates its way through the current production year. "For L & M's customers, this acquisition means seamless, gap-free, year-round onion supplies," stresses Tracy Fowler, general manager of potatoes and onions for L & M. "Our onion marketing program now fits hand-in-hand with our year-round potato program."

Fowler notes, "Ninety percent of buyers want to buy both onions and potatoes consistently from the same supplier. This one-stop shopping not only offers convenience for our customers, but the additional growers who are signing up with us also realize that they will benefit from L & M's steady supply chain and expertise." He adds, "More and more retailers, wholesalers and foodservice buyers want to go directly to the source. That was one of the primary reasons we made the acquisition of Griffin-Holder. We are now able to control the supply chain from the ground up throughout the year."

The Griffin-Holder purchase encompassed two onion packing and storage facilities in Colorado and one in California; onion production in Colorado, California and New Mexico, and the sales offices in Rocky Ford, CO.

L & M's Colorado onion operations include packing and storage facilities in Greeley and Rocky Ford. Both warehouses are situated amidst two of Colorado's major onion-growing regions.

In Northern Colorado, L & M will ship and market the onion crop from two experienced growers. One of these, Marc Arnusch, owner of South Platte Produce, also manages L & M's Greeley packing facility.

In the state's third major growing region, Colorado's Western Slope, a new alignment

with a key grower has been finalized. "We just signed with Mike Ahlberg to market his entire onion crop," Fowler reports. Ahlberg is the owner of Mountain Fresh LLC, headquartered in Delta, CO.

The L & M onion and potato sales and operations manager for Colorado is Pat Hansen, who is based in the Griffin-Holder Rocky Ford offices. Hansen was brought on in December. His extensive experience in sales and packinghouse management include his previous work with Peri & Sons Farms Nevada Inc., in Yerrington, NV.

Griffin-Holder's former owner and head of sales is Justin Ensor.

FAGERBERG PRODUCE INC., Eaton, CO: Answering increasing demand from both retail and foodservice sectors, the company has installed a robotic palletizer at its packing operation, according to Alan Kinoshita, sales manager. "It takes the bags and puts them on a pallet mechanically and wraps them automatically," he explains. "It reduces labor by six or seven people and increases efficiency." Another robotic palletizer may be added at the packinghouse in the near future, Kinoshita adds.

GRANT FAMILY FARMS, Wellington, CO: Cory Spain was recently brought on as sales manager. Spain brings with him extensive experience in sales at both shipping and receiving points. His most recent produce sales position was with a Salinas, CA-based grower/shipper. Spain was also in procurement and sales for several years for Reaves Brokerage Co., in Dallas, TX.

MARTIN PRODUCE CO, Greeley, CO: In its 71st year of operation, the company made a significant adjustment in Zabka Farms, its growing operations last season. The organization discontinued is transplant onion-growing and harvest program, according to general manager Chuck Bird.

The crop from Colorado transplants normally begins shipment during an earlier market window in late July, prior to the direct-seeded, storage onion crop's availability. "We still have plenty of seed onion supplies for our customers, starting in August," Bird emphasizes. "And we began shipping potatoes the first part of August."

The Martin Produce potato crop is for the fresh market and is shipped through Labor Day. It is sold by the sales staff at Center, CO-based Canon Potato Co. Inc., whose storage potato volume overlaps with the early crop, and provides a year-round spud supply for its customers.

SAKATA FARMS INC., Brighton, CO: The popularity of locally grown produce has resulted in this firm's recommitment to its diverse line of Colorado produce, according to R. T. Sakata, vice president. Growers of onions, sweet corn, cabbage and broccoli, the company had seriously considered the option of eliminating broccoli from its mix for various reasons including mounting production and distribution costs and labor and water concerns. "Our local retailers came to us and strongly encouraged us to keep growing it," Sakata reports, emphasizing that the locally grown trend has increased demand for all of the company's primary commodities, in addition to broccoli.

NORTH WELD PRODUCE CO., Greeley, CO: Celebrating its 46th year in business, the company maintains its emphasis on a more traditional measure to maintain quality that President Dennis Hoshiko believes is a step above his competitors. Unlike virtually all direct-seeded onion growers, North Weld still harvests the majority of its onion crop by hand. "Our clientele appreciates the higher quality and longer shelf-life that hand-harvested onions are known for, and we are pleased to be able to provide jobs for more people by doing so," Hoshiko notes.

summer crop, while the San Luis Valley, in Southwestern Colorado, produces a fall storage crop harvested in September.

The 2008 potato crop was valued at nearly \$190 million, making it one of Colorado's leading agricultural industries, reports Tim Larsen, senior international marketing specialist for the Lakewood-based Colorado Department of Agriculture.

Onions are Colorado's second leading crop. "The onion fields are looking good, even though we've had a lot of weed pressure because of all the moisture," notes R.T.



Sakata, vice president of Sakata Farms Inc., headquartered in Brighton, CO. "Overall, we're just thankful for the moisture."

Chuck Bird, general manager of Greeley-based Martin Produce Co., agrees. Although the company discontinued its transplant onion growing last year, it continues to market its seeded onion crop and handles onion packing and distribution for other growers. "We have our supplies committed for our onions and potatoes," he notes, adding that early demand has been strong.

Colorado is an onion and potato supplier



John Stulp, CDA commissioner of agriculture



Chuck Bird, Martin Produce Co.



Pat Hansen, L & M Companies Inc.



Dorothy Zabka and Sparky,
Martin Produce Co.



Justin Ensor and Tracy Fowler,
L & M Companies Inc.



Dennis and Jean Hoshiko,
North Weld Produce Co.

both to the United States and export markets nearly year-round, thanks to in-field curing and modern storage facilities. Most of the onions are grown north and east of Denver, with some in the Arkansas Valley in the

Southern part of the state and on the Western Slope.

Ideal Sales Inc., located in Dallas, TX, buys a wide variety of fruits and vegetables from Colorado. Potatoes and onions are

among its highest-volume procurements, according to Pam Dunning, a sales associate. "Colorado's dry climate helps onions and potatoes cure in the fields and makes the storage crops perfect for shipments through most of the year," she emphasizes.

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COLORADO'S EXPANDING ORGANIC SECTOR

Larsen also points out that in 1989, the CDA was the first state agency to begin a certification program for organic farmers. "Since then, some farmers, ranchers and processors are choosing organic production and processing to differentiate their products and seek great farm revenues," he notes.

According to the USDA report on national organic certification statistics, Colorado's organic industry consists of more than 270 certified organic farms and ranches with more than 580,000 food products under organic certification regulations. This represents 25 percent of the total certified organic acreage in the United States. Of that acreage, 45 farms utilize 10,700 acres for vegetable production, placing Colorado third in the nation for organic vegetable acreage. CDA statistics also report that 30 farms produce organic fruit on over 550 acres.

With a lineup that includes several fingerling potato varieties, LaSalle, CO-based Strohauer Farms Inc. has seen phenomenal growth in its organic specialty produce. Harry Strohauer, president and owner, reports the increase of consumers eating at home has increased demand for flavorful



The CDA and King Soopers produced this ad, which highlights Colorado-grown produce.

new items, both organic and conventional. Strohauer's fingerling potato production includes Russian Banana, French Fingerling, Rose Finn Apple and Peruvian Purple varieties. Pearl onions and shallots are other specialty selections.

Tanya Fell, director of marketing and retail relations at Strohauer, explains, "Strohauer Farms' organic and conventional fingerling potatoes are smaller in size, which makes them convenient, flavorful and versatile. Because of their size, fingerlings bake quickly. They can also be roasted, grilled, steamed, sautéed, boiled, fried or mashed. However you prepare them, fingerlings add outstanding flavor and color to your favorite meal."

One of the oldest organic farms in Colorado is Grant Family Farms Inc., based in Wellington, CO. Cory Spain, sales manager, reports that Grant Farms' 2,300 organic acres include kale, chard, collards, cilantro, parsley, dill, five varieties of lettuce, onions, leeks, winter squash, beets, carrots, eggplant, zucchini, heirloom dry beans, raspberries, heirloom tomatoes and artichokes.

QUALITY REMAINS FIRST PRIORITY

Whether it is conventional or organic produce, most Colorado shippers stress that quality remains their No. 1 priority.

"The beauty of the farms and ranches enriches the Colorado landscape," notes Wendy White, marketing specialist for the CDA Markets Division's Colorado Proud program. "Buying Colorado is better for the environment because it helps keep



Grower representatives at the Ride the Rockies promotion, from left: Bob Mattive, Worley Seed Co.; Carole and Hunter Sessums, growers; and Keith Holland, grower and new chairman of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee board.

Reinvesting in the Earth...

It's been our commitment since 1995.

As Organic Produce gains increasing space in produce departments, multitudes are suddenly attempting to capture their share of this complex category's popularity. We set the standard for product excellence long before it became fashionable. We understand Organics and the extra steps necessary to ensure the integrity of this specialized product line. Our diligence has established us as industry leaders in growing, packing and distribution of Organic produce. And while others are still experimenting, we already deliver perfection.

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Reader Service # 88

Special Events, Retail Advertising Among Colorado Proud Activities

Now in its eleventh year, Colorado Proud promotes food and agricultural products that are grown, raised or processed in Colorado. The expanding popularity of locally grown produce has provided the perfect backdrop for the program. Colorado Proud, which is administered under the umbrella of the Lakewood-based Colorado Department of Agriculture's (CDA) Markets Division, now boasts more than 1,300 members including farmers, ranchers, processors, retailers, restaurants and greenhouses. The program started in 1999 with 67 members.

Colorado Governor Bill Ritter has officially proclaimed August as Colorado Proud Month. "There are a number of events scheduled to help draw more attention for Colorado products, including Feast in the Field and Colorado Proud School Meal Day," announces Wendy White, CDA marketing specialist. Feast in the Field, slated for August 16, will feature all Colorado products at the Colorado Chefs Association monthly meeting. More than 150 chefs are expected to attend, "so this is a great opportunity to showcase Colorado agriculture to our food-service friends," White notes.

"We also take August as an opportunity to encourage Colorado residents to participate in an Eat Local challenge by eating foods that are only grown, raised or processed in the state," White continues. "August is the perfect time to buy local products. Buying products with the Colorado Proud logo shows our commitment to Colorado farmers who are hard at work providing us with safe, fresh, abundant food."

September 8 will be the seventh annual Colorado Proud School Meal Day. The CDA invites all Colorado schools to participate. "This is a day to celebrate Colorado agriculture and to educate school children about healthful eating," White explains. "In order to encourage eating habits that will promote a lifetime of optimal health, it is essential to teach children about the importance of eating foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products. Proper nutrition is critical if our educa-

tional programs and our students are going to continue to excel."

"Colorado farmers and ranchers produce food items that provide the nutrients children and adults need to thrive," stresses White. "Agribusinesses contribute nearly \$16 billion to the state economy annually and provide more than 105,000 jobs. With more than 37,000 farms and ranches encompassing 31 million acres, it is easy to understand the value this industry adds to Colorado."

Other events continue to draw attention to Colorado-grown products. The Colorado Proud television advertising campaign began in July and continues into the fall. The ads encourage consumers to look for the Colorado Proud logo and support local producers.

Major retail chains, including Safeway, King Soopers and Wal-Mart have taken advantage of the Colorado Proud program to promote locally grown produce in their print advertisements and on in-store displays. Safeway outlet displays feature photographs of local growers in the field or packing operations, along with background information about the grower/shippers.

Colorado MarketMaker is a new resource created through the CDA. Available at www.comarketmaker.com, "This new online resource connects consumers, restaurants, retailers and schools with local products," describes White. "Users can search for local companies or visit the Market Place for new products."

The Department also publishes the *Colorado Farm Fresh Directory* annually, which lists farmers' markets across the state as well as farms that sell direct to the public, roadside stands, wineries, U-picks, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, food and agricultural festivals and other agritourism activities. In addition, the directory features information on county fairs, food and agricultural festivals, recipes and tips for picking Colorado produce. *Farm Fresh* also includes farms that offer tours, wineries, corn mazes, pumpkin patches, farm and ranch vacations and a crop calendar. The 2010 *Colorado Farm Fresh Directory*

is available for free at participating libraries, chambers of commerce, welcome centers, visitor centers, CSU Extension offices and other businesses.

Agritourism is also growing in popularity. "The CDA works with Colorado State University to sponsor workshops across Colorado to help agricultural producers develop agritourism on their properties," notes Christi Lightcap, communications director at the Commissioner's office of the CDA. The next workshop is scheduled for September 11, in Grand Junction, CO.

"People are becoming more aware of where their food is coming from, and they want to have an interest in what their local area has to offer," says the CDA's White. "The average food item on your dinner plate has traveled somewhere between 1,200 to 1,500 miles, causing a large part of your food dollar to go toward transportation costs. "Therefore, reducing the distance food travels from production to consumption also reduces its carbon footprint."

"Eating locally not only helps keep the cost of food down because it doesn't have far to travel, but it also encourages the production of superior ingredients while benefiting the environment," according to Elizabeth Williams, events manager at Highland's Garden Café in Denver.

Receiving a big boost for marketing outside the state, the Colorado Department of Agriculture Markets Division was awarded more than \$40,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Specialty Crops Grant Program to fund the first Colorado Pavilion for the Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Fresh Summit trade show in 2008. This year's Colorado Pavilion is expected to be the largest yet. Highlighting some of the strongest benefits of the Colorado Pavilion, Tim Larsen, senior international marketing specialist for the CDA, notes, "The Colorado pavilion is a large exhibition area where the Colorado produce industry can share common spaces at trade shows. We are able to promote Colorado's produce on the U.S. level as well as internationally." **pb**

farms and ranches profitable, thereby maintaining open space and wildlife habitat," she explains.

A standout among these is North Weld Produce Co., in Greeley, CO, whose owners still harvest the majority of their onion crop by hand as opposed to a

machine. Company president Dennis Hoshiko reports that North Weld Produce marks a special milestone in 2010. "It was 100 years ago this year that my grandfather immigrated to America from Japan," he remarks. Paul Hoshiko Sr., Dennis' father, eventually made his way to Col-

orado and began vegetable farming. Hoshiko attributes his company's ability to stay in business in an evolving, competitive marketplace to "a long-time, dedicated staff, loyal customers," and a higher power. "We plant and we nurture, but God gives the growth." **pb**

ETHNIC GUIDE

MERCHANDISING TO ETHNIC CONSUMERS



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AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO



Most supermarket chains have only scratched the surface of ethnic marketing potential. Yet, targeting and capturing huge, fast-growing ethnic segments is arguably the most important corporate initiative the retailer can undertake to grow sales and profits, win consumer loyalty and gain the competitive edge.

Produce executives, take note: Fresh produce is of core importance to multi-cultural shoppers. Latinos, Asian-Americans and African-Americans represent about one-third of the U.S. population, and collectively, are expected to grow another 40 percent by 2010.

The *PRODUCE BUSINESS Guidebook Series On Merchandising To Ethnic Consumers* is designed to offer different strategies and perspectives for success in reaching targeted ethnic segments of the population. This is part of an ongoing collaboration with market leaders and PRODUCE BUSINESS.

ETHNIC GUIDE

MERCHANDISING TO ETHNIC CONSUMERS

COMPANY:
AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO

PRODUCT FOCUS:
Avocados (Mexico)

TARGET ETHNIC GROUP:
Hispanic



Why does your product appeal to this specific ethnic group?

Avocados are a food staple in the Hispanic household. According to recent research, eight out of 10 Hispanics say they buy avocados to eat or serve at home with nearly half purchasing avocados weekly. Avocados from Mexico evoke a sense of nostalgia for Hispanic consumers who grew up eating avocados and prefer fruit from Mexico. Additionally, Mexico is the world's largest producer and No.1 provider of avocados in the United States, providing a year-round supply of avocados in a full range of sizes so customers can get what they want, when they want it.

Are there other market segments for this product?

The general market also responds well to avocados. However, compared to the general market, Hispanics buy avocados and eat and serve them at home more frequently. They tend to buy more per shopping occasion and use them in more ways, such as salads and guacamole.

What are the principal buying factors?

Taste is the No 1 factor followed by nutrition and convenience.

What advice can you share on display tactics to help produce departments better reach your target ethnic consumer?

- Ripe avocados can outsell unripe avocados by 2-to-1. Note the following tips on the "ripe" way to display:
- To help consumers find what they want, identify ripe avocados with stickers or signage. This will prevent customers from squeezing the fruit, which causes internal bruising and shortens the shelf-life.
 - Keep an eye on your display inventory and remove poor quality fruit on a daily basis.
 - Avocados like it dry. Do not refrigerate! Do not display on wet racks or near misting systems. Display at room temperature.
 - Replenish your display as needed with avocados from a new carton and remove

damaged fruit (look for air pockets and other damage). Place new fruit on the bottom of the display.

- The ideal display should feature ripe fruit. Firm fruit is best featured on a separate display.
- Keep both green and ripened avocados refrigerated at 40°F. To ripen further, store avocados between 60 to 70°F, but never exceed 70°F because it damages the fruit.

Can you pinpoint key marketing or promotional strategies?

CROSS MERCHANDISE: Display avocados next to items they partner with in meals and recipes. For example, next to tomatoes, onions, lemons and limes.

PRESENT OPTIONS: Use multiple display stations to promote large and small sizes, different price points, levels of ripeness and bagged fruit.

PROMOTE CREATIVELY: Create

displays that are eye-catching. Tie them into holidays, entertaining and occasions where families gather.

DISPLAY POS MATERIALS: Set up secondary displays in highly trafficked areas, create hype with promotional cards and increase sales with recipes ideal for Super Bowl, Cinco de Mayo and other special events.

What is the biggest challenge in ethnic marketing?

Determining the right product mix that appeals to your customers is key. By providing both large and small size avocados you can give customers a choice at varying price points. Also providing ripe fruit will boost sales.



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ETHNIC GUIDE

MERCHANDISING TO ETHNIC CONSUMERS

COMPANY:
TURBANA CORPORATION

PRODUCT FOCUS:
Plantains

TARGET ETHNIC GROUP:
**Hispanics, African-Americans
and Asians**



What is your target ethnic market? What other segments are you targeting?

Currently, Turbana is marketing plantain and exotic products not only to Hispanics, African-Americans and Asian populations originating from countries where plantains are consumed but also to mainstream Americans, due to extensive travel and food channels.

Nearly 33.1 percent of the U.S. population is Hispanic, Asian-American and African-American.

Retailers should embrace these groups with a combined 10.72 billion dollar buying power (2008).

What products are you directing to ethnic consumers?

Turbana, the leading importer of plantains, recently expanded its product line to include new plantain varieties such as Burros and Hawaiian plantains. In addition, we also offer Baby, Red and *Manzano* exotic bananas, as well as pineapples.

We recently developed a 20-pound variety pack box. This is a mix of *Manzano* and Red bananas. They are delicious and a great way to get people interested in exotic bananas so they can enjoy our top quality Red bananas, with a hint of raspberry, and our *Manzano* bananas, with a nice kiwi-banana-citrus taste.

How do product preferences differ among segments?

It is very important to understand that it is not productive to group all ethnic consumers together. It is key to look at each group separately because of different wants and expectations. For example, depending on the consumer's country of origin, the demand for stages of ripeness of plantains changes.

Discuss supermarket buying habits among your target consumers.

As a whole, Hispanics tend to shop more often than mainstream American consumers, eating at home more often, preparing more meals from scratch and using larger amounts of fresh produce.

Hispanics also spend 33 percent more on fresh fruits than mainstream consumers, their basket sizes are larger and they tend to make shopping a group or family activity.

If you are able to attract these groups to your store, they will purchase more than just your tropical products.

What advice can you share on display tactics?

Since plantains can be prepared and eaten in various stages of ripeness, supermarkets can double their plantain sales by offering both green and ripe plantains.

Can you pinpoint key marketing strategies?

Use tropical fruits as the tool to capture as much of the total food dollar as possible.

In order to capture these ethnic shoppers, it is important to reach out to these communities and make the supermarket employees look like their neighborhood.

Hiring bilingual employees and being involved in the community also builds upon goodwill, as does educating staff members about the culture and values of their customers.

Introducing ethnic elements to the store, such as bilingual signage and in-language advertising, makes your ethnic group feel at home in your store.

We provide bilingual signage to our customers for plantains and exotic bananas. We offer our customers POS informational materials.

Another great educational tool for the plantains are recipe stickers. When the shoppers purchase the plantain, there is already a simple recipe for them to follow, so any first-timer is guaranteed success.

We also have recipe booklets containing a variety of plantain recipes, which include photos, for preparation of both the green and ripe stages. Many shoppers, after having enjoyed the recipe on the sticker, call to request our free recipe booklets for more ideas.

What are the biggest challenges to ethnic marketing?

The challenge when trying to capture an ethnic market is to know the relevant demographic makeup of the surroundings of the store.

Supermarket involvement in the community has proven to be an important factor when marketing to ethnic groups.

Where do you see untapped opportunities?

The size and purchasing power of this group (10.72 billion dollars in 2008) and the fact that one of every three Americans is of ethnic descent make catering to this underserved group a huge opportunity to capture as much of the total food dollar as possible.

The Turbana sales force and marketing department are proven success stories, and we can tailor-make business plans to suit your plans. For any and all other inquiries, please visit our website: www.Turbana.com or call 1-888-BANANAS. Remember to request our complimentary plantain recipes.





Burro

How do you turn a plantain into a category?

Variety.



Hawaiian



Traditional

Not long ago, consumers were unsure if a plantain was a fruit or vegetable. Today it is becoming one of the fastest growing categories in the produce department, with Traditional, Hawaiian and Burro varieties. Whether sweet or starchy, with Latin, Caribbean and Pacific influences, more and more families are discovering plantains as an alternative to potatoes, rice and pasta. We are the leading importer of all varieties of plantains in North America. Let's grow together.



plantain goodness inside.

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SweeTango Business Model Provides Gratification

SweeTango apples arrive at retailers thanks to an all-encompassing marketing agreement.

BY DAVE DIVER

How do beer and cigarette marketing and distribution, plant breeding expertise and multiple growers spread out over 3,000 miles come together to form a business model relevant to the production and marketing of an individual produce item?

Common threads connect the group. Some had ongoing business relationships with Lake City, MN-based Pepin Heights Orchards and a reputation for being good competitors, provided good product and were good marketers. Others were known from their involvement with apple industry organization or by recommendations from respected members of the industry. However, it was only back in April, 2006, that a cooperative named the Next Big Thing (NBT) would be formed with 45 equity partners located in the five states of Washington, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and New York, plus the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia. In essence, this group's business model is condensing into a relatively few years what others have done over extended periods.

Individual grower/shippers may have interest in more than one geographic area. Co-ops such as Sunkist and family-owned-and-run Driscoll's operate over a wide geographic area with grower/owners producing Sunkist-branded citrus and Driscoll's patented varieties of berries.

Having started growing strawberries in the 1870s, it wasn't until 1904 when Driscoll's grew its first patented variety, and not until 1953 was the independent California co-operative selling premium fresh California strawberries founded. It took until 1971 to start shipping a common label and until the 1990s, with the advent of the clamshell and expansion to additional berry varieties, for them to reach the current level of recognition by retail category managers and consumers.

A NEW DISCOVERY

After the University of Minnesota had licensed the rights to Pepin Heights Orchards, owned by Dennis Courtier, to develop and market the newly patented Minneiska apple variety, marketed as the SweeTango brand apple, the co-op then received its licensing. As part of the agreement, the University received a fee enabling it to continue an aggressive apple-breeding program. Minnesota apple producers who are not members of the co-op, however, are also able to obtain the trees for which they too pay a fee to the University for growing and selling the variety in state.

Over the last century, the University has developed 25 varieties that can be grown in Minnesota — an average of one out every 10,000 researched. During the last decade, plant breeder David Bedford, who has been at the University for 30 years, sampled 500-600 apples daily in an attempt to find the next great variety. As a result of his efforts, the SweeTango, a cross between Zestar and Honeycrisp, was discovered.

The amount of equity, in conjunction with the amount of production rights purchased, determines



Photo courtesy of Pepin Heights Orchard Inc.

The SweeTango has a Rome-like red color and the texture of a Honeycrisp.

the number of votes each member has, as well as the amount of apples each can market each year. Pepin Heights Orchard's Tim Byrne, with his 22 years of experience with the company, along with his Philip Morris distribution and marketing expertise, serves as non-paid president. The elected Board of Directors, comprised of three members each from the Western, Midwest and Eastern regions, run the co-op, and the board has committees responsible for operations, marketing and Best Practices standards.

BRAND ADVANTAGES

The three regions provide diversification from weather and related events making it possible to have the variety within two days delivery time from potential markets chosen by the marketing committee.

By all reports, SweeTango, with its Rome-like red color and distinctive russetting at the stem bowl, has the texture of a Honeycrisp, but with higher pressure, providing more of a snap when bitten. The sugar content, which is purportedly higher than Honeycrisp sugar content, adds a flavor complexity not known in most early season apples. The ability to be in the market seven to ten days earlier than Honeycrisp makes SweeTango the first early apple available with extended keeping quality for the consumer.

Although 2009 had limited supplies at around 15,000 bushels and a three to six week availability, the projection for 2010 is for 100,000 bushels spread over nearly eight weeks and expanding into a broader marketing area. The five years production forecast reaches nearly a half million bushels, contrasted with Honeycrisp supplies currently in the neighborhood of four million boxes.

Given the level of supplies, it is anticipated all of the SweeTango sold by NBT co-op will be marketed in tray packs for bulk selling. The objective is for retailers to be able to sell SweeTango at a price point of \$2.29 to \$2.99 a pound.

MARKETING THE SWEETANGO

With a relatively short season, SweeTango provides one of the few produce items with a true seasonality message for consumers, in contrast to the near year-round availability globalization has brought for most fresh fruit and vegetables. As a result, retailers are provided with an incremental sales kick because of the differentiation from other varieties and pent up demand from consumers.

While sampling and customer word-of-mouth approval are essential to assisting the product attributes to gain ground, the new social media applications provide a quick

method for disseminating information not possible in previous decades. Next Big Thing has an interactive Web site and will also use messaging tied in with leading retailed Web sites to spread knowledge of the apple's attributes.

Fowler Farms, growing 2,000 acres of apples in upstate New York's Wayne County, is also the designated marketer for the SweeTango produced in the Eastern region. According to sales manager, Lee Peters, "It is not the first bite of the SweeTango, but the second, when the taste really grabs the customers' eating interest."

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Future expansion of growing acreage will depend on this consumer acceptance and the vote of the co-op owners. However, initial growing tests are being conducted halfway around the world in the Southern hemisphere to determine feasibility for being able to provide a second season availability during the spring. Of course, that might not be necessary if the apple stores well under a set of controlled atmosphere conditions.

Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station already has several crosses now



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destined for growers within New York State, although there is always the possibility growing may be expanded to other regions.

The two recently released varieties fruited as young trees and have performed consistently for 14 growing seasons. New York 1, similar to Sweetango in appearance with a Honeycrisp parent, has a harvest window from late September to early October and retains its ripe harvest quality even after storage.

New York 2, a cross between Braeburn and Autumn Crisp, with more acid than New York 1, has a sweet juicy flesh with a zing of tartness consumers like, and is harvested in mid-to late-October. Both come from over 50 acres of trees under evaluation. However, it now appears that any noticeable production of the two Cornell varieties will not be available for marketing until 2015, at the earliest.

The challenge for the success of any new variety is not limited to the initial sales but for repeat sales, according to John Rice, whose family, located in Pennsylvania, is the largest apple and peach packer east of the Mississippi. A good example is the growth of the Gala variety. Honeycrisp, after 15 years of commercialization, is continuing to achieve expanded plantings and increasing supplies, which undoubtedly will lead to reduced pricing and the potential of additional competition for the Honeycrisp-crossed Sweetango.

Nevertheless, the business model for the Next Big Thing co-op is one that presents an opportunity for a case study of the alternative methods of distributing and marketing unique fresh fruit and vegetables. Especially interesting will be the competitive affect from new and existing varieties with characteristics including some degree of similarity as well as contrasts. Consumers will have the final vote, and perhaps some of the alternative varieties will actually be a contributor to year-round consumer interest for the eating experience and benefit expanding apple consumption.

Agricultural marketing professors at various universities should have a field day. In a world where the primary production control has been Mother Nature and its effect on marketing along with free-market product entry, the agricultural world will be watching the NBT implementation by the approximately four-dozen principals.

One group that is already taking note is team of Minnesota apple growers who have filed a lawsuit against the University of Minnesota, claiming that an exclusive licensing agreement between the University and Pepin Heights Orchard is in violation of state anti-trust laws and promotes unfair competition. Clearly, the future of the Sweetango remains to be seen.

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Organic Herbs: An Increasing But Uncertain Opportunity

Herb producers are ready to take on the challenge of growing and supplying organic herbs to meet the ever-increasing demand.

BY BOB JOHNSON

With demand increasing exponentially in recent years, organic herbs have gone mainstream.

In fact, in many parts of the country there is enough demand to warrant carrying organic options of all the major herbs in the produce department.

"There has been a growing demand for organic herbs the past three or four years," recognizes Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa's World Variety Inc., in Los Angeles, CA. "Basil is the most popular organic herb in the market. But rosemary, dill, sage, chives, mint and thyme are also popular. Organic has been well implemented in the supermarkets."

There can be uncertainty, however, in finding a reliable source of supply to satisfy this increasing market. The challenge is particularly great for organic herbs because, even after a decision to expand, it still takes three years to transition ground for certified organic production, which can cause shortages at crucial times. "The year-round production of organic herbs has not caught up with

the potential demand," points out Charlie Coiner, president of Rock Garden South, in Miami, FL.

Herb Thyme Farms Inc., in Perrysburg, OH, is embroiled in a legal controversy that underscores why produce executives must go the extra step in making sure they have a reliable supply of organic herbs. Around 80 percent of Herb Thyme's retail business is organic, according to Chick Goodman, national sales manager. The firm faces a lawsuit filed by a consumer who claims that Herb Thyme handled an organic supply problem by selling its conventionally grown herbs as organic.

This controversy seems to have had little or no affect on the overall impact for organic herbs. "We have not experienced any changes in demand because of the Herb Thyme controversy," says Timothy Heydon, president and CEO of Shenandoah Growers Inc., in Harrisonburg, VA. But Heydon believes that retailers and producers need to work together to ensure that quality, reliable organic product will be available to the consumers when they want it most. "It is the responsibility of the producers/organic farms to best plan and coordinate their capacity with projected demand," he says. "The best planning starts with open and regular communication between the organic producer and the retailer. While availability varies by season, specific herbs and growing conditions, nature still plays a major role in organic agriculture."

'TIS THE SEASON

The uncertainty over supply is usually the greatest during the Holiday season. That is when herbs — organic and conventional — are most in demand for cooking. However, it is also when herbs are hardest to grow because of the weather. For these reasons, it remains challenging for all herb producers to meet this growing demand during the Holiday season. The key to the supply issue is lining up enough herbs for this peak demand period of Holiday cooking.

"I know more about conventional herbs," says



Supermarkets are rising to the occasion of marketing organic herbs.

“Herb production typically peaks in the spring and summer because they are field-grown. Pricing is the differential advantage in the spring and summer. We do more promotional pricing then.”

**— Robert Shueller
Melissa’s World Variety
Produce Inc.**

Jim Krouse, president of Los Angeles, CA-based Eureka Specialties Inc., “but we gear up for certain herbs at different times of the year. We know there will be demand for sage in November so we prepare in advance. We’re able to control what we have.” While seasonal supply is an issue that affects both conventional and organic fresh herbs, it has greater impact on the organic side because of the lengthy three-year transition period.

Major suppliers plan their operations for the year-round demand they expect, which typically falls during a fairly short window in the fall and early winter. “November 15 to January 1 is the peak season for organic herbs,” remarks Goodman. “We have to schedule new organic customers in the spring every year to make sure we will have the supply during the peak season. Every year for the last decade we have brought on new customers in the spring, since that’s when we’re taking on new business.”

KNOW YOUR SUPPLIER

In this period of uncertainty, it is essential to know your organic herb supplier. One very important thing to know is how your supplier handles the misfit between the time of year herbs are most in demand and the very different time of the year when they are easiest to grow. “As with any food crop, herbs are vulnerable to weather and pest pressures, so shortages are inevitable,” explains Marina Pace, marketing spokesperson at Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo Inc., in Pescadero, CA. “Work with year-round grow-

ers with diversified, overlapping growing regions,” she suggests.

The organic produce buyer would do well to make an occasional trip to the farm and get a firsthand look at the operation. “Visit the farm and look at the compost pile,” advises Coiner. “An organic farm that doesn’t have a compost pile isn’t farming organically.”

There are USDA standards for organic production and you should check your supplier’s label, too. “Make sure their label is certified organic,” assert Schueller of Melissa’s.

It is worth the time to dig a little deeper and look at the very detailed documentation that stands behind that organic label. “Retailers can request from their organic farmers their current NOP (National Organic Program) certification certificates and lot num-

ber traceability documentation,” remarks Heydon of Shenandoah Growers.

Another option is to have independent testing done to verify that herbs and other products sold as organic are actually organic. “Most of the food safety auditing companies have laboratory facilities that can test the produce,” says Rock Garden’s Coiner. Testing can be an expensive way to go, but the expense may be worth it if you need to offer skeptical consumers an additional layer of third-party certification.

Ultimately, the answer to the crisis of confidence in supply comes down to developing trusted relationships with an organic supplier. “Routine communication and a genuine partnership approach between the retailer and the organic producer are essential,” remarks Heydon. “By working



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“As with any food crop, herbs are vulnerable to weather and pest pressures, so shortages are inevitable. Work with year-round growers with diversified, overlapping growing regions.”

**— Marina Pace
Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo Inc.**

together, producers can keep their retail partners informed of changes in growing conditions, quality and seasonal effects on particular fresh herbs. With this informa-

tion, the retailer can better plan for changes in supply and educate their consumers that some fresh herbs are seasonal and dependent on natural growing conditions.”

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CRISIS

The difficulty supplying enough organic herbs to meet the demand in the fall and early winter means that most growers have too much product in the spring and summer. This can create opportunities for retailers. When the herb harvest is at its natural peak in the spring and summer, it is possible to get extraordinary price breaks, which can be used for profitable cross-merchandising promotions. “Herb production typically peaks in the spring and summer because they are field-grown,” explains Schueller. “Pricing is the differential advantage in the spring and summer. We do more promotional pricing then.”

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Photo courtesy of Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo Inc.

The most popular organic basil package is 3/4-oz, but during promotions, you'll find 8-oz. packs for the same price as the smaller ones.

tional item is tomatoes with basil, which is by far the most popular herb. "There is a basil and tomato connection in the spring and summer, so you can cross-merchandise it near the tomatoes," Schueller continues. "The most popular basil package is 3/4-oz, but during the promotional time you'll find packs that are eight ounces. You'll find retail 8-oz. packs for the same price as 3/4-oz. packs during the peak season."

There should be many opportunities to arrange for these promotions because most suppliers know in advance that they will have excess supply in the middle of the year. "We try to avoid having too much production in the spring and summer, and too little in the fall," says Herb Thyme's Goodman. "If we have too much organic product in the spring or summer, we'll move it into conventional

sales or we'll sell it to the pesto makers."

For some suppliers, the alternative to giving warm weather price breaks is destroying a portion of their harvest. "We plan for the high demand period and have excess in the short demand period. We harvest the excess and move it in the conventional market or destroy it," says Coiner of Rock Garden.

HELP IS ON THE WAY

The suppliers of organic herbs know they are playing catch up in a growing market and they are finding ways to quickly close the gap between supply and potential demand. "Demand has definitely grown, though it is difficult to measure how much," reports Jacobs Farm's Pace. "Jacobs Farm has steadily increased open field and protected environment acreage and production to meet



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the increasing demand for organic herbs.”

The herb acreage certified by California Certified Organic Farmers, the largest certifying agency in the country, increased from an average of less than 500 acres in 2008 to well over 700 acres in 2009. In addition to the increasing organic field acreage devoted to herbs, there is also a steadily increasing supply of organic herbs from greenhouses that can produce year-round.

“We have seen a steadily increasing demand in organic herbs, particularly for our Living Organic Herbs, which we grow exclusively at our farm utilizing a USDA-certified organic growing system,” explains Heydon of Shenandoah Growers. “These organic, live herbs are available year-round and are grown in a greenhouse growing system that emulates nature, making them less

vulnerable to fluctuations from weather.”

The increased field and greenhouse production in the United States is being augmented by organic herb production around the world. “We’re not selling to retail, but we’re selling organic spices from India to food service,” remarks says Paul Suhre, vice president for product strategy at Woodland Foods Ltd., headquartered in Gurnee, IL. “We’ve had some organic product, such as beans and grains, for years.”

Woodland’s producers in India can supply loads of as much as 40,000 pounds of organic spices and organic herbs. “We definitely have enough,” Suhre confirms. “We have a connection in India that can send us a container load. As our needs increase, they tend to be able to keep up.”

Even domestic growing operations are

lining up foreign sources of organic herbs to augment their supplies. “Organic farming has expanded to meet the demand,” asserts Goodman. “The farming of organic herbs has grown tremendously beyond just the United States. They’re growing them in Israel, Mexico, Columbia, the Dominican Republic – all over!”

The organic herb producer community sees the opportunity and seems determined to offer adequate supply to meet the growing demand. “Shenandoah Growers is striving to lead the fresh herb industry to bring a year-round supply of fresh herbs to the kitchens of consumers. With this mission in mind, the company is committed to transforming the way Americans think about fresh foods by using sustainable, organic agricultural practices,” Heydon says. **pb**

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in the international market.

In Mexico unprecedented advances in infrastructure are being created. In the last few years, the modernization of communication routes has been carried out by channeling both public and private resources, with a view to consolidating a first-rate logistical platform. Mexico is a viable option for investment due to its increasingly competitive regulatory and legal framework. Substantive constitutional reforms have been applied in energy, taxes and the pensions system. This favor-

able and dynamic setting makes it easier for investment to be much more productive.

It's time to invest in Mexico. Our territory enjoys a strategic geographical position, great natural wealth and the advantage of being a country primarily of young people. This, together with the plurality of its industrial sectors, sound international trade relations, economic and financial stability, as well as a notable political maturity, consolidates it as one of the best destinations for international investment.

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relationships with growers. We have developed some outstanding partnerships in Mexico in excellent production areas for our complete line of berries – strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries both organic and conventionally grown. In Mexico, we have been able to produce superior quality berries in a timeframe that complements production from other areas.

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breeding proprietary berry varieties. An important part of our partnerships with independent farmers in Mexico is conducting research into varieties and cultural practices that fit their climate and production systems. We are very proud of the extent to which our partners in Mexico have embraced Driscoll's standards. Regardless of production area, the farmers who grow for Driscoll's adhere to same stringent food safety standards that are verified by inde-



pendent, third-party audits and random inspections. And, our recognized quality standards are the same everywhere. It's a tough standard but our Mexican partners are committed to producing the best and safest berries possible.

Our experience in Mexico has been very positive – a win, win for Driscoll's, the family farmers with whom we have partnered and for the communities in which we farm. Our values are to operate with passion, humility and trustworthiness and recognizing that our businesses have an impact on

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involving hand held radios that would allow the food safety team to communicate real-time with critical control points scattered throughout the field. However, the patient field manager first commended our brilliant idea but then gently informed us that since several dialects were being spoken in the field and not everyone spoke Spanish, such communication would be impractical. We realized then that our education was just beginning.

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A Bounty In The Mid-West

Chicago's central location and diverse population supports a bustling wholesale market and independent retail and foodservice scene.

BY LISA WHITE

Chicago is more than just The Windy City. With its 100 neighborhoods and diverse population, Chicago is a real melting pot of cultures and cuisines. Although the city itself has approximately 3 million residents, the Chicagoland area includes close to 10 million people in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana. This is what makes its produce industry so unique. The city's central location means that the best fruits and vegetables from East and West Coast producers, as well as suppliers from Northern and Southern states, are only between three and six days away, on average.

The city is known for its more than 7,000 restaurants, from Mom & Pop diners and ethnic eateries in Chinatown and Greektown to the Tony Award-winning spots in a variety of neighborhoods, including River North and Lincoln Park. Everything from soul food to Korean fare can be found in and around the city. "Restaurants in this area are always looking for that edge, and chefs are becoming more aware of what's on the market," says Gene Ruffolo, part owner of C. Ruffolo & Sons, a Chicago wholesaler specializing in the restaurant and foodservice industry.

Like its restaurants, Chicago's supermarket industry is diverse. Rather than a glut of large chain stores, the area features a wide range of independent and specialty markets that spotlight unique produce geared toward different ethnic demographics. Chicagoans are looking for stores that provide the freshest and largest selection of fruits and vegetables. "An average Chicago-area supermarket will sell more produce than a store in another city," reports Jim Bilbrey, produce buyer and supervisor at Treasure Island, which has seven stores in the city and surrounding suburbs.

With its central location, cultural diversity and thriving retail and foodservice segments, produce is a top priority in Chicago.

Distinct Demographics Reign In Retail

Chicagoans are known for their loyalty, especially in the retail arena. Many supermarket chains have come and gone over the years, but two have remained. The 182 Jewel-Osco stores, owned by Supervalu, account for about 40 percent of Chicagoland's supermarket business. Dominick's, owned by Safeway, is the region's second-largest supermarket chain. Its approximately 80 stores account for about 10 percent of the Chicago area's supermarket sales. The remaining 50 percent of the area's supermarket business is garnered from independent specialty and ethnic markets in and around the city. One of the most successful independents is Garden Fresh Fruit Market Inc. This chain has eight stores in the Chicagoland area and is known for its wide selection of fresh produce. "Chain stores in this market are doing a better job with produce

due to the knowledge and experience of independents like us," says Adi Mor, president of the Wheeling, IL-based company.

Garden Fresh's produce selection is geared toward its varied demographics in each location, which ranges from Russian and Jewish to Polish and Hispanic. "We are different from cities like New York, which have more chains and fewer independents," Mor points out. "In Chicago, we have distinct neighborhoods that are more segregated in terms of ethnicities and cultures."

Before the age of refrigerated trucks, Chicago was a dumping ground for produce that was headed east. "Chicago's South Water produce market was the place to de-ice. Not all product bound for the East Coast would make it there, [due to perishability factors]," Mor says. More often than not, the city ended up being the final destination for much of this produce. "That's why the city's fruits and vegetables are cheaper. Our transportation costs are less due to our central location," Mor explains. "It's more expensive to take a trailer of produce east from Chicago than vice-versa because of all our factories and processing plants."

Mor shops the new Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM), where he says the average cost per basket is at least 20 percent less than anywhere else in the country, including Miami and New York City. "This is due to the fierce retail competition in the Chicago area," Mor says. "There are typically 10 big retailers competing for the same baskets." Garden Fresh staff members shop the CIPM at 4 a.m. every morning to have the produce in their stores by 9 a.m. later that day.



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Treasure Island's Bilbrey also visits the CIPM daily. "The new market is updated, runs better than older markets and keeps the cold chain better," he says. "That means a lot in produce. There also are a lot of local farmers coming to the market now."

Procuring the freshest and best quality produce is key for Treasure Island, which has a strong emphasis on fruits and vegetables in its stores. "Many independents like us are heavy on produce, because Chicago is a big produce town," Bilbrey says. This is because many city neighborhoods are mainly catering to the young and affluent who are looking to eat more healthfully. Plus, "Produce prices haven't really increased here much, despite the down economy," Bilbrey notes. "We're seeing sales thriving now more than ever, especially with organic items."

Tony's Finer Foods, a 7-store operation based in Chicago, IL, that also has a heavy emphasis on produce, has seen its sales in this department increase between 8 and 10 percent annually for the past five years. "Last Memorial Day weekend was our best ever in terms of produce sales," says Jessie Soto, the chain's produce director. "It's the only department where sales have been growing significantly." He says Chicagoans are looking to taste new fruits and vegetables as well as incorporate them into recipes. Instead of the Golden and Red Delicious apples, consumers are looking for Galas, Fujis and Honey Crisp, for example. "Our customers are hungry to taste something new," he adds. "We've seen our biggest incremental sales increase in the Hispanic segment with items like avocados."

John B. Sanfilippo & Son Inc., located in Elgin, IL, which processes and markets nuts in addition to distributing Orchard Valley Harvest dried fruit products, sees more potential for its lines in the produce department as consumers look for nutritional items in the produce section. According to Robert Sarlls, senior vice president of consumer sales, strategy and business development, "Chicagoans, like most consumers, want to eat more healthfully and are paying for quality. This bodes well for our company and the produce." He notes that higher end retailers in and around the city are placing better quality, value-added products in the produce section.

Seasonal Produce Shines On Chicago Menus

The city of Chicago is known for its approximately 9,000 restaurants. Ethnic enclaves like Chinatown and Greektown offer authentic fare, but the various neighborhoods offer a bevy of dining options. "Chicago is a big restaurant and convention town that consumes a lot of produce," says Peter Testa, president of Testa Produce Inc., a Chicago-based produce sup-

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plier to foodservice operations in town.

The area's chefs are seeking new and different ingredients that can help set their restaurants apart in the competitive marketplace. "Chain restaurants and casual spots are always looking to change their menus to entice consumers," Testa adds. "High-end eateries are looking to do something unique, too. Today, everyone is trying to 'upscale' their menus in a cost effective way." Chicagoland chefs are doing this by utilizing less costly fruit and vegetables in innovative ways to make them look and taste different.

People in this area see eating as a reward for working hard. The majority of the Chicago area's demographic eats out more often than not. Like in other big cities, people in Chicago are seeking more gourmet dishes made with specialty produce. Restaurant operators are responding by incorporating different products into their dishes. "One big advantage here is that there are many people from all areas of the country who enjoying eating out at nice restaurants," says Ruffolo of C. Ruffolo & Sons. "Chicago has one of the greater selections of restaurants in the world."

Still, the city is not immune to the current economic crisis. "Our foodservice customers are all independents, and their sales are down," says Jim Stamos, president of J. & S. Produce

"Chicago is a unique market that is very heavy on independent grocery stores. Grocers still like to come down to the market and hand-pick their produce. We still have product coming in every day, throughout the day. It's as fresh as they can get it."

— Lisa Strube
Strube Celery & Vegetable Co.

Corp., a wholesaler located in the CIPM. "Everyone is fighting to keep sales up, margins are suffering and everyone is price-shopping."

Restaurant operators are buying produce from two or three sources, instead of one, and price is typically the deciding factor when purchasing. "In the past, we would seek out customers, but nowadays, our customers seek us out," says Jim Nix, who owns Market Produce, a trade produce supplier in LaGrange, IL, with his wife Gwen. "Restaurants in this area are looking for companies they can partner with." Approximately 95 percent of Market Produce's products are sold to restaurants.

Phoenicia Mediterranean Cuisine, which is located in the Northern Chicago suburb of

Highland Park, purchases its produce from the CIPM as well as local distributors. Chef/owner Joseph Skaff says one of the biggest challenges of doing business in Chicago is the high prices. "Companies are exporting vegetables overseas and charging customers here more money," he explains. "But we can't increase our menu prices to cover these costs."

Skaff says the higher prices became more evident about five months ago. Tomatoes that formerly cost 49-cents a pound, for example, were recently priced at \$5 a pound. "We don't make our money on the food, only booze," Skaff admits.

The biggest benefit to procuring produce in Chicago is availability and quality, Skaff says.

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CHICAGO MARKET PROFILE

Phoenicia uses a great deal of produce in its dishes, including eggplant, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes and turnips. "We also make our own pickles.

Located on Milwaukee and Halsted streets in Chicago's River West neighborhood, Piccolo de Sogno is a restaurant that takes full advantage of the area's produce offering. "The trends are leading toward getting produce from small area farmers," says Tony Priolo, executive chef and owner. "They grow what chefs want. This helps us control what we put on our menus." He says in the Midwest, seasonal product is utilized most often. "For example, we are now using fava beans for summer, in addition to peaches and other stonefruit. Tomatoes will be in season soon, too," Priolo adds. "We're now excited to be

using fresh figs, as well, which we are serving with prosciutto." Despite the challenges in cold weather, Priolo says being centrally located is a definite advantage when it comes to sourcing produce for his Chicago restaurant. With an almost endless produce bounty to choose from, area chefs can take advantage of all that the city and surrounding areas have to offer.

Wholesale Market Has Historic And Ever Important Role

Chicagoland's produce industry is centered around the city's wholesale market, which has had three locations since the 1800s. The Water Street Market moved to The South Water Market in 1926. In November, 2002, The Chicago International Produce Market

(CIPM) was built at a cost of \$58 million. Sitting on 26 acres, the 436,000-square-ft. market is comprised of 36 tenant spaces ranging from 12,117 to 60,586 square feet. Today, imports from 48 states, Canada and more than 20 countries are sold by CIPM's almost two-dozen wholesalers. State-of-the-art, computer-regulated refrigeration technology is designed to respond instantly to humidity and temperature fluctuations, which benefits the cold chain by impeding produce spoilage and maximizing freshness.

Because the CIPM is one of the newest markets, it offers benefits unmatched by outdated facilities. "This is a state-of-the-art facility that offers advantages the city's former South Water Market didn't," says Lisa Strube, director of finance and administration at Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. Established in 1913, the fourth generation, family-run wholesaler is located in the CIPM. Most importantly, wholesalers are benefiting from being able to maintain the cold chain from the back to the front door. "Many older wholesale markets are struggling with this, due to the age of the facilities," she adds.

Business has picked up within the last year and, as a result, Strube added two new salesmen to focus on specific areas of growth.

"We can catch someone going to another state with produce and pick up the necessary pallets, since there's a good chance they'll be driving through the area. We pick up many opportunities this way."

— Mark Pappas
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"One brings strength with tomatoes for our growing division, while the other new hire will be the head of our Hispanic division," Strube says. "The latter is an area we've always been in, but moved away from, and now will be priority due to the huge potential of this segment."

With today's increased competition, knowledgeable wholesalers who have the will and determination to succeed are flourishing in the Chicago market. "The competition is greater, but it has always been there," says Ruffolo of C. Ruffolo & Sons. "This is good, because it keeps everyone on their toes."

Specialty Produce

CIPM wholesalers have become more alert about the type of produce their competitors are offering and the prices they've set. Being educated in the industry is important as growers and shippers develop more specialty products that are becoming staples in both the retail and foodservice industries. These items include mesclun lettuce, baby zucchini, basil, baby arugula, baby spinach, broccolini and seedless cucumbers.

The economy has caused a slowdown in the region's produce sales, but most Chicago wholesalers are reporting that business is still good. "Our sales are still stronger than ever, but there is more competition now," admits Stamos of J. & S. Produce. The company sells to foodservice operations as opposed to retail chains. Although J. & S. started out as a produce distributor, in the face of increasing competition, the company has become more of a broadline supplier. "About eight years ago, we slowly began adding products to supplement our produce offerings," Stamos adds. "Today, we've expanded our business to include paper products, dry goods, cheese and anything we can sell to foodservice operators."

Along with increased competition within the CIPM, companies like J. & S. have to go up against large foodservice distributors. The downturn in the foodservice industry also has resulted in more produce suppliers competing for less business.

Also, the city's central location ensures better and quicker access to these products. "We're basically a consolidation house, so our customers don't have to make 15 to 20 pickups for different items," Stamos says. "They can buy varying items from different areas, without traveling too far."

Because of the influx of independent supermarkets in the Chicagoland area, the CIPM sees a lot of retail business, in addition to foodservice. "Chicago is a unique market that is very heavy on independent grocery stores," says Strube of Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. "Grocers still like to come down to the market and hand-pick their produce. We

still have product coming in every day, throughout the day. It's as fresh as they can get it," she notes.

Along with organic produce, many customers are now looking for locally grown items, which are environmentally friendly due to the close proximity, which helps reduce carbon emissions.

Although there are more independent markets, these are mainly expanded locations from already established retailers, rather than stores operated by new businesses.

Despite the increasing competition for business, long-time Chicago produce market

tenants like Strube have built many strong relationships within the market. "We have a unique situation where competitors are selling similar products side-by-side," points out Strube. Customers can compare and contrast our goods. Many times, buying decisions come down to pricing, personality or extras, like reliability and service."

Dietz & Kolodenco Co., another wholesaler in the CIPM, mainly supplies product to independent stores that have specific needs. "Many of our independent customers are opening new store locations," says Nick Gaglione, president. "Big chains like Jewel

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and Dominick's buy produce from warehouses. Independent retailers come to the market every day of the week and choose products their customers are specifically asking for."

Because Chicago has a varied cross section of nationalities, these retailers are looking for a large assortment of produce to purchase. "Independents play a big role in the area's food industry," Gaglione says. "Chicago also has a good cross-section of consumers, both by ratio and nationality, which makes this region a good market for produce."

Overcoming Challenges

Gaglione adds that even when the economy was thriving, transportation has always been a challenge. "The cost for transporting produce is not getting cheaper; it's an ever-increasing expense," Gaglione says. "But, because we are centrally located, it's easier to get product from all over the country."

Even though the environment remains tough in all areas of the country, including Chicago, wholesalers are looking ahead. "We're affected by incimate weather as well as the economy," says Mark Pappas, president of Coosemans Chicago Inc., a wholesaler in the CIPM. "People are not going to country clubs or cafes yet. We're also being impacted by customers who aren't able to pay us."

Wholesalers still provide valuable resources to retailers, but also have a different view of the industry than most. Coosemans caters to independent retailers and foodservice operations that are looking for a wide variety of high-end produce. "Our independent customers compete by being more upscale than the 4-for-\$1 guys," Pappas says. "Where some houses provide more blowout product and sale-related produce, we give retailers a chance to compete in the specialty arena rather than in a traditional chain store."

The attrition of independent retailers has resulted in higher quality products. "Stores with quality operations, whether they are an ethnic, discount or higher end market, are here to stay," Pappas asserts. "New retailers that come in and think they will reinvent the wheel or hone in on other stores' territories don't last in this region." As a result, there are many independent retailers that come and go as well as solid independents that continue thriving and expanding their operations.

Pappas agrees that transportation remains one of the biggest challenges. "Years ago, our Thursday night trucks would typically arrive a day late once in a blue moon, but now it's every other week," Pappas says. "With the price of fuel and the trucking situation, we don't have the upper hand. Everyone has to work together in times like this."

There also is always an average order

amount to fill and rejected loads with which to contend. "The challenges in the produce business are the same for everyone, regardless of location," says Pappas. "We're dealing with weather situations and the economy. Getting paid on time is difficult these days. We are dealing with high costs of labor, whereas other cities may not. Not only do you have to keep an eye on your business, but it's important to know what's going on in the industry overall."

Big, Diverse And Centrally Located

Although being in the Midwest affects business on a seasonal level, during more temperate months, wholesalers are able to bring in local product from other nearby states, including Michigan, Iowa and Minnesota. This produce costs less because it is cheaper to transport the shorter distance. In addition, produce from surrounding states takes only two to three days to arrive.

Along with procuring product quicker from the east and west, Chicago is only six hours from Canada, and wholesalers can take advantage of the Michigan growing season, too. There also are a bevy of nearby growing areas where wholesalers can procure produce. For example, near the Southern suburb of Joliet, local growers are providing asparagus and spinach. Farms in Southern Illinois grow a variety of items, including corn, zucchini and cucumbers. The area also is known to be self-sufficient for many other traditional fruits and vegetables.

Being centrally located also helps with less-than-trailer-load transportation, Pappas of Coosemans notes. East and West Coast companies are more limited, while the Chicago area has many more drivers coming through on their way to other locations. "We can catch someone going to another state with produce and pick up the necessary pallets, since there's a good chance they'll be driving through the area," he says. "We pick up many opportunities this way."

In addition to location, being in a big, diverse city has its advantages. Overall, there is more business due to the large size of the city. "Anything you want, in terms of produce, you can buy in Chicago," says Stamos of J. & S. "There is a price range of merchandise and quality that is probably not available anywhere else in the country."

Pappas adds, "We have many more selling opportunities from an ethnic standpoint as well as with high-end product." Retailers and foodservice operators can find everything from European to Asian to Hispanic produce in the CIPM. "You can find anything down here, because the market caters to the diversity of the Midwest and Chicago," he continues. "There aren't just two people vying for your business; there are a multitude of companies. The competition is good for everyone, includ-

ing consumers and wholesalers. If there weren't as many choices or opportunities, the wholesalers would stay on the high end of the market. The competition makes everyone work harder."

Wholesalers in the Chicago area also can more easily position themselves as a volume house. "Although everyone competes against each other in the CIPM, and everyone generally sells everything, the wholesale market is still diverse enough that companies can create their own niche, despite their large offerings," Pappas says.

One thing the terminal market allows buyers to do is hedge their bets in terms of volume. "Retailers want to buy enough product if they anticipate the buyers will be there, but they don't want to get caught with too much produce," Pappas says.

The Transportation Situation

While the older terminal market had a stigma in terms of difficulties getting in and out, the CIPM is more customer-friendly. "There is always a dock available for emergencies, so people aren't waiting around for deliveries like in the old market," reports Pappas. "In the past, loading and unloading times weren't within our control, but now we can guarantee product gets off in time. This is because we have a lot more space than we did in the old market."

Eclipse Dist. Inc., a truck brokerage company based in Shorewood, IL, brings produce from the area's surrounding growing areas, including Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana. Trucks are tight, with many trucking companies going out of business, according to the company's vice president, Tristan Schmit. "Business is steady, but not strong, and there has been no big increase in new independent retailers, although they are still a strong presence," he says.

Companies like Eclipse are keeping an eye on the industry and operating in a more cautious manner. One of the biggest challenges for trucking companies and brokers are the new restrictions and regulations. On January 1 of this year, new regulations by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) mandated reductions in engine emissions by requiring that Transport Refrigerated Units (TRU) equipped with diesel engines seven years or older be replaced or retrofitted with new engines or verified diesel emissions control strategies. Operators also can use alternative technologies, such as electric-standby/hybrid-electric or hybrid-cryogenic systems. The Clean Air Act in California also may set limits on emissions from in-use non-road engines on a refrigerated truck or trailer.

"It is costing between \$8,000 and \$18,000 for truck companies to get current on reefer

trailer requirements," Schmidt reports. "It also is tougher for independent operators to suck up the cost. If they can't pay that amount, produce suppliers will go somewhere else."

The tougher restrictions in California have also resulted in a tight market for trucks. "There is less availability, and rates have gone up," Schmidt says, who estimates that produce shipping costs have increased 10 percent over the past year due to the truck shortage.

As such, companies are keeping a tighter rein on inventory. "Instead of ordering 10 loads of produce, companies will only take six loads and not have as much product on hand," Schmidt says. "You can't bring in more product when the price is \$5,000 for a truckload this year versus \$4,200 a year ago."

In business for 24 years, Kenosha, WI-based Cool Runnings hauls produce from the West Coast to the CIPM as well as to various receivers in the Chicago area. "We are noticing a trend moving away from terminal markets as a produce source and more toward specialty stores, whether for Hispanic, Asian or organic products," says Fred Plotsky, president.

Plotsky agrees that the increased regula-

tions have made it tougher to do business in California. "The equipment has to be compliant, so only certain drivers can go there," he explains. "We can't send our whole fleet like we did in the past." This has resulted in lower pay for long-haul truck drivers. "These drivers make less money for long hauls than truck drivers with local routes," Plotsky says. "Rates haven't been keeping pace with the increasing fuel costs, so it is hard to find drivers for long hauls."

With less owner-operators and increased regulations, the labor market has taken a big hit. "Many of our customers also require increased insurance now, which is an added cost," says Eclipse's Schmidt. Still, he says Chicago is a hub for outbound freight, so there are opportunities for trucking companies based in and around the city. "If you have a truck here, it is easy to get out," he adds.

Despite the challenges, Breck Grigas, president of World Wide Produce Inc., and a member of CIPM's board, says business on the market is great. "We've been in our new location for more than eight years now, and we're looking to our future," he says. "Chicago is not in a different situation than any other part of the country. It's a tough industry, but we are all survivors." **pb**

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Nine New Ways To Merchandise Onions

Creative usage and prep suggestions, along with big bold displays and savvy social media strategies help retailers stay connected to consumers looking for onions.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Sure, there are tried-and-true ways to sell produce, especially staples such as onions. However, by capitalizing on the trends that are sweeping the nation — consumers cooking at home, tuning into food TV and searching for recipes everywhere from cookbooks to cyberspace — there's a real opportunity to try something fresh and lift sales numbers to a new level. To do this, the merchandising mantra should be all about satisfying customers' desire for that something different with creative preparation suggestions.

1. KNOW THE TRENDS

Onion consumption, both fresh and storage, has increased more than 63 percent in the past two decades, from 12.2 pounds per person in 1983 to 20.1 pounds per person in 2008, according to the Greeley, CO-based National Onion Association (NOA).

Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co., in Brooks, OR, says, "Onions are a staple ingredient in so many recipes. That's why if you look at this spring's hot onion market, you clearly saw that despite rising FOBs, onion sales continued on track with previous years."

Versatility is a key driver of this blossoming consumption. Marty Kamer, sales manager for the Northeast office of Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc., in Greencastle, PA, points out, "Onions are used to enhance flavor in a wide range of recipes. Approximately 15 to 18 percent of onions are processed for use in prepared food items such as salsa, soups and appetizers. Onions are also processed for fresh consumption — peeled, sliced, diced and chunked — which also go directly to the foodservice industry. Recipes, educational videos and demos are all ways retailers can capitalize on this."

Some of the trendiest ways to use onions



Signage of different varieties of onions is key to helping consumers understand their different usages and versatility as a whole category.

today come from recipes developed in the past few years by the celebrity chefs on the Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee's (VOC) Chefs Advisory Board. For example, Spike Mendelsohn, *Top Chef* Season Four contestant and executive chef/owner of the Good Stuff Eatery in Washington, D.C. has developed a signature take on traditional onion rings with his Vidalia Onion Petals. Other new and novel recipes include Apple-Vidalia Cake by Jeffery Ruben, executive chef at the Vidalia Restaurant in Washington, DC; and Food Network chef, Paula Deen's Butter and Bouillon-Cube Grilled Saturday Night Vidalias.

Beyond this, Kim Reddin, the NOA's director of public and industry relations, says, "The craze for comfort foods has sparked a revival of the grilled cheese sandwich with exciting new twists such as the addition of artisan cheese and bread served with an onion-based jam or chutney."

"Another trend," according to Curry, "is for sliders, mini-burgers and other appetizer-style items that all work great with sautéed onions."

2. EDUCATE CUSTOMERS

Yellow onions — including sweet onions — are still king of the category and represent 87 percent of sales, according to the NOA. Red onions make up 8 percent of sales, while white onions are at 5 percent.

Dave Brossart, general manager for produce and floral at Jingle Jim's International Market, a single specialty supermarket in Fairfield, OH, says, "Ten years ago, consumers would pick up a yellow onion and use it for everything they were cooking. Today, we've started to see customers pick up different varieties of onions for different reasons."

"The more variety of onions consumers buy, the greater the opportunity to expand

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sales in the category," remarks Dick Thomas, Jr., vice president of sales for Potandon Produce LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID.

To do this, retailers need to address the lack of knowledge by many consumers about which onions are best for specific dishes, explains Sherise Jones, marketing director for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon (IEOOC) Onion Committee, in Parma, ID. "Consumers would have more confidence in creating a new dish if they knew which type of onion to use. That's where education at retail comes in.

Sweet onion demand remains strong, reports John Shuman, president and director of sales for Shuman Produce Inc., in Reidsville, GA. "In addition to other applications, we're seeing an increase in the use of sweet onion marmalade to add flavor and texture to beef dishes," he says.

Kathy Fry, executive director for the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee, in Walla Walla, WA, says, "Recipe trends we're seeing are mustards, chutneys and fruit salsas made with our onions. There's been a lot of chefs talking about the possibility of creating Walla Walla sweet onion ice cream, but I haven't seen it yet."

Rick Antle, CEO at Tanimura & Antle Inc., in Salinas, CA, reveals, "Red onions

have become popular to add color to the top of salads and pizzas. We're now seeing them used on sandwiches and burgers, too."

"Sales of red onions seem to be overtaking those of white onions in recent years," adds Dale DeBerry, vice president of marketing for Progreso Produce Co., based in Boerne, TX.

"Yet in Ohio," says Jungle Jim's Brossart, "we're seeing increased sales of white onions."

"When offering an assortment of onions, it's important to understand the demographic of your customer," advises Curry & Co's Curry. "If you have a lot of Hispanic customers, make sure you have a larger-than-usual display of white onions than non-Hispanic stores. Pay attention to what types of onions various cultures buy and use and structure your displays accordingly."

3. SELL PACKAGING WITH SOLUTIONS

Packaging makes a difference in onion sales, asserts Shuman Produce's Shuman. "Consumers are most interested in recipe ideas, nutrition information or preparation ideas at point-of-purchase or on the bag," he reports. "Bags that offer this information entice consumers to purchase more.

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Our vertical bag in 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-lb. options are our most popular items and all of our consumer bags include recipes and nutrition information."

Progreso Produce's DeBerry adds, "It's important to change the recipes on pack either regularly or with the seasons."

Starting in September, Onions Etc. will pack its yellow onions in a 2-lb. bag that includes a recipe and photo of a grapefruit, avocado and onion side dish on the front and another photo and recipe for Mango Avocado Salsa on the back. This pack offers the advantage of not only giving customers a meal solution, but also selling more produce overall.

Also new, Market Fresh Produce LLC, in Nixa, MO, has created a new bag design using a black label and red mesh sides for its 4-lb. Vidalia onions. The bag provides a high graphic picture of the product on the front and nutritional and recipe information on the back. Jeff Jones, national procurement director, says, "This bag also will provide flexibility to use with other onion varieties with very few changes."

4. BUILD WELL-SIGNED, DESTINATION DISPLAYS

"At Jungle Jim's," says Brossart, "We put all of our onions together. Each variety — sweets and cooking onions, red and whites, too, are all signed so that customers know what they're buying."

Onions are often taken for granted and thought of as a maintenance item, relays Curry & Co.'s Curry. "Sweet onions, in particular, are often placed alongside the other onions and aren't called out in any special way. Add a grower story to the display. In addition, you can really make red onions pop when you peel off the loose skins, and they make a great natural color break."

"Break up an onion display not only by type but also by size," advises Judy Queale-Dunsmoor, brand manager and co-owner of New York Bold LLC, in Fulton, NY. "There are different recipe applications for different sizes of onions — jumbo for making bloom-in' onions, medium for dips and baby onions for cooking whole."

Go big when it comes to the size of onion displays, recommends Keystone's Kamer. "Nothing says 'Buy Me' like end caps, stand-alones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays, all of which offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift."

Big was indeed the word at GFF Foods, an independent supermarket in Moore, OK, that was named the Grand Prize Winner in the IEOOC's 'Onion Lover's Month' display contest in January. Dave Dozier, produce

"Consumers are most interested in recipe ideas, nutrition information or preparation ideas at point-of-purchase or on the bag. Bags that offer this information entice consumers to purchase more."

— John Shuman
 Shuman Produce

manager, says, "We took bulk and bagged red, white and jumbo sweet yellow onions and built a display that was 14 x 8 feet with a 6-ft. long banner overhead." Dozier decorated the display with POS materials offered by the IEO as well as posters he made himself. He also included tie-in items such as onion ring batter mix. The result? "In one month," he says, "we sold 15,270 pounds or 7.6 tons of onions! What's more important is that we've participated in this contest for four years, and each year sales increase over the year prior."

5. TAKE CULINARY CUES FOR CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Opportunities to cross-merchandise onions are limitless and year-round, says Jones of Market Fresh Services. "In the summer, cross-merchandise onions with steaks and hamburgers for grilling. Casseroles are more popular than ever in this tight economy. In the fall and winter, cross-merchandise the main ingredients for a particular type of casserole with onions."

In the produce department, display sweet onions next to bagged salads, advises Kamer of Keystone. "Consumers will get the idea that they can just slice and enjoy. No cooking required."

Walla Walla's Fry agrees, adding, "Sweet onions always sell well with salad dressings."

In July, Stockton, CA-based Onions Etc.



Photo courtesy of the Vidalia Onion Committee

The Vidalia Onion Committee's Shrek promotion was a huge success with 11,000 bins, 2.5 million bags and more than 10,000 floor stands and box toppers distributed to retailers nationwide.

Inc. ran its Sweet Onion Strawberry Salad promotion in more than 300 stores nation-

wide. The promotion cross-merchandised a 2-lb. bag of Tuscan Sweets, which contained yellow California onions and red Italian sweet onions, and a recipe for the salad on the bag. Derrell Kelso, Jr., owner and president, says, "We encouraged retailers to advertise the Tuscan Sweet and build displays around it with strawberries and spinach. It created profitable sales for the retailers and happy customers who enjoyed a unique summer recipe."

"Onions also merchandise well next to tomatoes for a salsa theme," says Jones. "Add a recipe for extra measure."

Curry & Co's Curry adds, "I saw a great display at a Hispanic-based store that used white onions, jalapenos and red tomatoes to create a Mexican flag at the front of the produce department."

"Display onions on an end cap," recommends Potandon's Thomas, "and tie in an onion ring batter mix."

Glenville, GA-based Bland Farms LLC takes an additional helpful step with retailers and offers a corrugated pallet-sized bin display that holds pre-selected onion-based condiments such as onion ring batter, salad dressing, dips and steak marinade in the middle of the unit. Richard Pazderski, director of sales and marketing, says, "All a retail-

er has to do is take off the lid and the unit is ready to sell."

"Outside of the produce department," says Jones of Market Fresh Services, "merchandise onions in the meat department next to steak and chicken for kabobs."

This past year, the IEOOC worked with two small retail chains to set up a cross-promotion that paired onions with two pork products. Jones details, "Customers who purchased a specific amount of onions, potatoes and pork roast received breakfast for free in the form of a dozen eggs and pound of bacon. The promotion was advertised in the chain's weekly flyer and there was POS in both the produce and meat departments. Results were incredibly positive; we're looking for more opportunities such as this."

Brian Kastick, president and CEO of OSO Sweet Onions, in Charleston, WV, recommends, "Sell sweet onions in the soup aisle during the winter."

Kitchenwares make novel products to cross merchandise with onions as well. The NOA's Reddin reports, "One chain creatively cross-merchandised onions and a Crockpot cookbook next to their Crockpots. Cutting boards and skewers are other kitchen utensils that also can be cross-merchandised with onions."



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Green Onions See Renewed Consumer Interest

The high price of regular onions this spring drove sales of green onions at Jungle Jim's International Market, a single specialty supermarket in Fairfield, OH, says general manager for produce and floral, Dave Brossart. "Sales have really picked up and consumers are using the green onions as a substitute for the regular onions."

Lindsay Martinez, director of marketing for Boskovich Farms Inc., headquartered in Oxnard, CA, says, "Green onions are great flavor boosters, so as the trend for healthy dishes continues to grow, green onions are frequently used to add zest to nutritious, low-fat dishes. Retailers can really push green onions as a healthful way to add flavor."

Brossart notes, "I look for the medium-sized green onions because they offer a broader range of cooking opportunities."

Rick Antle, CEO and principal in Tanimura & Antle, in Salinas, CA, counters with this observation: "Some retailers like the pencil-thin variety from out of Texas or Southern California. Others, especially the Hispanic stores, will offer two sizes."

Cebollitas have been popular in the His-

panic/Latino community for years, reports Martinez. "However, recently, they have become much more widely available. *Cebollitas* have a slight bulb, but still impart a sweet, mild, though slightly stronger flavor than green onions. They are also called Barbeque Onions because they are perfect for grilling," she adds. "Both *Cebollitas* and green onions can be grilled using a little olive oil, salt and pepper until they are slightly charred and caramelized. This method imparts delicious and complex flavors. Summertime barbeque promotions are the perfect way to capitalize on selling both *Cebollitas* and green onions."

"Brossart prefers to purchase green onions without packaging," he says, "because customers like to see the product."

However, Martinez points out that, "Benefits of the packaged and iceless shipped product are many, including reduced food safety risks. Proper packaging also provides maximum shelf-life, thereby reducing shrink. There is also less mess and potential slips and falls from melting ice on the cold room floor, as well as freight savings." **pb**

6. DO IN-STORE DEMOS

There's nothing like sampling something to increase sales. This is the goal behind Keystone Fruit Marketing's executive chef, Dave Munson, conducting a number of educational in-store demos with onions each year. Earlier this year, the company partnered with Wegman's Food Markets Inc., a 75-store chain based in Rochester, NY, for a Vidalias on the Veranda promotion.

Onions were featured in three recipes. Munson says, "Demos such as this are typically from three to five hours long and are most effective on Thursdays through Sundays when most people shop. I make it a live demo, meaning I prepare three to four recipes right on the spot. This gives me an opportunity to teach techniques and interact with customers all while giving short bullet points of information. All the ingredients for the recipes are displayed right next to where I'm working so customers can pick up everything at one time."

7. SHOWCASE VARIETY IN ADVERTISING

Onions can sometimes be under-adver-

tised due to their being a shopping list staple, says the NOA's Reddin. "That's what many shippers tell me. At the same time, they say they see shipments go up when onions are on ad."

Curry & Co.'s Curry says, "Onions are so versatile. I'd love to see an advertisement showing how onions can be a perfect part of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Create a full-day menu."

Theme ads can be effective, contends Reddin. "For example, some retailers will group burgers and brats with onions and put all three items on sale for Memorial Day. They'll follow it up with a cross-display in the store."

Put one-liners in ads to suggest different usages, recommends the IEOOC's Jones. "For example, you can write 'Chili this winter? Try Spanish Sweets' or 'Football game this weekend? Grab some red onions to top your pizza.'"

"Other advertising ideas," says Keystone's Kamer, "are to feature customer testimonials and share real consumers' photos and stories regarding new recipes, first-time users or favorite recipes using sweet onions."

8. PROMOTE CREATIVELY

Shuman Produce's Shuman says, "Achieve an optimal promotional impact by creating a year-round promotional plan that includes all onion category segments and maintains the category pricing structure."

To accomplish this, Bland Farm's Pazderski advises retailers to "capitalize on the seasonal excitement, especially within the sweet onion category. Highlight where the product is grown and what makes it unique."

Beyond this, partnering with onion commodity boards and shippers offers novel opportunities to promote onions. This past May, the VOC partnered with DreamWorks Animation for its Shrek Forever After, Vidalias Forever Sweet Ogres and Onions promotion timed with the release of the *Shrek Forever After* movie. The promotion included numerous POS materials for the produce aisle, an in-store radio drive, online consumer contest and national print and radio campaign. The promotion also included creative usage ideas in the form of kid-friendly Vidalia onion recipes. Executive director of the VOC, Wendy Brennan, says, "We've had such positive results with the Shrek promotion. This included participation from the Top Ten major retailers as well as Mom & Pop stores. As of the end of May, we put out 11,000 Shrek bins, 2.5 million Shrek bags and over 10,000 Shrek floor stands and box toppers."

In June and July, Keystone Fruit Marketing partnered with the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee on a Save the Flavor campaign. The campaign, which took place in Los Angeles, CA, and the Pacific Northwest, highlighted summer foods and sweet onions via targeted ads on buses and in transit shelters near participating retailers. "In addition," Walla Walla's Fry adds, "we have a new promotional packet available to retail buyers. The packet contains a list of shippers and handlers and also five 8½ x 11-inch glossy photos of new recipes."

9. BE SAVVY ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Retailers have a great tool with social media, points out Curry of Curry & Co. "Posting recipes on Twitter is one example," he says. "Others are using Twitter or other social or electronic media to announce when local onions have arrived in store, when there is a hot price, to inform customers about the health benefits of onions, or to let them know when you've posted new recipes to your Web site."

New this year, the NOA, VOC and IEOOC have all launched social media initiatives that retailers can tap into to increase onion

“I write the blog once a week and connect with our audience on topics such as onion trivia, health and nutrition information and purchasing tips.”

**— Kim Reddin
National Onion Association**

sales. In March, the NOA's Reddin, under the pseudonym, Onionista, launched a blog. “I write the blog once a week and connect with our audience on topics such as onion trivia, health and nutrition information, purchasing tips, recipes and interviews with growers who are harvesting at the time,” she details. “In between, I’m using Twitter to fill in the gaps with short bursts of information and to drive traffic to the blog posts. The benefit of social media is the immediacy in being able to connect to a target audience.”

The VOC used \$10,000 from its Specialty Crop Block Grant to invest in an overhaul of its Web site and initiate interactive networking on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This social media outreach was launched in June. Brannan says, “Our main goal with the re-design of the Web site was to better highlight

the history and heritage of the Vidalia onion without compromising its place in the modern culinary world as an incomparable ingredient. We wanted the layout more recipe- and food image-heavy, and a design that's more interactive for consumers and more accessible for retailers and media.” All of these sites now allow for direct communication from the VOC to its fan base through recipe ideas to yearly crop outlooks.

Finally, this summer, the IEOOC will debut a marketing campaign that will enable customers to use Apps on their smart phones to scan bar codes on POS materials at retail that will take them to specific information such as an exact recipe on the IEOOC's Web site. “This is something new for produce, but we see it as a valuable marketing tool for the future,” says Jones. **pb**



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Mushroom Merchandising Challenges And Opportunities

Finding the right variety mix, managing space allocation and coming up with creative promotional strategies might be a challenge, but retailers that do so say it's worth the effort.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

There's no denying the versatility of mushrooms. They fit any meal occasion from breakfast omelets to luncheon salads and dinner steaks. This favorite fungi is also convenient. Just look at the proliferation of sliced white, brown and even specialty mushroom products. Add to this the mushroom's many health benefits and it's easy to see why fresh mushrooms were the best performing vegetable among the Top 20 retail produce categories in 2009, with sales up 6 percent compared to overall produce sales, according to FreshLook Marketing data for the 52-week period ending December 27, 2009.

What's more, the mushroom category continues on a roll. In April, fresh mushroom sales showed a 4.9 percent increase in both dollars and pounds, according to FreshLook Marketing data for the year ending April 25. This increase is significant as mushroom pounds were up 7.5 percent during the same time period in 2009, which shows double-digit growth for two years in a row.

Mushrooms are so important at Sweetbay Supermarket, a Tampa, FL-based chain "that it's one of our signature categories," says Tom DeBlicek, produce category manager. "This means, for example, we concentrate on offering our customers a better variety and prominent easy-to-shop displays."

VARIETY: WHAT KIND AND HOW MANY?

Variety is the key to satisfying today's consumers, says Bill Litvin, national account manager for Giorgio Foods Inc., in Temple, PA. "Whites and browns, both Baby Bellas and Portabellas, are the mainstay of the mushroom category. Consumers also look



Photo courtesy of Sweetbay Supermarket

Some 20 SKUs of mushrooms are available at Sweetbay Supermarkets, including 14 fresh and six dried.

for Shiitakes, Oysters and other, lesser-known varieties such as Pom Pom, Beech, Maitake, Royal Trumpet and Enoki," he adds.

"White mushrooms are the category drivers," asserts Gary Schroeder, managing member and CEO of Oakshire Mushroom Sales LLC, in Kennett Square, PA. "They get the most facings at retail and they should."

At Hannaford Bros. Co, a chain headquartered in Portland, ME, fresh produce category manager, Mark Jewell, says, "The two top mushroom SKUs for us, respectively, are the 8-oz. sliced white mushroom and the 8-oz. whole white mushroom. Together, they represent 35 percent of our category sales. We offer eight white mushrooms SKUs in total, and together, these account for 64 percent of movement."

Nationally, white mushrooms represent 68.9 percent of dollar sales and 74.7 percent of pounds, according to FreshLook

Marketing data for the year ending April 25. Compared to a year ago, sales of white mushrooms grew 3.2 percent in dollars and 5.7 percent in pounds.

White mushrooms sell 2-to-1 over the brown variety, reports DeBlicek, "although the brown mushrooms have shown nice growth over the past few years. Two of our fastest movers are the 8-ounce Baby Bella, both whole and sliced."

Mike Maguire, director of produce for DeMoulas Market Basket, a 62-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, agrees and adds, "Sales of brown mushrooms have been leading over white in the past few years. The popularity of Portabellas started that trend."

Six SKUs of brown mushrooms represent 25 percent of category movement at Hannaford, points out Jewell. "What is driving this is two-fold. First, more people are cooking at home and second, the availability of

“A good rule of thumb is to turn the mushroom display daily. It’s important for produce staff to recognize when product is ‘tired.’

One way to do this is by tracking the ‘use by’ date. When there are two days left, move it to the blow out rack. Yes, this will impact your gross, but it will be a lot less than declaring it shrink.”

**— Harvey Mitchler
Champs Mushrooms Inc.**

recipes and cooking shows on television are teaching customers how to cook with a greater variety of ingredients.”

“Flavor and texture also make brown mushrooms attractive to customers,” discloses Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms Inc., in Watsonville, CA.

Brown mushrooms make up 27.2 percent of dollar sales and 23.6 percent of pounds, according to FreshLook Marketing data for the year ending April 25. Sales of brown mushrooms grew 11 percent in dollars and 12.7 percent in pounds over last year.

“In specialty mushrooms,” says Hanaford’s Jewell, “Shiitake is the No. 1-selling variety for us. We also carry a wild bunch blend that contains Shiitake, Cremini and Oyster mushrooms. This has risen fast.”

Kevin Donovan, national sales manager

for Phillips Mushrooms Farm LP, in Kennett Square, PA, says, “Sales of Shiitakes continue to grow. They are the next step in flavor for consumers after whites and browns.”

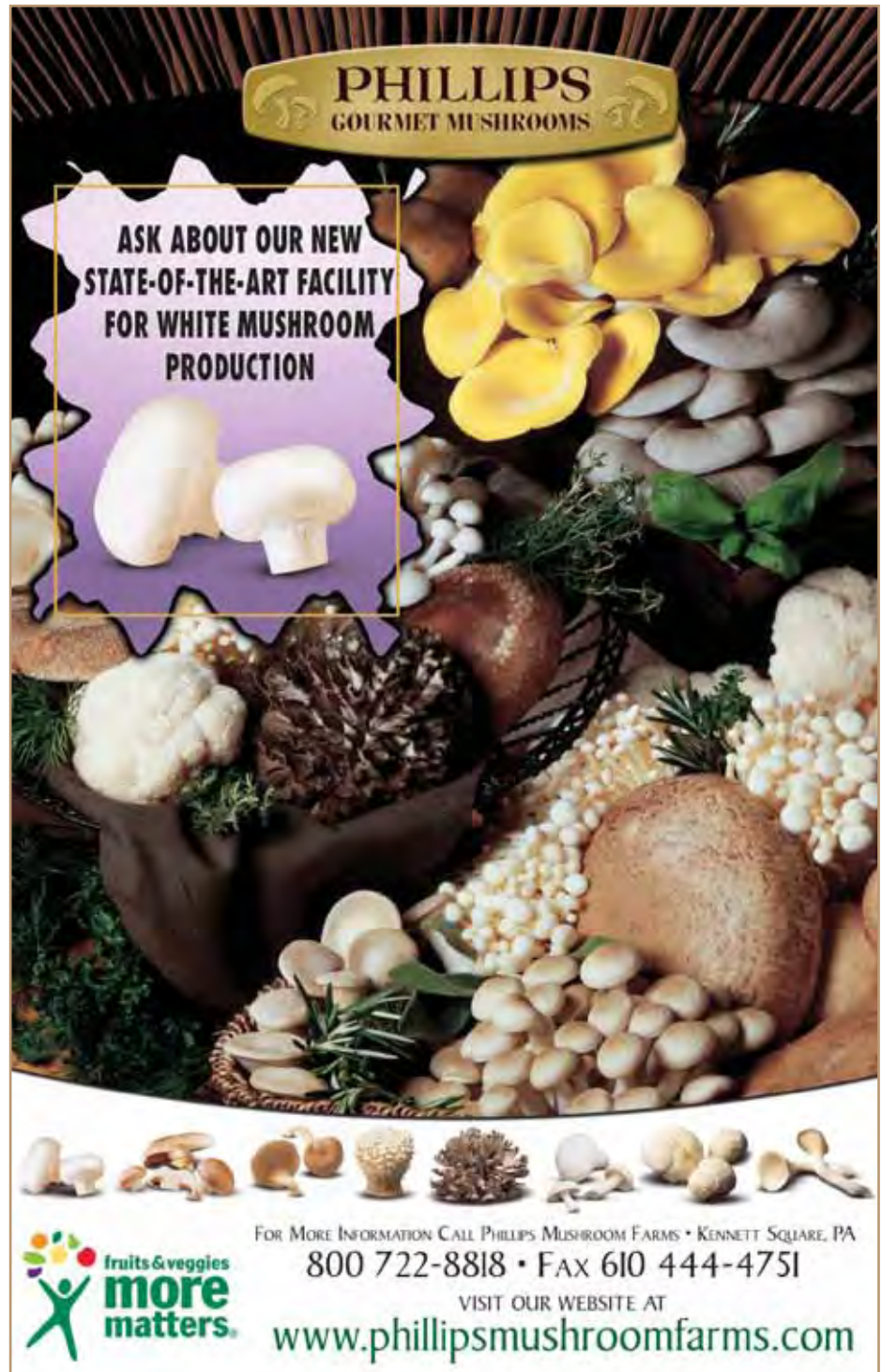
“Retailers who carry Shiitake mushrooms will often carry oyster mushrooms as well,” points out Fred Recchiuti, general manager for Basciani Mushroom Farms, in Avondale, PA. “What they may not carry are Enokis. These have a very short shelf-life.”

“Enoki mushrooms,” adds Oakshire’s Schroeder, “aren’t really going anywhere. Sales are flat. They are at the bottom of fla-

vor and texture when compared to browns and Shiitakes, and flavor is what’s driving mushroom sales today.”

Specialty mushrooms represent 3.1 percent of dollar sales and 1.1 percent of pounds, according to FreshLook Marketing data for the 52 weeks ending April 25. However, specialty mushroom sales rose 9.9 percent in dollars and 11.4 in pounds over last year.

As for convenience products, Bart Minor, president of The Mushroom Council, in San Jose, CA, says, “Sliced packages of white and



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Reader Service # 62



Sliced packages of white and brown mushrooms are growing faster than whole mushrooms.

brown mushrooms are growing faster than whole mushrooms. To capture new consumers who are looking to try mushrooms for the first time, retailers should display small 6- to 8-oz. packages of both sliced and whole white and brown mushrooms.”

Like at Hannaford, the No. 1-selling mushroom SKU at Sweetbay is the 8-oz. sliced white, notes DeBlieck. “These sell 3-

to-2 or almost 2-to-1 over the whole whites.”

At Hannaford, Jewell adds, “Sliced Shiitake is the fastest gaining specialty mushroom SKU for us.”

Schroeder reveals, however, “Not everyone carries a sliced Shiitake, but we encourage it as the next logical step after sliced whites and browns.”

Sliced white, brown and specialty mush-

rooms combined made up 44.1 percent of total mushroom sales and 42.8 percent of mushroom pounds during the 52 weeks ending April 25, according to FreshLook Marketing data. During the same time period, sales of sliced white, brown and specialty mushrooms grew 3.1 percent, 14.9 percent and 14.6 percent, respectively.

Market Basket’s Maguire says, “We’ve found sliced white mushrooms, in especially the larger sizes, have become popular – the 16-oz. package, for example, in addition to the 8-oz.”

In the value-added arena, Monterey’s Caldwell reports, “Stuffed Portabella caps sell well during the holidays, but there’s usually not enough shelf space to carry these year-round.”

“Organic mushrooms are a small, but growing niche,” says Paul Frederic, senior vice president of sales and marketing for To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms Inc., in Avondale, PA.

Some 20 SKUs of mushrooms – 14 fresh and six dried – are available at Sweetbay, says DeBlieck. “We don’t make all of our stores carry every SKU available. In general, all stores will carry about two-thirds of these and there will be six to eight SKUs that will be up to that store’s produce manager to decide whether to carry or not based on cus-

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Asparagus is a great tie-in to use in mushroom displays, according to retail produce executives.

tomers demand.”

Frederic advises, “Retailers have to keep in tune with demographics and demand, and offer different sets in different stores in different locations to maximize sales. There are several variables that impact demographics including income and ethnicity. For example, higher income shoppers tend to purchase more mushrooms and a greater variety of mushrooms. Italian and Asian consumers are

big mushroom buyers, too.”

It’s a fallacy that Hispanic customers don’t buy mushrooms, says Harvey Mitchler, sales and marketing director for Champs Mushrooms Inc., headquartered in Enderby, BC, Canada. “We worked with four retailers in California with a large Hispanic customer base to do more aggressive marketing on mushrooms such as one-day ads,” he details. “Part of this promotion included handing out

recipes such as quesadillas with white mushrooms. Sales increased dramatically.”

MAKE ENOUGH SPACE

Successful retailers provide enough space to merchandise the variety mix demanded by customers. “For example, DeMoules stores, on average, devote at least 24 linear feet to mushrooms,” details Maguire. “Fifteen SKUs are displayed top to bottom in a 6-shelf multi-deck.”

Giorgio’s Litvin says, “There is no one-size-fits-all. Some stores do well with making mushrooms a destination category and devoting 32 linear feet of space, while other, more mainstream stores, do fine with 16 to 20 feet.”

Since white mushrooms remain the foundation for a strong category, The Mushroom Council recommends devoting 70 percent of the display space to this variety. Brown mushrooms should then follow with 20 percent of the display and be placed at eye level to capture consumers’ attention. Specialty, value-added mushrooms and dry mushrooms should each be given 5 percent of the mushroom display. The Mushroom Council’s Minor adds, “Sliced mushrooms should represent 10 percent or more of the display.”



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“Retailers have an opportunity to include mushrooms in all annually planned promotions. For example, Button mushrooms make stews or stuffings heartier in the fall, while Portabellas are the perfect meat replacement for grilling in the summer.”

— Bart Minor
The Mushroom Council

EDUCATE ON USE AND HEALTH BENEFITS

There are a number of ways in which retailers can educate shoppers about mushrooms. At Hannaford, Jewell describes, “We have a strong sign package that calls out the product by name and gives consumers high-level attributes such as potential use and nutrition information.”

Similarly, at Sweetbay, “7x11-inch signs not only have product name and price, but information about the variety,” explains DeBlieck. “We also use information from suppliers as well as The Mushroom Council.”

The Mushroom Council develops POS materials that are retailer-ready for in-store use as well as industry-focused fact sheets that retailers can reference and tailor for their own materials, notes Minor. “These include consumer tips for cooking and storing mushrooms, as well as nutritional facts. We also work with chefs and have a plethora of recipes that retailers can use to incorporate into their in-store newsletters or ad circulars.”

Mushrooms and mushroom recipes have been featured in retail consumer magazines such as Hannaford's *Fresh*.



Mushrooms, even the dried version, have become a produce department staple.

Giorgio's Litvin remarks, “Some stores like to provide recipes, while others feel that it clutters up their displays. We put recipes and nutritional information on the labels and on our Web site, which is also referenced on our label.”

Market Basket's Maguire believes, “On-pack is the best place for recipes. That way, consumers don't lose them before they get home.”

Secondary displays can stimulate impulse, remarks The Mushroom Council's Minor. “Retailers should consider setting up displays of complementary food items next to mushrooms, along with a recipe card, to provide consumers with a convenient meal idea while shopping. For example, retailers can display olive oil, grill seasoning and barbecue sauce next to their mushroom display, while displaying a recipe card for Barbecue Pork and Mushrooms.”

Monterey Mushrooms is testing the use of 24-inch-long theater-style signs that can attach to or hang over a display and offer menu suggestions rather than an entire recipe. Caldwell explains, “The information, for example, shows a picture of eggs with a plus sign and then picture of cheese with another plus sign and mushrooms equals an omelet. It's very visual and grabs customers' attention in two or three seconds. HEB in Texas has tested these signs.”

Simple cross-merchandising is a selling technique many retailers employ. For example, in addition to merchandising mushrooms in a destination set, Hannaford's Jewell reveals, “We'll tie them in on a weekly basis with other produce items such as tomatoes and asparagus.”

Maguire adds, “We'll run a row of sliced mushrooms in with the bagged salads.”

This summer, Oakshire Mushroom Sales,

which markets Dole brand mushrooms, is launching a new cross-promotion, says Schroeder. “Consumers who purchase two Dole brand salads will get an 8-oz. sliced white or Baby Bella mushroom for free. In stores that we test-marketed this promotion, the best success was achieved when retailers called out this promotion in both their weekly flyer and in-store signage.”

Sweetbay's DeBlieck says, “We'll also cross-merchandise mushrooms in the meat department next to steaks and as kabob fixings.”

“Some retailers,” says Basciani's Recchiuti, “will combine sliced mushrooms and julienne peppers in an overwrap pack and sell them with beef or chicken as a stir-fry mix.”

Demos can teach consumers usage suggestions, says Champ's Mitchler. “We've demo'd mushroom sliders made with large Creminis and mushrooms on a toasted baguette with much success.”

Sweetbay takes its mushroom demos literally to the streets. “For example,” says DeBlieck, “we'll do special events like the Italian Festival in Ybor City. It's a weekend event where our traveling chef comes out in the Culinary Cruiser and demos recipes. In this case, it was recipes with mushrooms and other ingredients like tomatoes.”

Supermarket cooking schools offer another type of educational opportunity, adds To-Jo's Frederic. “D&W Fresh Markets in Michigan, for example, has featured mushrooms in its cooking school.”

Beyond this, some mushroom suppliers are now using social media to educate customers directly. Greg Sagan, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Modern Mushroom Sales Co., in Avondale, PA, details, “We provide recipes, handling and

Shrink Shrink

The big challenge for many retailers," says Kevin Donovan, national sales manager for Phillips Mushrooms Farm LP, in Kennett Square, PA, "is to offer enough variety and self space, while controlling shrink at the same time."

Savvy retailers have implemented several strategies to reduce shrink. One is effective cold chain management. Tom DeBlieck, produce category manager at Sweetbay Supermarket, a Tampa, FL-based chain says, "We no longer build waterfall displays or any type of display that would break refrigeration. By doing this, we've reduced shrink in the mushroom category to an average of about 10 percent."

Refrigeration is foremost at DeMoulas Market Basket, a 62-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA. "The multi-deck case where mushrooms are displayed is set at between 33 and 34°F," reports Mike Maguire, director of produce. "However, the problem used to be that it was hard to differentiate or call out a mushroom product when it was on ad. In the past five years, as stores have been built or remodeled, we've remedied this problem by adding 20-foot double-sided refrigerated display cases in the front of the department. We can now take value-added and highly perishable products, such as mushrooms and bagged salads, out of the normal set and display them in this location, right under consumers' noses, during the weeks when these items are on promotion. That's why we've seen an uptick in perishable product sales."

The San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Council has Best Practices for cold chain management that call for maintaining a temperature of less than 35°F to increase

product longevity. Under optimal conditions, whole mushrooms can last between nine to 15 days and sliced mushrooms for up to nine days. The shelf-life of sliced mushrooms is reduced to five to six days when the product is stored or displayed at 43°F.

"Improper cold chain management coupled with failing to cull product that is past its prime can greatly affect consumer perception of not only the mushroom section, but the entire produce department," says Bart Minor, president of The Mushroom Council.

"A good rule of thumb is to turn the mushroom display daily," advises Harvey Mitchler, sales and marketing director for Champs Mushrooms Inc., headquartered in Enderby, BC, Canada. "It's important for produce staff to recognize when product is 'tired,'" he adds. "One way to do this is by tracking the 'use by' date. When there are two days left, move it to the blow out rack. Yes, this will impact your gross, but it will be a lot less than declaring it shrink. This recommendation will also help to decrease overall shrink."

"Another way to reduce shrink," says Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms Inc., in Watsonville, CA, "is to understand consumer buying patterns and order appropriately."

Strategic ordering has reduced shrink in the mushroom category at Hannaford Bros. Co, a chain headquartered in Portland, ME. Fresh produce category manager, Mark Jewell, says, "The reason for this reduction is just-in-time inventory. We get fresh mushrooms delivered to the stores seven days a week from the distribution center and orders into our DC six days a week."

pb

cooking tips on our Facebook page, which provides an interactive experience. In addition, most retailers have online e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter accounts that their loyal shoppers follow regularly. An occasional Tweet or Facebook post can quickly share the benefits of mushrooms to a large and growing audience."

Raising consumer awareness of the health benefits of mushrooms can also drive sales. Mushrooms are low in calories, are sodium, fat- and cholesterol-free, and contain a number of health preventative antioxidants. In addition, many mushroom suppliers now briefly expose growing or just-picked mushrooms to ultraviolet light,

which boosts the vitamin D levels.

This fall, mushrooms will be sold at retail in pink tills from mid-September to mid-November as part of an industry-wide initiative to raise awareness of breast cancer. In turn, the Mushroom Council will donate \$50,000 to the City of Hope for research on the correlation of breast cancer and mushrooms. City of Hope scientists were some of the first to uncover the potential benefits of mushrooms on cancer. Minor says, "Going pink is a great way for retailers to boost sales and show their customers their commitment to the community by offering simple ways to contribute to a larger cause." In 2009, the pink promotion sparked the largest move-



White mushrooms are still the category driver, say suppliers.

ment of fresh mushrooms for any time period, raising dollar volume by 6.7 percent and pound volume by 12.3 percent.

PROMOTE OFTEN AND MIX IT UP

Since cultivated mushrooms are available year-round, Minor points out, "Retailers have an opportunity to include them in all annually planned promotions. For example, button mushrooms make stews or stuffings heartier in the fall, while Portabellas are the perfect meat replacement for grilling in the summer."

"At Market Basket," Maguire adds, "we have a mushroom in the ad almost every week — whites, browns, sliced, organics. We mix it up."

It's important to mix up the ad rotation, agrees Champ's Mitchler. "So many retailers promote the same old thing, like an 8-oz. sliced white. One retailer we've worked with on this is Safeway. In the past few months, the chain has introduced a 6-oz. Portabella package in its promotional lineup for the first time. The first time they ran this ad, sales were six to 10 times the normal amount."

In general, fresh mushrooms should be promoted at least eight times per quarter with a discount of 25 percent or more each time, according to The Mushroom Council's Best Practice Research. Additional recommendations include pricing sliced white mushrooms higher than packaged whole mushrooms and bulk whites above packaged whites; promoting packaged and bulk mushrooms together and packaged whole and sliced mushrooms at different price points; featuring multiple mushroom items in the same in-store ads; and including a white mushroom in the same ad when promoting brown, specialty and dried.

"Beyond price," says Modern Mushroom's Sagan, "any promotion can be effective if it is well executed and supported." **pb**

Let Raisins Rev Up Produce Sales

Make sure this popular powerhouse of a dried fruit is placed in the produce department.

BY JON VANZILE

Vince Mastromauro, produce and floral director at Sunset Foods Market headquartered in Highland Park, IL, doesn't think too much about raisins in his produce section. The way he sees it, raisins are mostly a grocery item, and even in the produce section, they are outsold by other dried fruits, including dried apricots and prunes. "Raisins just don't represent a lot of tonnage," Mastromauro says. "Unit-wise, they just don't keep up with the rest of the category."

This might be surprising, considering that raisins are firmly affixed atop the dried fruit category, which, in general, is booming. In fact, according to a Sun-Maid study, raisins account for about 35 percent of sales of all dried fruit. So why would they do so poorly in Sunset Food's produce section, and can anything be done about it?

RAISINS — THE ALL-PURPOSE DRIED FRUIT

Raisins are, by far, the most popular dried fruit, but their own success creates a challenge in the produce aisle. Shoppers might not be surprised to see dried apricots or dates in the produce section, but few people automatically head to the produce department when looking for raisins. That's because raisins are typically sold in the grocery aisles, and sometimes in more than one place. They might be displayed with baking goods — where they are a popular ingredient — or they might be displayed with lunchbox items such as dried fruit bars, peanut butter and jelly and even candy.

But their success elsewhere in the store comes at the expense of the produce section's bottom line. Like all dried fruits, raisins are a nearly perfect item for the produce section. They are healthful. They



Yogurt-covered raisins target the snacking demographic and are meant as a replacement for sugary candies.

have an extremely long shelf-life — up to 18 months — and they have an excellent margin. Also, according to studies conducted by the National Raisin Company, raisins in the produce aisle will increase sales of all dried fruit.

"If it were up to us, we'd have all the dried fruit in the produce section," says Joe Tamble, vice president of sales for Sun-Maid, in Kingsburg, CA. "It's good for the retailer because they make money, and it promotes the health and wellness category in the minds of consumers."

Tamble raises an important point, that being the health and wellness movement of the past decade has been good to dried fruits. All dried fruits, including raisins, are increasingly seen as healthful snacking alternatives to candy and salty snacks. This perception has driven a steady, decade-long increase in sales of raisins. "The snacking usage of raisins has increased over ten years," reports Tamble. "It used to be used as an ingredient, but that has switched. Part of the reason why

is because Moms, Dads and families are looking for healthful options for snacking."

Raisins also possess another important trait: they are highly portable and don't make a mess.

YOUR RAISIN OPTIONS

Raisins are available in a number of package sizes, with the most common being the familiar round "canister," or 24-oz. container. Besides this, raisins are sold in standard package sizes, six-packs of 11.5- or 9-oz. containers, and the mini-containers that frequently end up in lunch boxes. Raisins are also sold in private-label and commercial trail mixes.

Raisins are available in flavors, covered in yogurt and sold as golden raisins. Golden raisins, which are made from the same grapes as traditional raisins but processed differently, account for a small percentage of the market and are used primarily in baking, but they can also be eaten out of hand.

"I'd focus on yogurt-coated raisins and

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flavored raisins,” notes Miranda Ackerman, brand manager for Mariani Packing Co., in Vacaville, CA. “They’re the next evolution in raisins and they bring in new consumers.”

The flavored raisin category is expanding with Raisels, a new product from the National Raisin Company. These are raisins coated with sour-flavored sugar and meant as a candy replacement.

Organic raisins are also a natural fit with the produce section, where they can be merchandised with the rest of the organic produce. “We had more success with the organic raisins,” Mastromauro of Sunset Foods admits. “We situated them with the other

organics and people like them. They tend to be a better tasting raisin and more plump. It’s just a better quality product all around.”

Organic raisins are offered by Earthbound Farm, based in San Juan Batista, CA. “Dried fruit has been the leading healthful snack trend and for good reason,” points out Tracy Miedema, director of product innovation at Earthbound. “It’s fruit; it’s natural; it’s convenient, and with Earthbound Farm, it’s organic.”

Any of these raisins can be successfully merchandised in the produce section, but there are differing opinions about where the best place to locate them can be found: alone, or with the rest of the dried fruit. If raisins are displayed alone, they can be cross-merchandised with products such as almonds and lettuce, which can be combined into a tasty nutritious salad, or displayed in a stand-alone rack or clip-rack.

“We’ve done extensive category data studies using syndicated data,” reports Jane Asmar, vice president of retail sales for the National Raisin Co., in Fowler, CA. “We have found that if you want to increase sales of raisins, you’re best bet is to put up a secondary display of raisins.”

Tamble at Sun-Maid agrees, saying, “If we had our choice, we would prefer to have our products displayed separately.”

Miedema, however, argues for the opposite tactic. “I think raisins will do better when they’re together with all the dried

“If it were up to us, we’d have all the dried fruit in the produce section. It’s good for the retailer because they make money, and it promotes the health and wellness category in the minds of consumers.”

**— Joe Tamble
Sun-Maid**

fruit, in a real destination center for dried fruit choices,” she asserts.

The most important thing, however, is to give raisins visibility in the produce section. Although raisins are a “list item” in the grocery aisles, they are usually an impulse buy in the produce section. “My suggestion is to focus on the snacking option with packages that are more kid-friendly,” advises Mariani’s Ackerman. “That can be done by placing packages throughout the produce section. Raisin cartons are pretty flexible where you put them.”

TIMELY SALES

If space is limited and a year-round stand-alone raisin display isn’t practical, it might be wise to target the times of year when raisin sales spike. According to Tamble, raisins sell best during three times of the year. “The first is back to school, when six-packs spike because of their convenience,” Tamble says. Many of these raisins end up in lunch boxes and bags as a healthful alternative to candy and sweets. “The second is Halloween, when we feature the mini-packs as a snack item,” he adds. Like the lunch raisins, these are destined as candy-replacements and will end up in Halloween bags. “Finally, there is the fall holiday season with Thanksgiving and Christmas, when baking is an important part of the holiday.” **pb**

Cooking With Raisins

Raisins are in the midst of a transition from ingredient to snacking item, but they are still an important part of any cook’s repertoire, and Sun-Maid, based in Kingsburg, CA, is hoping to remind consumers of that fact.

Sun-Maid recently unveiled a section on its Web site called “100 Years of Recipes.” Just like the name says, the page gives readers access to raisin cookbooks dating back almost a century. In 1915, for example, the *Souvenir California Raisin Recipe Book*, has lots of recipes that might be familiar to modern cooks, including raisin cookies, cakes and rolls, alongside some more unusual recipes, like raisin ice cream and a raisin and egg white sandwich. **pb**



ANNOUNCEMENTS



"HIGH & ICON" ROSE NAMED

Bobbi Ecker Blatchford, AIFD, PFCI, AAF, Chicago, IL, was surprised in Miami when she was honored during the June International Floriculture Expo Rose Naming Ceremony. Preesman/United Flowers, Naaldwijk, Netherlands, one of the oldest breeding companies in the Netherlands, sponsored the event and named the "High & Icon" rose after the award-winning designer in honor of her "outgoing, flamboyant personality" and her many spirited years of participation and service in the floral industry.

Reader Service No. 338



NEW PRODUCT AWARDED AT IFE

Carolina Fraser Fir Company LLC, Mouth of Wilson, VA, was awarded Best New Product at the June International Floriculture Expo in Miami for its Deluxe Hanging Basket. The holiday basket consists of Fraser Fir, White Pine, Variegated Boxwood and Western Red Cedar topped off with sparkling starbursts.

Reader Service No. 339



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

HPP Worldwide, Amsterdam, Netherlands, announces the FlorEcuador • AGRIFLOR 2010 will be held October 6-9 in Quito, Ecuador. Promoted as the largest flower business exhibition of the Americas, the event, co-hosted with Expoflores, will feature a judged competition, farm tour, innovative products area and the largest collection of worldwide flower buyers and decision-makers in one place.

Reader Service No. 340



NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR PMA FLORAL MARKETER OF THE YEAR

Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE, is accepting nominations for Floral Marketer of the Year. The award recognizes an outstanding individual who has served the mass-market floral industry with dedication and distinction and someone who has had a positive influence on the entire industry. All nominations must be received at PMA no later than August 16, 2010. See www.pma.com for the nomination form. Last year's winner was Harrison Higaki of Bay City Flower Co. Inc., pictured above.

Reader Service No. 341

NEW PRODUCTS



GARDEN ROSES

Fiore Farms, Miami, FL, introduces Garden Roses. These beauties are enhancing homes across the world. This is an extravagant rose that can be used in everyday arrangements. No longer just for brides, offer your customers romance by stocking Garden Roses.

Reader Service No. 342



CINNAMON BROOM BOWS

Potter Inc., Bryan, OH, introduces Cinnamon Broom Bows, the perfect holiday accent for cinnamon brooms. This bow combines wired edge ribbon and festive cording for a classic look. Boost your holiday broom sales with these decorative bows.

Reader Service No. 343



FLOWER FOOD

Temkin International, Payson, UT, and Chrysal USA, Miami, FL, introduce FloraPatch Sleeve, the preassembled sleeve and preservative combo. The floral sleeves ship with a pre-applied preservative patch, enabling buyers to save money by consolidating their sleeve and preservative orders, eliminating preservative-based labor, minimizing preservative-based shrink and cutting freight costs in half.

Reader Service No. 344



INSPIRATIONAL CONTAINER

The Jungle Nursery Inc., Miami, FL, is launching its Inspirational Message Series of plants in containers featuring a changeable, two-sided message band. Planted with a hardy variety of foliage plants, the fall containers are available in tangerine, lime, grape and raspberry. Pastel colors will be available for spring containers. Each plant will have a handled sleeve to encourage consumers to buy the plants as gifts.

Reader Service No. 345

Floral 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

Profiting From The Orchid Obsession

Enticed by mass displays, value-seeking orchid enthusiasts appreciate the longevity of orchid blooms.

BY JON VANZILE

Rod Nelson, floral manager at Straub's Markets, a 4-unit chain in St. Louis, MO, sells a lot of orchids. In fact, he sells so many orchids from his floral center that he considers them central to his department's success. "I go through at least 60 potted orchids every two weeks," Nelson reports. "They're great as gifts and we have a sophisticated customer. A white orchid works for a funeral or a party. It's a classy way to sell a flower."

During the past decade, potted orchids have taken the floral world by storm. Once the exclusive province of serious enthusiasts with greenhouses, today's potted orchids are sturdy and dependable plants that offer blooms for months, instead of the week or two that most cut flowers offer. Better yet, despite the fact that they've moved from collector's tables to mass displays at thousands of retailers, orchids have lost little of their exotic allure.

Yet even orchids don't sell themselves, and today, there are more choices than ever before. According to Nelson and experts in the orchid business, floral departments that take a few simple steps will maximize their orchid ring and profits, even in challenging economic times.

OFFER A VARIETY OF ORCHIDS

Orchids made the jump into the mainstream, thanks to two factors: cloning techniques that made it possible for growers to economically produce thousands of identical plants, and the discovery of white and purple Phalaenopsis by high-end interior designers and design magazines.

To many people, white Phalaenopsis are still the orchid of choice. These market lead-



Shoppers at Whole Foods in Boca Raton, FL, are greeted by this strategically placed, grand orchid display.

ers have long branches of rounded, striking and massive flowers. They are easy to maintain once in bloom and hold onto their blooms for months. Purple Phalaenopsis run a close second to the white flowers. These have all the advantages of white Phalaenopsis, plus a vibrant purple hue.

In fact, though, the orchid universe is expanding rapidly. In addition to the two basic Phalaenopsis, a whole spectrum of new colors is available, including yellows, orange, candy-striped and polka dots. "When we started breeding Phalaenopsis, it was 70 percent pink and white and 30 percent novelty colors," reports Marc Clark, executive vice president of Rocket Farms in

Salinas, CA, and one of the largest orchid growers in the United States. "Now we're the opposite."

Mini-Phalaenopsis have also recently become available, especially in the past few years. These plants were first introduced in Europe and have since moved into the U.S. market. "Minis are a novelty," admits Andre Harster, owner of Harster Greenhouses Inc., in West Flamborough, Ontario, Canada. "Small is cute, and people like to give them as presents."

Beyond Phalaenopsis, a number of species have made inroads into the market, including Oncidium, Dendrobium and a smattering of less common species.



Photo courtesy of Harster Greenhouses Inc.

Merchandised in their own display box, these miniature orchids are ready for impulse purchases.

Although all of these orchids have distinct growth habits and don't look like Phalaenopsis, they all have long-lasting blooms.

SHOW HEALTHY BLOOMING PLANTS

Orchids are often impulse purchases, so successful orchid sales usually require three elements: healthful plants, high visibility and an eye-catching display.

Healthful plants are key to orchid sales. Vibrant, saleable orchids should have unblemished leaves with no rot or black spots. Similarly, the flowers should be intact, without black spots or wilted blooms. To get the maximum bloom,

orchids should be sold before all the flower buds have opened.

At Straub's, Nelson doesn't sell orchids that are completely bloomed. "If they have, I'll cut them and use the stems in an arrangement," he says. "I'll get some of the money back, and they're amazing stems."

Older blooms or torn and blemished blooms should be removed. Even healthy plants will sometimes have a bad bloom, and this will taint the whole plant in the customer's eyes.

Finally, orchids should not be misted in the display. This will encourage rot and bacterial spotting on both the leaves and flowers and potentially shorten the life of the plant.

DISPLAY ORCHIDS IN PROMINENT POSITIONS

Without question, the best way to display orchids is near heavily traveled areas in a massed display. "I merchandise them throughout the store," reveals Straub's Nelson. "I like to use a table with risers to create a little bit of spectacle. They're much more impressive when they're grouped together."

Orchids do especially well if they're placed by the store entrance, where they create an inviting and high-end feel, and by the check-out lanes, where customers are more likely to pick one up on a whim. "At Trader Joes, right when you walk in, there's a floral section," explains Clark of Rocket Farms. "Right away, you see the orchids sitting on a shelf. It's nothing fancy, but it's amazing how well they do with that."

Mini-Phalaenopsis, however, do best when they're not merchandised with their larger cousins. In general, minis are desk-top plants or meant as small gifts. They are easily overwhelmed by larger Phalaenopsis in a display, and considering their price point is only slightly lower, you may be costing yourself sales. "It's best to put minis near a front counter so people will pick them up," Harster of Harster Greenhouses emphasizes.

The choice of containers is also important. Basic terra cotta pots are fine for most customers, but Nelson also upgrades pots at customers' request into glass or metal containers, which increases the plant's value and profit.

OFFER ORCHIDS AS A VALUE PROPOSITION

When people hear "orchid," they don't necessarily think "value," but Nelson and other orchid experts are quick to differ. When compared to most cut flowers, orchids are a better deal — an especially

Orchids As Cut Flowers

Although potted orchids are the standard, cut orchid stems are common in high-end flower arrangements. Amy Vongpitaka, owner of Amy's Orchids in Phenix, VA, ships cut orchids from her farms in Thailand throughout North America and Europe. She offers a few tips when it comes to buying the best orchid stems and increasing sales:

- Keep plants at 55°F to lengthen the bloom.
- Buy only fresh plants.
- Remove bad stems immediately to prevent rot from spreading to nearby stems.
- Don't display orchid stems in a bucket like roses; instead arrange them.
- Allow 5" to 7" from cut end to first bloom to prolong bloom.

Ideally, fresh and well-kept orchid stems should last two to three weeks after purchase in an arrangement. Cut orchids allow you to offer flowers that are not suitable for pots, including exotic tropical species such as Vanda and Arachnis.

pb

Orchid

Care Sheets

Retailers looking to better serve their floral customers might want to download orchid care sheets from the American Orchid Society's Web site, www.AOS.org. These culture sheets provide orchid culture information in a convenient, concise format and are available in several languages. At the bottom of each webpage culture sheet are links to PDF versions that print perfectly onto a business-sized sheet of paper. (The AOS copyright and contact information may not be removed or modified.) There is space to insert the store name and floral department information. Great for POP giveaways or as info links from retail Web sites, the culture sheets are free and will be appreciated by orchid enthusiasts.

pb

important distinction in a struggling economy. Orchids typically retail for \$15 and up. Multi-branching plants in high-end pots with dozens of blooms can fetch as much as \$60 or even \$80, depending on the market. Minis retail for between \$8 and \$10.

After selling orchids for several years, Nelson believes it's a mistake to under price the plants. "You kind of create your customer," he explains. "When I first started, we had smaller ones that were \$14 or \$18. But they weren't impressive. Now we sell orchids for \$29.99 to \$34.99 retail. You can really see the value for the dollar in our plants. Orchids have a very high perceived value."

On the other hand, Clark believes orchids are "definitely shopped on price. I think you've got to get below \$15," he says. "It used to be that you had to be under \$20."

Although this is obviously more expensive than most floral market bouquets, orchids' longevity eventually balances the equation. "Customers feel as though they're buying fresh blooms, but they'll have them for two months," Nelson explains. "So cost-wise, they'll actually save money. I think that's why they've done so well."

pb



Hits And Misses

By the first year of the new millennium, organic producers had struggled for well over a decade to achieve a significant niche in fresh produce sales. During the prior 15 years, it was one step forward and three-quarters back for many producers. Agreement on both standards and convincing consumers organics mattered was at a snail's pace. Since then, organics' share of fresh fruit and vegetable sales has more than tripled, becoming one of the fastest expanding trends in the department. By the end of 2010, sales will approximate \$10 billion — nearly quadruple the previous decade's sales penetration.

Reaching this level required not only production in the United States, but a global sourcing of both fresh and processed product. As with many products, China has been a significant supplier, but the use of inspectors of directly managed farms controlled by the State who were affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection has created a conflict-of-interest mentality. After the many former instances of contaminated Chinese products, there may be considerable time before the appearance of a potential problem can be removed from consumer minds without destroying gains made by the organic industry. Nevertheless, it appears the hits will continue to produce sales, profits and consumer satisfaction.

Second to organics growth has been the recent explosion of locally grown. As the concept has developed, so have there been recent modifications of these production and distribution systems. While many local growers are expanding acreage to meet the needs of nearby chains, so, too has come the development of grow-your-own. From rooftop plots and backyard gardens, there are now large plots being sub-divided into approximately 10x10-foot plots that individuals lease to grow their own produce.

From acreage being provided for interested families among the 9,000-plus population on Skidaway Island, GA, to a former street island running between row homes in Boston, MA, the grow-your-own development continues. In the United States, more than 1,000 farms seek long- or short-term laborers in exchange for room and board, a welcome opportunity in today's economy.

In some instances, community-supported-agriculture (CSA) programs, in which a box of various produce is delivered to the consumer weekly, are rapidly expanding. Many operations have multiple box sizes and delivery schedules, and the consumer receives products according to what is available.

One program, specifically, is an outgrowth of a restaurant's need. The owner and chef had a 3-acre plot of land used to raise

vegetables for the restaurant, along with the restaurant's 300 box subscribers, all of whom raved about the product. Upon the manager quitting, a number of subscribers to the farm box program volunteered to barter their labor for restaurant gift certificates. Not a bad program — supplying vegetables to what was becoming a well-known restaurant with the ability to adjust the menu as the occasion arose. Plus, having workers who also became consumers is nearly the perfect circle of production to consumption. This illustrates another hit from relatively new entrepreneurs who were willing to think outside the box, innovate and develop an important growing niche.

Unfortunately, some producers have yet to understand that the creation of short-term income may result in long-term consumer dissatisfaction. Too frequently, this consequently impacts the consumption demand and the return for later-grown, higher quality product.

A perfect example occurred during the second week in June when a friend was interested in making a fresh peach dessert. The peaches in the supermarket had a beautiful dark red skin with a slight aroma. When the individual began preparation, the peaches were found to be semi-cling, with little if any flavor and a somewhat rubbery texture. Once cooked, the primary flavor was that of the other ingredients. Having attended the dinner party, I volunteered to investigate.

The store still had several containers with the varietal and shipper information. Recognizing the producer's name, I called the company and spoke to one of the family members. The response was that freestone peaches would not be harvested until the following

week. Then, the flavor and texture should meet most consumers' expectations. This individual also commented that other varieties from the two major Southeast producing states have similar characteristics during the first month of the season.

Upon asking why these varieties are grown, the reply was, "We have to make money and the folks up North are anxious to get these peaches as soon as possible." But the question for all in the distribution system is: are the consumers happy or do they get turned off to the extent they wait well past the time when good-eating, juicy peaches become available? Do you blame the producer, distributor or the consumer?

It's in everyone's best interests for retailers to become knowledgeable and provide consumers badly needed, pertinent information and the desired product. Publix's "At Season's Peak" promotion is an example of the hits outweighing the misses with the consumer.

Unfortunately, some producers have yet to understand that the creation of short-term income may result in long-term consumer dissatisfaction.

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Greenhouses Get High-Tech In Northern Europe

The upscaling of an industry is a common phenomenon. However, the speed at which the scale of greenhouse growers' operations is increasing in Belgium and the Netherlands is no less than impressive. Until 10 years ago, almost all greenhouses in Belgium and the Netherlands were between ½ and two hectares (about 1.2 to five acres). Now greenhouses of 10 or more hectares (or about 25 acres) are the rule rather than the exception.

A lot of small growers can't keep up with the pace and stop their business. In Belgium and the Netherlands, about 7 percent of greenhouse growers go out of business each year. Most stop voluntarily because of old age. A small minority — about 5 percent — go bankrupt.

With greenhouse operations growing at such a fast pace, the challenges of the sector change. Ten years ago, growers were focused on plant growth related issues. Now, greenhouse owners worry about human resources, energy management and negotiating complex financial constructions with the banks.

High prices for fossil energy pushed growers and their suppliers to search for energy saving solutions. With large projects being realized, greenhouse builders and other suppliers to the sector created innovative, high-tech solutions such as semi-closed greenhouses, energy screens, fogging installations, heat exchangers, LED lights, etc. Combined heat and power installations were a must for every project over two hectares (five acres), although the electricity network isn't always fit for a decentralized electricity production.

The evolution in Belgium and the Netherlands is so important because both countries are important exporters of greenhouse-grown produce. The Netherlands is known to be an important exporter for tomatoes, cucumbers and sweet peppers, whereas Belgium exports large volumes of lettuce.

Technological evolutions find their way all over Europe as Dutch and Belgian growers try to market their innovative and more sustainable approach to supermarket chains that want to please their customers with more eco-friendly produce. Suppliers to horticulture, always in search for new markets for their innovations, help growers from all over Europe to implement the newly introduced innovations.

The rest of Northern European countries follow the trend set by Dutch and Belgian growers. However, in Southern Europe, the approach is different within the greenhouse sector. As a

result, the gap between greenhouse production in Northern and Southern Europe is widening. In spite of a serious attempt to modernize the greenhouse infrastructure in Southern Spain, most production facilities remain poor. The aim is at the lowest cost of production. Most supermarket chains — also in Northern European countries — are susceptible to this approach, certainly in periods of price wars between them. However, the low cost approach results more than often in quality loss on the produce and harvest insecurity as a consequence. In the long run, these consequences are not compatible with the approach of most supermarket chains.

For Northern European growers, innovation and sustainability are the key words. Quality of produce and harvest security are part of the "licence to produce." This results in modern production facilities, but causes the cost of production to be higher. In times where supermarkets are battling for market shares with low prices for fresh produce, this causes an unpleasant pressure on prices for vegetables and fruits.

Although — or maybe because of — price margins are quite low for growers, the evolution toward a more modern way of growing continues at a fast pace. Implementing as one of the first a technique that allows growing with less energy consumption, or with less labor, permits a grower to acquire important competitive advantages.

Within the Netherlands, a new cluster of growers was formed. Where growers were — and for a large part still are — united by common interests of sales in cooperatives, they now form new alliances between growers who want to invest in new techniques and wish to share information. At this time, there is a lot of interest in sharing information on the "new growing," which encompasses everything related to growing with less energy. The focus is on drying incoming air while recuperating heat of the outgoing air, using energy screens, temperature integration, creating movement of air, active cooling and benefiting from aquifer energy by using heat exchangers.

Compared to the "new growing," attention given to automation is still low to moderate. However, some growers have already combined forces to pay for the development of automation in some crops, mainly tomatoes and cucumbers.

With the development going as fast within the past couple of years, greenhouse horticulture projects itself as one of the most innovative industries. And we probably ain't seen nothing yet. **pb**

For Northern European growers, innovation and sustainability are the key words. Quality of produce and harvest security are part of the "licence to produce." This results in modern production facilities, but causes the cost of production to be higher.



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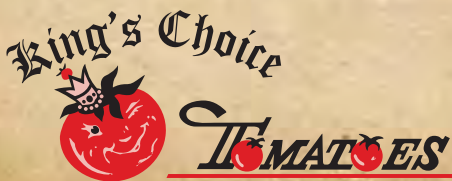
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Blast from the Past

While the produce business has changed tremendously over the years, one thing has remained the same – the influence of exhibiting at the annual PMA convention. “This photo was taken at a PMA convention in either New Orleans or Chicago in the late 70s or early 80s,” recalls George Wooten, president of the company, and stepson to Elroy Bailey, pictured at right. It was Elroy’s father, Wayne, who founded the company in 1935.

“By exhibiting, Elroy launched our company in the industry and we are still feeling the impact from it today,” continues Wooten. “In fact, he was the first sweet potato shipper to exhibit at both the PMA and United Produce shows. If you look closely, in the top left corner you can see pre-packaged sweet potatoes on display. Elroy was always looking for different ways to package and sell sweet potatoes, since at the time, most people were focused on bulk displays,” he says.

Elroy ran the company until his death from cancer in 1991. At that point, Wooten took the reigns, along with his two sons, George, III, who is the farm manager, and Adam, production manager. “While his father founded the company, Elroy put us on the map,” remarks Wooten. “We strive to follow his lead and continue to stay at the forefront of the industry.” The Wootens are definitely doing something right, as the company celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.



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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A&A Organic Marketing, Inc.	68	59	831-768-0300	831-685-0302
Albert's Organics	69	68	678-429-9497	610-388-8418
Alpine Fresh	44	26	305-594-9117	305-594-8506
Anthony Marano	107	23	793-321-7500	312-829-9426
APEAM (Avocado Producers & Exporting Packers of Michoacán)	60-61	51	452-503-3000	452-528-9600
Apio, Inc.	41	63	800-454-1355	805-343-6295
Asociacion Mexicana de Horticultura Protegida A.C.	7	91		
Ayco Farms, Inc.	44	29	954-788-6800	954-788-5600
Philip Balsamo Company	78	27	630-575-8000	630-575-8004
Basciani Foods, Inc.	93	69	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Basket Ease	47	24	952-447-3168	952-447-3178
Blue Book Services	74	6	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Borton & Sons Inc.	38	46	509-966-3996	509-966-5131
Brooks Tropicals	27	4	800-327-4833	305-246-5827
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	84	14	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CarbAmericas	44	31	954-786-0000	954-786-96785
Castle Rock Vineyards	66	84	661-721-8717	661-721-0419
Champ's Mushrooms	92	32	866-Champs1	604-607-0787
Chilean Avocado Importers Association	29	47	202-626-0560	
Christopher Ranch	68	1	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Church Brothers, LLC	89	85	831-796-1000	831-796-1050
Columbia Marketing International	35	12	509-663-1955	509-663-2231
Cool Runnings, Ltd.	78	45	800-522-5623	262-657-8018
CrunchPak	89	71	509-782-7753	509-782-0869
Crystal Valley Foods	44	34	800-359-5631	305-592-9803
Curry & Company	83	21	800-929-1073	503-393-6085
Customized Brokers, Inc.	44	70	305-471-8989	305-471-8988
Deardorff Family Farms	53	86	805-200-5216	805-483-1286
DeBruno Produce Co.	84	64	800-733-9177	616-772-4242
Del Monte Fresh Produce	108	52	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
DiMare Fresh	53	40	209-862-2872	209-862-0103
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	50	800-333-5454	831-754-5243
dProduce Man Software	19	10	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Earthbound Farm	70	56	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	105	53	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eclipse Berry Farms, LLC	53	72	310-207-7879	310-207-7868
Eclipse Berry Farms, LLC	77	43	815-744-2900	310-207-7868
Giorgio Fresh Co.	71	16	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
Giorgio Fresh Co.	92	41	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
The Giumarra Companies	30	49	760-480-9133	213-628-4878
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	69	58	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Gourmet Trading Company	44	36	310-216-7575	310-216-7676
Gourmet's Finest	93	38	313-832-4640	610-268-2298
Harvest Crown Co.	44	93	561-496-0390	561-637-0780
Harvest Sensations	44	73	305-591-8173	305-591-8175
Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co.	38	35	952-746-1314	952-746-1316

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Promotion Committee	85	20	208-722-5111	208-722-6582
Index Fresh of California	31	3	909-877-0999	909-877-1999
JAB Produce	81	44	312-226-7805	312-226-5154
Jacobs, Malcolm & Burt, Inc.	44	74	415-285-0400	415-824-4844
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	68	25	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	45	30	800-498-1577	717-597-4096
L&M Companies, Inc.	37	55	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
Lakeside Organic Gardens	70	75	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
Tom Lange Co.	79	19	217-786-3300	217-786-2570
Mandolini Co.	80	41	312-226-1690	312-226-1833
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	2	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	43	76	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
MIXTEC Group	28	17	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Mucci International Marketing, Inc.	53	37	866-236-5558	519-326-5917
Raymond Myruski	86	94	845-651-7900	845-651-1511
North Bay Produce	45	77	231-946-1941	231-946-1902
North Weld Produce Co.	56	28	970-353-4950	970-356-6566
OsoSweet Onion Co.	86	87	231-946-9696	304-342-5022
Pacific Tomato Growers	53	92	209-835-7500	209-580-6514
Peri & Sons Farms	84	13	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	45	78	305-477-9906	305-477-9975
Phillips Mushroom Farms	91	62	800-722-8818	610-444-4751
PMA Foundation for Industry Talent	103	79	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce for Better Health Foundation	13	7	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	32-33	8	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	87	9	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Pro Software	80	57	630-395-9600	630-572-0390
Progressive Produce	45	80	800-900-0757	323-890-8113
ProWare Services	28	39	813-752-7952	813-704-4803
River Point Farms, LLC	89	11	541-567-4781	541-289-8123
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	72-73	22	202-728-1729	202-728-1728
Skyline Potatoes	57	88	719-754-3484	719-754-2200
Southern Specialties	45	81	954-784-6500	954-784-5800
Spice World, Inc.	22	65	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Stemilt Growers, Inc.	71	89	509-662-9667	509-663-2914
Strube Celery & Vegetable Company	76	42	773-446-4000	312-226-7644
Sun-Maid Raisins	97	61	800-786-6243	559-897-6348
Sunlight Intl. Sales/Jakov P Dulcich & Sons	19	54	661-792-6360	661-792-6529
Sunview Marketing International	66	82	661-792-3145	661-792-2927
Team Produce International, Inc.	45	83	800-505-0665	305-513-9596
Turbana Banana Corp.	62-63	48	800-TURBANA	305-443-8908
United Fresh Produce Association	65	66	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
United Fresh Produce Association	52	5	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Village Farms	53	90	877-777-7718	610-429-6222
Washington Fruit & Produce	39	60	509-452-8529	509-452-8520
Well-Pict Berries	66	18	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
Kurt Zuhke & Association	51	67	800-644-8729	610-588-6245



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