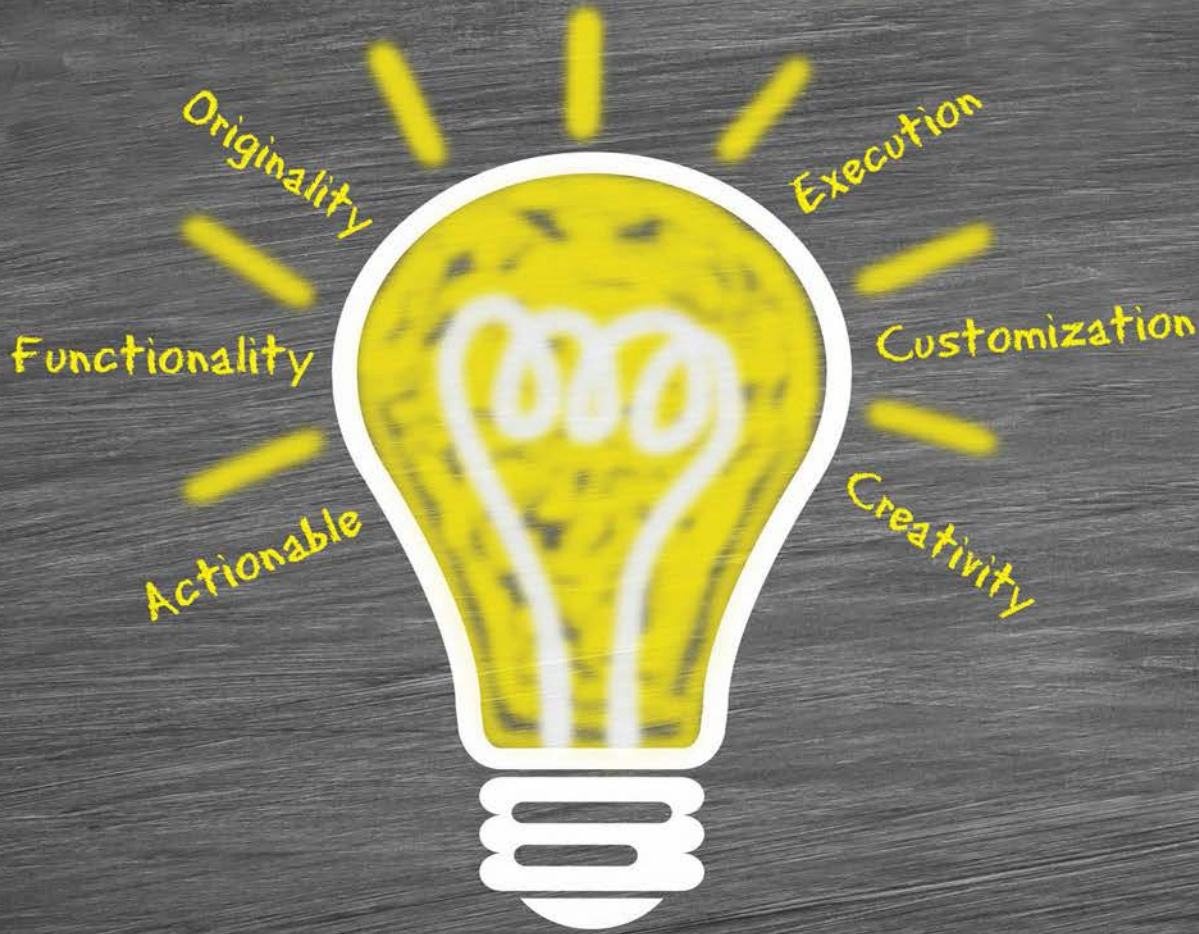


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MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2015

 **BRIAN GANNON**  **RETROSPECTIVE**
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INSIDE

SQUEEZED MIDDLE GROUND IS ISSUE FOR RETAILERS
MURPHY'S MARKETPLACE RETAIL PROFILE • FALL MERCHANDISING
TAILGATING • WASHINGTON APPLES
TRADE PACKAGING • ORGANIC DISTRIBUTION
MERCHANDISING ONIONS • MUSHROOMS • RAISINS



Dole is not only one of the world's largest providers of fresh fruits and vegetables — we're experts in science, nutrition and culinary too. Founded by David H. Murdock, the Dole Nutrition Institute (DNI), with labs located at the North Carolina Research Campus, is committed to improving the world's health through groundbreaking fruit and vegetable research, innovative educational programs and health-related findings from renowned scientists around the world.



DNI's team of scientists conducts cutting-edge, nutrition-based research in the Dole Nutrition Lab. Every day they are discovering more about the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and are collaborating with universities to explore the relationship between food and health.



Meet Jenn

As Dole's official Registered Dietitian (RD), Jenn LaVardera reports the latest health-promoting findings to the public through the Dole Nutrition News, social media, and print brochures. She works closely with Dole's recipe development team to create inspiring, nutritious recipes and with supermarket RDs to support their in-store educational programs.



Meet Chef Mark

DNI welcomes Chef Mark Allison, former Dean of Culinary Arts at The New Orleans Culinary & Hospitality Institute and Johnson & Wales University, as the new Director of Culinary Nutrition. Chef Mark is an expert on how to prepare fruits and vegetables in ways that maximize flavor and complement additional ingredients, creating exciting recipes founded on the principles of culinary nutrition.

To find out how the Dole Nutrition Institute's world-class fruit and vegetable research can help your customers eat healthier, contact us at DoleNutrition@Dole.com



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 Health benefits and convenience drive year-round sales.

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



ROBERT MERCURIO
President
James Desiderio, Inc.
Buffalo, NY

Robert Mercurio, president of full-service wholesale company, James Desiderio, Inc., began working in produce at a young age when his father owned a B-Kwik in Buffalo, which was a smaller full-service supermarket franchise under the Buffalo-based TOPS Markets' umbrella. In 1975, after graduating as an Accounting/Business major from Canisius College in Buffalo, Mercurio's father was ready to sell the grocery business and retire, which provided the perfect timing to make a career move. Jim Desiderio Jr. (Mercurio's brother-in-law) recruited him to be a part

of the Desiderio family business. In 1990, Desiderio Jr. was diagnosed with cancer, and "he mapped out a visionary plan of how he perceived the business might progress. Upon his death, I became the soldier that put the game plan into action," says Mercurio.

Today, along with Desiderio's three sons (Jim, Chris, and Nick), Mercurio says the company maintains distinction in the wholesale business with a well-rounded customer base and a versatile facility. "We have more than 40,000 feet dedicated for packaging, ripening rooms, a foodservice division that distributes out of a separate facility located on our property, but the main attribute that keeps us viable is the fact that we are able to incorporate youth along with our mid-aged and veteran leadership."

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.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE AUGUST ISSUE

- 1) What is the web address for J&C Tropicals? _____
- 2) What kind of Pure Earth juice is featured on the ad for Del Monte Fresh? _____
- 3) What is Sweetango's Twitter handle? _____
- 4) What commodity is CMI promoting in its ad? _____
- 5) What is the Growers Express Sales phone number for Green Giant Fresh Cauliflower Crumbles? _____
- 6) How many melons are shown on the ad for Dulcinea and Pacific Trellis Fruit? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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Congress Addresses Issues Interrupting Flow Of Commerce On Land And Sea



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR,
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Transportation issues are particularly prominent in the spotlight recently. For example, nearly 50 percent of America's seaborne cargo enters the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, making those the busiest ports in the country. Thinking back several months ago — when slowdowns, congestion and disruptions in work at the ports brought much of the country's commerce to a halt and wreaked havoc on the produce industry — that statistic would have been hard to believe.

Analysts note delays and work stoppages during that time could add up to \$7 billion in extra costs. Couple that with losses from more recent delays at the Port of Oakland (the country's fifth-busiest container port), and the financial picture for growers, shippers, wholesalers and distributors within the produce industry, and the situation does not look appetizing.

After hearing from business owners about irreplaceable losses of perishable products either waiting to be exported or idling offshore, Congress is taking steps to ensure commerce moves efficiently through America's ports. Senator John Thune (R-SD) recently introduced S. 1298, the "Ports Performance Act," which would provide nationally consistent measures of performance of the nation's ports.

While we can quantify the amount of goods that travel through American ports each year, the government currently lacks empirical data examining factors that contribute to port performance, thereby leaving businesses throughout the supply chain stranded, with little guidance and direction on how best to prepare, respond to and prevent unpredictable, disruptive work situations.

After hearing from business owners about irreplaceable losses of perishable products either waiting to be exported or idling offshore, Congress is taking steps to ensure commerce moves efficiently through America's ports.

The "Ports Performance Act" would give stakeholders visibility into how U.S. ports are operating and the ability to identify congestion and other key factors impacting the efficient flow of commerce. United Fresh is among more than 70 organizations representing manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, farmers, agribusinesses, importers, exporters, distributors, logistics providers and other supply chain stakeholders supporting this legislation.

As the U.S. enters new trade agreements with foreign countries, general congestion and poor performance (related or unrelated to labor disputes), and subsequent losses attributed to these elements, would devastate the produce industry's ability to expand access and consumption of diverse, nutritious fruit and vegetable exports.

While ports are often the first line of entry for international imports, America's trucking industry plays just as critical a role in the nation's economy, moving nearly 70 percent of all freight tonnage. For years, the debate about expanding truck length and carrying capacity has been permeating through the halls of Congress.

A new report just released from the Department of Transportation (DOT) weighs in on the controversial subject. The DOT discovered that six-axle trucks weighing either 91,000 or 97,000 pounds maintain key braking and handling characteristics.

This factor allows the trucks to safely ship more freight, reduce miles traveled, reduce logistics, reduce pavement costs, and ultimately reduce environmental impact. The report also found the use of larger capacity trucks would lead to a minimal diversion of freight from other modes of transportation, such as rail.

A member of the Coalition for Transportation Productivity (CTP), United Fresh urged members of Congress to review DOT's "Comprehensive Truck Size & Weight Limits Study" and take swift action to reform interstate vehicle weight limits for six-axle trucks. After all, fewer vehicles on the road safely carrying more products make good environmental sense, common sense and business sense — allowing more variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to reach consumers than before.

These developments come as Congress is also debating how to deal with the Highway Trust Fund, which funds key infrastructure projects as well as legislation reauthorizing programs for surface transportation programs. As the fresh produce industry knows, the ability to move product safely, efficiently and effectively is essential to meeting America's nutritional needs and produce providers' business viability. United Fresh will continue to press for improvements to our nation's transportation systems to keep fresh produce moving.

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TRANSITION

**VISION PRODUCE
LOS ANGELES, CA**



John Caldwell, current vice president of sales Arizona for Los Angeles-based Vision Produce, was promoted to Arizona division manager/vice president. Caldwell will be instrumental in growing FOB Nogales sales business as the company expands into additional grower direct deals.

Lance Nichols, formerly at the sales Arizona office for Los Angeles-based Vision Produce, was promoted to the Phoenix sales manager position. Nichols has been with Vision since January and contributed immensely to the sales and leadership in the Phoenix office. Before Vision, Nichols held positions with Legend Distributing, Del Monte Fresh Produce and Safeway stores.



TRANSITION

**DEL CAMPO
TRACY, CA**



Del Campo welcomes back **Javier Gonzalez** to the sales team where he will resume his role as sales representative. Javier's expertise is in tomatoes and bell pepper sales and previously worked at Del Campo for more than three years. He will be working out of the Nogales, AZ facility.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**PAIA ANNOUNCES CATEGORY
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Peruvian Asparagus Importer's Association (PAIA), Miami, FL, completed and published its 2015/2016 Category Management Plan Outline for Fresh Asparagus, which is a tool for all involved in the trade of fresh asparagus. The Plan contains vital statistics identifying market growth, trends, industry facts and key demographics for the 2015/2016 season.

**GIUMARRA VINEYARDS CORP.
BAKERSFIELD, CA**



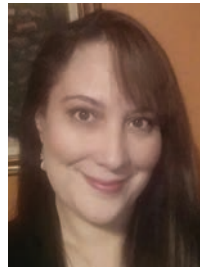
Giumarra Vineyards Corporation announces **John Giumarra** was elected president and chief executive of the company by its shareholders. Giumarra Vineyards is one of California's producers of California table grapes, one of the largest employers in Kern County, CA, and a breeder of new-patented table grape varieties. Over the years, Giumarra has been very active in produce industry affairs serving as: Chairman of the board of directors of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League; chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; chairman of the board of directors of the California Table Grape Commission. He also served on the board of directors of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and the Produce Marketing Association.

TRANSITION

TRANSITION

**LOCUS TRAXX
JUPITER, FL**

Locus Traxx Worldwide promotes **Lorraine Woods** to vice president of finance, accounting and human resources. Woods has been a strong leader within the company for the past six years. She started her career with Locus Traxx as a general accountant. Woods quickly became the go-to person in the accounting department and moved into the role of director of accounting. She also spearheaded the responsibility for leading the human resources department for the company.



TRANSITION

**EASTERN PRODUCE COUNCIL
SHORT HILLS, NJ**

The Eastern Produce Council's board of directors is proud to announce the appointment of **Susan McAleavey Sarlund** as executive director of the Eastern Produce Council. McAleavey Sarlund is a graduate of Boston College with a bachelor's degree in communications; she went on to achieve her master's degree in marketing from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, NJ. McAleavey Sarlund is currently part of the Northeast sales team for the New York Apple Association. Throughout her career, she held various sales and marketing positions with companies including Nabisco, Hilton Hotels and two investment firms, prior to joining New York Apple. She brings a wealth of knowledge as well as experience to the EPC during the past five years, where she served under former longtime executive director, the late John McAleavey.



TRANSITION

**INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT
INDIANAPOLIS, IN**

Antonia Mascari served three years as the marketing manager, and now she is the assistant director of marketing for the Indianapolis Fruit distribution company. In her new position, Mascari will manage and develop all marketing programs to service customers and suppliers of the industry.



ANNOUNCEMENT



**GROUNDBREAKING FOR AEROFARMS
NEW CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS**

AeroFarms' (Newark, NJ) chief executive, David Rosenberg, was joined by RBH Group's chief executive, Ron Beit, and their investment partners, Goldman Sachs and Prudential Financial Inc., to break ground on the world's largest indoor vertical farm and new global corporate headquarters for AeroFarms, a commercial grower for vertical farming and controlled agriculture. The indoor 69,000 square-foot-space was converted from a steel factory. The first phase will open by the end of 2015, creating approximately 78 jobs in a local New Jersey community with an unemployment rate that is twice the national average.

ANNOUNCEMENT



**SAKATA ANNOUNCES
PARTNERSHIP WITH P. ALLEN SMITH**

Sakata Home Grown from Morgan Hill, CA-based Sakata Seed America is the official vegetable seed brand of P. Allen Smith, an award-winning designer, gardener and lifestyle expert. Smith identified a collection of Sakata varieties and branded it under the P. Allen Smith Home Grown Seed Collection. The goal for the partnership is to increase exposure and inspiration for Smith's culinary fans and the like.

ANNOUNCEMENT



SUN WORLD UNVEILS NEW CONSUMER WEBSITE

Sun World International, LLC, Bakersfield, CA, launches a new consumer website designed to deliver the information for its consumers. The newly updated Sun-World.com has a responsive web design that allows accurate viewing on any device's screen, including mobile phones. It features a natural, farm-fresh design theme to connect consumers back to the vineyards, and a clean and creative layout for an improved navigational experience. The new search-engine-optimized site offers visitors customized content such as: recipes, how-to guides, health information, and social media.

NATURAL DELIGHTS EXPANDS DATE ROLL LINE

Natural Delights, Bard Valley, CA, announces two new flavor varieties and a new package design for its popular Date Roll line. Beginning this month, Natural Delights will offer its seasonal flavors for a limited time, alongside its traditional date roll varieties (Coconut Date Rolls and Almond Date Rolls), which are available year-round. New seasonal flavor options include Pecan Pumpkin Pie Spiced Date Rolls and Dark Chocolate Orange Date Rolls for the holiday season, with plans to launch a springtime flavor in March 2016.



ANNOUNCEMENT

SEALD SWEET LAUNCHES NEW KIDDIE CLEM CITRUS PACKAGING



Seald Sweet (Vero Beach, FL) launches Kiddie Clems, which is a line of packaging for the company's easy-to-peel Clementines. The new high-graphic packaging with colorful, kid-friendly graphics is the next move following the success of the company's Mandarina's brand sweet Mandarins packaging, which launched in the summer of 2014. Kiddie Clems' packaging is for the conventional varieties of Clementines.

ANNOUNCEMENT



DECA MANGO DISPLAY CONTEST GARNERS 32% INCREASE

The National Mango Board (NMB) sponsored a mango display contest by the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) this season, which saw more than 150 participating stores that reported a 32 percent increase in mango movement over the previous year. The NMB partnered with Bush's Black Beans for this contest, using the theme "Mango and Black Bean Fiesta!" Stores were divided into five groups based on store sales. Three winning stores in each group were awarded commissary gift cards that they can use as giveaways to their shoppers.

Produce & 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

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Will California's Drought Cause Industry's Positive Reputation To Dry Up?

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The severe drought in California — and the subsequent public attention to agricultural water use — threatens the produce industry and its reputation for being one of the good guys in society. An effective response will require more than good PR; it will require the industry to reposition itself from being perceived as water gluttons to wise stewards of our water supplies. In doing so, the industry must take a harder look at the potential of GMOs and the ability of GMO crops to survive a drought and thrive in high-saline-content water.

Very often, severe circumstances and events have impacts long after the specific crisis passed. For example, habits of thrift adopted during the Great Depression often stayed with those people throughout their lives, and they became commonly known as “Depression Babies.” More recently, during the Great Recession, when consumers traded down from restaurants to home cooking, from high-end stores to mainstream stores, from mainstream stores to discounters, from organic to conventional, and from national brands to private label, one of the key questions was would they trade up if prosperous days returned?

Indeed, in countries such as the United Kingdom, where deep discounters such as Aldi and Lidl gained much market share, panic did not set in when the recession caused market share of discounters to skyrocket. That was assumed to be a reasonable customer response to hard times, but the real panic among mainstream retailers occurred when more prosperous times returned and the discounters didn't lose market share. In fact, the discounters kept gaining market share.

The fresh-cut salad industry suffered — and continues to suffer — from consequences of the Great Spinach Crisis of 2006, although that specific e-coli 0157:H7 outbreak is long gone. It took years to get back to the pre-crisis sales levels and the category has never regained the momentum of rapid sales growth that it had pre-crisis.

Now the news media is filled with stories of the Great California Drought. Though some of these stories focus on the specific hardships caused by the lack of water — crops not planted, others that cannot thrive, valuable trees put at risk, and labor unemployed because there is no work — much press focuses on production agriculture as “water hogs.” This invective was coined by the editors of Mark Hertsgaard, who wrote a piece in *The Daily Beast* titled “How Growers Gamed California's Drought.” After painting a picture of produce industry profiteers screaming, “Show me the money,” and “I'm smiling all the way to the bank,” the substance of his accusation was laid out:

Agriculture is the heart of California's worsening water crisis, and the stakes extend far beyond the state's borders. Not only is California the world's eighth largest economy, it is

an agricultural superpower. It produces roughly half of all the fruits, nuts, and vegetables consumed in the United States — and more than 90 percent of the almonds, tomatoes, strawberries, broccoli and other specialty crops — while exporting vast amounts to China and other overseas customers.

But agriculture consumes a staggering 80 percent of California's developed water, even as it accounts for only 2 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Most crops and livestock are produced in the Central Valley, which is, geologically speaking, a desert. The soil is very fertile but crops there can thrive only if massive amounts of irrigation water are applied.

This image of produce farmers profiteering while they use massive amounts of water — the now famous image of each tiny almond requiring over a gallon of water to grow and the generalized notion that farmers are greedy and not contributing to solving this water problem — is a big change for the industry. We always benefited from the fact that farmers were trusted and well thought of by the population. That is why Ocean Spray and Blue Diamond feature farmers in their ads and why industry food safety publicity always features farmers.

To some extent, the industry can address this with an industry PR campaign and should. An almond is tiny. It does not hold a gallon of water — water is put into the ground and replenishes ground water or gets evaporated and causes rain. There is an important place for education of consumers and the media here.

The industry can also be more sensitive to the situation. Although many installed drip irrigation and similar systems, there are plenty of fields where you see water flying through the air. Presumably, there is good reason for this, but it still looks bad for the industry and won't help with public perception.

Ultimately, if we have to start turning to expensive water sources (such as desalinization), it is unlikely that there will be a long-term consensus to provide inexpensive water for agriculture. So we need to prepare for a future of more expensive water.

The most likely path to success is the development of water-sparing varieties, and the most likely way to go this direction is with genetic technology. UC Davis, several Israeli institutes and many others have been working on this issue for a long time. They and others would work harder if there was a certain market.

There is, of course, resistance to GMOs. But if we combine this technology with capabilities people are in favor of — say water conservation — there is a much greater likelihood of gaining consumer acceptance.

The image of produce farmers profiteering while they use massive amounts of water is a big change for the industry.

James F. Prevora **pb**



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Conference Management: Urban Expositions, Shelton, CT

Phone: (203) 484-8051

Email: atencza@urban-expo.com

Website: westernfoodexpo.com

AUGUST 25, 2015

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Conference Management: Piazza Produce, Indianapolis, IN
Phone: (317) 872-0101

Email: Michelle.agresta@piazzaproduce.com

Website: piazzaproduce.com

SEPTEMBER 13 - 18, 2015

VIII WORLD AVOCADO CONGRESS

Conference Venue: The Westin, Lima, Peru

Conference Management: Peru ProHass, La Victoria, Lima, Peru

Phone: +51-1-2251626

Email: consultas@wacperu2015.com

Website: wacperu2015.com

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III INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FRESH-CUT PRODUCE: MAINTAINING QUALITY & SAFETY

Replacing the annual Fresh-Cut Workshop, this international gathering of colleagues focuses on issues and technologies relevant to the fresh-cut produce industry.

Conference Venue: UC Davis Conference Center, Davis, CA

Conference Management: UC Davis - Post Harvest Technology Center, Davis, CA

Phone: (530) 752-6941

Email: postharvest@ucdavis.edu

Website: fresh-cut2015.ucdavis.edu

SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

BUYING FOOD SHOW & EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR

Conference Venue: Great American Ball Park, Cincinnati, OH

Conference Management: Crosset Company, Independence, KY

Phone: (859) 817-7617

Email: ameyer@crosset.com

Website: crossetcompany.com

SEPTEMBER 16 - 18, 2015

NEW ENGLAND PRODUCE & FLORAL EXPO 2015

Conference Venue: Chatham Bars Inn, Chatham, MA
Conference Management: New England Produce Council, Burlington, MA

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

Email: nepc2@rcn.com

Website: newenglandproduceCouncil.com

SEPTEMBER 23 - 25, 2015

MACFRUT 2015

Conference Venue: Rimini Expo Centre, Rimini, Italy
Conference Management: Cesna Fiera S.P.A., Cesena FC, Italy

Phone: + 39 0547 317435

Email: info@macfrut.com

Website: macfrut.com

SEPTEMBER 23 - 25, 2015

FFVA CONVENTION 2015

Conference Venue: The Breakers, Palm Beach, FL
Conference Management: Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, Maitland, FL

Phone: (321) 214-5200 • **Fax:** (321) 214-0210

Email: martha.tucker@ffva.com

Website: ffva.com

SEPTEMBER 28 - 30, 2015

WASHINGTON PUBLIC POLICY 2015

Conference Venue: Hyatt Regency Washington on Capital Hill, Washington, D.C.

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

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**CELEBRATING
FRESH**

Lower Temperatures in Cases with Doors Improve Produce Quality and Safety with Reduced Energy Consumption

BY J. ATILIO DE FRIAS, YAGUANG LUO, BIN ZHOU, PATRICIA MILLNER AND XIANGWU NOU, USDA AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE

Time-temperature control of fresh-cut produce at 41°F (5°C) or less significantly reduces the growth of human pathogens. Since 2009, the US Food Code has required that packaged ready-to-eat leafy greens be kept at 41°F (5°C) or lower to minimize the potential of pathogen proliferation in the supply chain.

Under commercial settings, scientific studies reported large temperature variations and temperature abuse for produce displayed in open multi-deck refrigerated cases, often exceeding 41°F (5°C). Lower product temperatures in open cases are not achieved by simply lowering thermostat settings, because freezing temperatures and loss of product quality can occur in the rear sections of the cases. To address these issues, we determined in our research supermarket facility at the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) that installing clear glass doors was the most cost-effective solution for achieving compliance to US Food Code, improved quality and safety of fresh-cut leafy greens, and reduced energy consumption.

Open versus Doors

At USDA-ARS, two commercial-scale 12-ft multi-deck display cases were installed in a research supermarket facility. One of the cases was retrofitted with clear glass doors for comparative studies involving packaged fresh-cut leafy greens (e.g. baby spinach, chopped romaine lettuce and lettuce trio). Ambient conditions during the tests were 70°F (21°C), 60-70 percent relative humidity, and thermostats were set at 33°F (0.6°C).

Bagged leafy green products were displayed in both cases in three- to four-day trials, allowing for the collection of tens of thousands of temperature data points from the produce stored in both cases. The differences in temperature uniformity were striking. In the open case, product temperatures in the front often exceeded the US Food Code temperature requirement of 41°F (5°C). In the display case with doors,

To address these issues, we determined in our research supermarket facility ... that installing clear glass doors was the most cost-effective solution ...

the non-compliance with Food Code was greatly reduced at the front of the case, and product temperature differentials decreased significantly.

Quality of Produce

In the open case, the quality of baby spinach samples in the front was standard after four days of storage. Trained sensory panelists gave these samples the lowest ratings, often described as “wet,” and showing significant decay, particularly from samples by the front of the case. On the other hand, the visual quality of baby spinach in the case with doors was higher and with lower decay. Data showed good statistical correlation between visual quality scores and storage temperatures.

Food Safety

To validate the effects of the Food Code compliance in the case with doors, packaged fresh-cut leafy greens were artificially contaminated with three major human pathogens, including *E. coli*, *Salmonella enterica*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*. After displaying the products for three days in the case with doors, with temperatures maintained below 41°C (5°C) and above freezing, no pathogen growth was observed during the entire period.

Operational Energy Costs

We evaluated the operational energy use of the display cases, which included the energy consumption by the condensing units, the evaporator fans, and the LED lights. Anti-sweat heaters were not used for the glass doors, which would have contrib-

uted to the energy use. We determined that overall energy consumption can be reduced by as much as 69 percent with the display case with doors under typical door-opening frequencies and durations (every 10 minutes for 6 seconds).

Engaging Retailers

Recently, some retailers took actions toward displaying produce behind glass doors. The latest awardees of the 2014 and 2015 Retail Sustainability Award from PRODUCE BUSINESS (Wegmans and Weis Markets) have pilot programs in place to retrofit open cases with doors for produce, and according to the reports, the initiative has been positive for the stores and accepted by their customers. The opportunity of a truly win-win situation at the intersection of food quality, food safety, and energy efficiency is at hand for the retail industry.

About The USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

The ARS works to ensure that Americans have reliable, adequate supplies of high-quality food and other agricultural products. ARS accomplishes its goals through scientific discoveries that help solve problems in crop and livestock production and protection, human nutrition, and the interaction of agriculture and the environment.

Research was funded by USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (Specialty Crops Research Initiative Award No. 2010-51181-21230) and USDA-ARS (Project No. 1275-43440-004-00D).

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Study Leads To Food Safety And Quality Decisions

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

The difficulty of sustaining optimal temperatures in open cases is well recognized. In floral, for decades now there is substantial evidence that the quality and life of cut flowers and floral arrangements is optimized by displaying the flowers and arrangements behind closed doors.

Yet, though some floral departments use closed-door displays and others may have a closed-door display for expensive or pre-ordered arrangements, there are far more flowers in open refrigerated cases than closed and quite a large number of floral displays not in refrigeration at all. The reason is that these are supermarkets, not museums; the goal is not the preservation of flowers but their sale. Even if shrink could be reduced via the use of the closed-door cases, the goal is not to minimize shrink; the goal is to maximize profits and it is, of course, easy to imagine scenarios in which an open, easier-to-access display maximizes sales and profits while simultaneously increasing shrink.

Over the long term, however, closed-door cases, which sustain the cold chain and thus quality, could actually boost sales. Presently, consumers may not buy flowers or produce; they might limit what they are willing to buy, because they have long experience that makes them feel these products have a limited shelf life in the home. If closed-door cases sustain the cold chain — delivering products that will last longer at home — consumers might be more likely to purchase and might be willing to pay a higher price. It could take a very long time before consumers make a connection between a closed-door display case and more useful life with floral or produce.

In this case, there is a distinction between the argument for closed-door cases in produce as opposed to floral. In floral, we are talking about a strictly commercial deci-

Retailers that choose not to invest in closed-door cases for their fresh-cuts are consciously deciding to sell their customers product that is of lower quality and more likely to carry a foodborne illness.

sion. We ask questions such as: Does the closed-door case depress sales; does overall profitability rise due to energy savings and less shrink; or does profitability fall due to lower sales? When we turn to produce, and specifically fresh-cuts, we have two other concerns. One is a legal requirement for retailers to maintain temperatures in accordance with the FDA's U.S. Food Code, and one is a moral obligation to do all that can reasonably be done to avoid selling food that could cause foodborne illness.

It would be interesting to have a good study on the impact on sales by switching to closed-door cases. It may well be that fresh-cuts are more of a shopping list item than, say, a bouquet of flowers, so sales may not suffer much or at all. Indeed, if consumers perceive the cases to keep food fresher, the closed-door cases might increase sales, but that is research for another day.

For now, retailers are stuck with this persuasive study and its implications. Namely that retailers that choose not to invest in closed-door cases for their fresh-cuts are consciously deciding to sell their customers product that is of lower quality and more likely to carry a foodborne illness.

More broadly, this study points to a pivot point in food safety and produce. Ever since the Spinach Crisis of 2006, the focus has been on buyer-directed food safety programs. These programs involved retailers directing producers to meet certain

food safety standards. This study argues retailers need to turn their attention inward to how their own practices contribute to food-safety risk.

Retailers would argue that the fault is always with producers. After all, if no pathogen is in the package, then the fact that pathogens can grow more quickly at higher temperatures is not relevant. There is something to this argument, but less than it seems at first glance. Food safety is a difficult subject in produce precisely because our knowledge is imperfect. There is no known set of standards that can guarantee safe produce, so the smart thing to do is use multiple levels of protection: proper growing standards to reduce the likelihood of field contamination; good manufacturing practices so that processing plants are likely to remove any pathogens that exist; cold chain management along the entire supply chain to inhibit growth of pathogens; and consumer education and outreach, so they don't cross-contaminate, use product past appropriate dates or abuse the cold chain at home.

After years of telling growers what to do, this study pretty well lays out what retailers need to do. Perhaps the government will eventually require closed-door refrigeration compliance. If not, one wonders if energy efficiency and moral requirements will be sufficient to make retailers move on this issue.

Squeezed Middle Ground Is More Of An Issue For Retailers

Ian Craig, chief executive of Fresca Group, was recently interviewed for a PRODUCE BUSINESS UK piece titled, "Fresca Calls For Support To Bolster Squeezed Produce Middle Ground." In the piece, he pointed out that although there was strong demand in many sectors such as upscale and convenience, sustaining the great middle market was becoming increasingly problematic.

Why? Consumer quality expectations are high, while the pressure on pricing is acute.

As the piece, by PRODUCE BUSINESS UK contributing editor Steven Maxwell, detailed:

"Price pressures are making it increasingly difficult for suppliers to maintain supply that meets the quality aspirations of the retail customer for the price available," says Craig.

"Whilst this has always been the challenge, with food prices in the U.K. down by 3.4 percent over the last year and inflation currently running at 0 percent, this picture looks set to remain for the foreseeable future."

Indeed it does. The phenomenon of the "shrinking middle" — in which what was once seen as the mainstream heart of the industry is under siege — is now global.

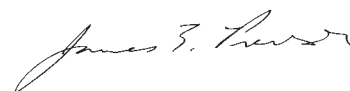
On the retail side, this columnist grew up in a family produce business, and when retailers began buying direct, we opened a few supermarkets. At that point, the great competitive fear was that another, newer, larger supermarket would open across the street and crush us with one mighty blow. For a long time

now, that has not been the big threat; in fact, back in 1993, we wrote a piece for PRODUCE BUSINESS, titled "Death By A Thousand Cuts" that put it this way:

It is the exception that the major competitive threat is a new supermarket chain coming into town, anxious to take major market share. More typical is that supermarkets and their produce departments face a death by a thousand cuts — death not from one new chain seizing 40 percent of the market, but instead from a plethora of new formats, each one seizing a few percentages of the business.

So the wholesale clubs come into town and grab 4 percent of produce sales. A Whole Foods Market chain, emphasizing a "back to the earth" atmosphere, opens and takes 6 percent. Fast food restaurants open their drive-through windows at 7 a.m. so workers can pick up a salad for lunch on the way to work — another 1 percent of business is lost. A supermarket chain opens specializing in small stores with limited variety and low prices, taking 6 percent of the market with them.

Then we have gourmet stores, farmers markets, flea markets, U-Pick operations, supercenters, hypermarkets, home delivery services and more. What it all boils down to is that it is increasingly hard to compete if your goal remains to be the broad-based supermarket attractive to



JIM PREVOER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

95 percent of the people in the community. Instead, the trend is the development of niche operations, each one dedicated not toward capturing the entire market, but instead dedicated to doing a great job serving a specific consumer segment.

Fresca's Ian Craig, himself, points to this phenomenon in the PRODUCE BUSINESS UK article explaining:

"U.K. retailers," says Craig, "are experiencing growth in and placing a lot of focus on the convenience and online markets; both of which require changes to conventional working models." In fact, Craig says Fresca has been adapting its offer to identify products and formats that would be ideally suited to making the most of those opportunities.

"There are different ripening requirements and different systems for distribution to meet these needs too, so it has involved a fresh approach in many parts of our operations," he explains.

The movement to specialisation is happening on the production end as

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well. There was a time when U.S. apple producers could make a good living growing apples with the expectation that a big chunk of the crop would be sent to make apple juice. Today, top apple producers expect to grow everything for the highest returning use — the fresh market — and the apple juice will be shipped in from China or elsewhere.

Indeed society as a whole has been following this trend to specialisation. People who grew up with only a few TV channels now have satellite and cable offers with highly specialised options running into the hundreds.

On the vendor side, this trend poses great challenges, because vendors now have to have many specialised abilities to serve numerous industry segments. Read this exchange on the issue of the growth and potential of meal delivery services and realise how fragmented the market is becoming.

Of course, this is also a great opportunity for vendors. One reason The London Produce Show and Conference was such a smashing success this year, with attendance up over 50 percent more than the previous year, is vendors that

Those retailers who think the hammer is their ally when dealing with suppliers will quickly learn investing in long-term, sustainable vendor relationships is as important as investing in up-to-date store design.

have little interest in selling to the Big Four retailers — where they think they will just be pounded on price and suffer too many rejections and clipped bills — are thrilled to sell to deep discounters, upscale chains, warehouse clubs, online services, the foodservice sector, wholesale markets and more. They think a specialised approach gives them a chance to create long-term value that gets expressed in pricing and the handling of disputes.

The vulnerability of the middle market is actually much more of a challenge for retailers than for vendors. Vendors have to be smart and agile and learn how to turn competitive winds in their favour. That is exactly what Fresca's Craig is referring to when he talks about certain

investments:

"Each of our companies operates a full programme of new product development, and seeing new ideas through to the shelf is very rewarding," explains Craig.

"We invested heavily in variety development programmes in all areas, but particularly in grapes and in stone fruit, with these long-term projects now showing plenty of commercial promise. We've taken a group-wide approach to help us make the best value of the investments."

Much as companies, including Sun World and Driscoll's, established proprietary variety development divisions, this is a path to change the power structure around produce. Once the best product is available from limited sources and is quantity-controlled, those retailers who think the hammer is their ally when dealing with suppliers will quickly learn investing in long-term, sustainable vendor relationships is as important as investing in up-to-date store design.

Of course, as a rising tide really does lift all boats, we hope the government and non-profit sectors will help lay the ground for a healthier population by encouraging more produce consumption.

Yet, in the end, no such efforts will revive a failing middle market. Consumers are just too likely to gravitate to specialised vendors that meet their specific needs at specific moments in their lives. That may be for a discount or it may be for something extraordinary; for something focused on health or a big-volume package; it may be something delivered or something that can be picked up 24/7. Whatever it is, the retailers that meet these specialised needs will triumph, and the vendors that can help them will triumph as well.

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Murphy's Marketplace

Customers experience local flavor and aesthetics in this New Jersey independent retailer.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



Fields blooming with bushy bunches of kale and spinach; meaty beefsteak tomatoes ripening on the vine; rows of cornstalks reaching for the sky ... this is what you see when driving through southern New Jersey's farmlands on the way to Murphy's Marketplace's corporate office and store in Tabernacle, NJ.

The freshness factor resonates right into the store. A display of locally grown Jersey Fresh-brand basil, greenhouse tomatoes and just-picked asparagus welcome shoppers both into the store and into the produce department. For more than three decades, Ron Murphy built his four-store namesake chain by offering produce that represents "natural," "fresh," "quality," "select" and "organic" items. These five words are inscribed in large, earthy-looking, farm-style signs on the wall above the refrigerated sets in the produce department. Each word spells out the recipe for success that Murphy's uses to entice potential customers who would rather shop close to home in the rural suburbs 30-plus miles east of Philadelphia, PA, than at rival retailers farther away.

Yesterday To Today

Murphy is a Philadelphia native who began working in the grocery industry more than 50 years ago for the now defunct Penn Fruit Company. In the mid-1970s, he and his wife, Kathy, had the opportunity to purchase a supermarket in Medford, NJ. The two sunk their wedding money into the venture and opened the doors of the first Murphy's Marketplace on May 1, 1978.

The Murphy's goal from the start was to care for their investment and to constantly improve it. This led to the opening of a second Murphy's Marketplace in the resort community of Beach Haven in 1995. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy deposited more than 4 feet of sand and water in the Beach Haven store. The storm necessitated a \$1.5 million gut and reconstruct, yet Murphy re-opened the doors seven months later on Memorial Day in time for the summer season kick-off.

He opened a third store in Atco, NJ in 2003. The Tabernacle store on the edge of the protected Pinelands opened in 2007. Tabernacle proved a good investment as it was rated

the No. 1 small town by *South Jersey* magazine in 2009.

Today, Murphy's Marketplace averages 25,000-square-feet in size. Approximately 12 percent of the sales floor or 3,000-square-feet is devoted to produce. Fresh fruit and vegetable sales average 16 percent of store sales.

Source & Supply

Two distributors, Eden Prairie, MN-based SuperValu and Pennsauken, NJ-based DiPascale's Farmer's Market at Meadowbrook provide Murphy's with the bulk of the chain's annual 1,000-plus fresh produce SKUs.

"Our suppliers are at the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market every day to keep an eye on price and quality for us. They also developed great relationships with many local farmers," says Jeff Norberg, produce supervisor, who previously worked for Publix in Florida for 22 years. "I go to the Philadelphia Market myself at 4 a.m. every Thursday to get a personal look at quality and deals and what we can offer to customers. Going weekly to the terminal market really helps me to put a

finger on the pulse of what's happening in our growing area, which can change from hour to hour in the summer."

Fresh produce is delivered daily to Murphy's four stores. If the Beach Haven store, which is more than 40 miles from the chain's headquarters, needs extra product, then items are added on refrigerated trucks carrying fresh-made deli and prepared foods from Murphy's commissary in Tabernacle.

"Each produce manager orders for his or her department. I do offer suggestions based on availability and pricing opportunities at the Philadelphia Market," says Norberg.

Produce Is The Star

Wooden Euro tables, baskets used to merchandise fresh fruits and vegetables on endcaps, rustic barrels with scoops for dishing out in-shell peanuts, and an emphasis on bulk merchandising makes the produce department at Murphy's look like an upscale farmers market with all the spotlessly clean temperature-controlled comforts of a conventional supermarket. Point-of-sale materials are strategic. For example, an eye-catching sign calls attention to health benefits and usage tips of berries. The sign illustrates a refrigerated display of berries cross-merchandised with whipped cream and baked goods on an adjacent non-refrigerated table. There are no cardboard shippers cluttering the aisles.

The produce department is well organized. Each section is spotlighted with a colorful sign overtop that offers nutrition information about the specific products displayed underneath. These sections include desserts and dips; fresh salads with subsections for complete kits, blends and to-go items; fresh salad greens; fresh-cut fruit and melon, pre-cut veggies and certified organic items.

Fresh-cut produce, which is prepared in the Tabernacle store's dedicated prep room, is a rapidly growing category, says Norberg. This is driven especially by two of the chain's key demographics.

One demographic is vacationers who shop in the Beach Haven store, stock up on ready-to-eat and cooked items and have limited space in small-size refrigerators at their rental house. For these customers, the best-selling items are berry bowls, cut watermelons, veggies for the grill (such as corn and onions), and fast-fixing meal items (such as bagged salads) and organic clamshells of greens (such as kale, arugula and spinach). The in-house nature of Murphy's



Ron Murphy, owner and founder of Murphy's Marketplace.

fresh-cut operation provides the opportunity for custom combinations. The most popular of these is the Luau Bowl: pineapple, cantaloupe and watermelon.

The second demographic is the customer who would rather pay a few cents more and avoid produce waste. These folks shop in all of Murphy's stores and range from families to retirees. The chain's pre-cut vegetable section is devoted to these customers. The more than two dozen SKU's here include: broccoli, cauliflower, baby carrots, a trio of these first three veggies, zucchini, asparagus tips, a multicolor assortment of chopped peppers and coleslaw-ready cabbage and carrots.

Organic produce represents approximately 20 percent of produce sales and is growing, says Norberg. Organically grown fruits and vegetables are displayed next to their conventional counterparts with appropriate dividers to prevent co-mingling on Euro tables. Organic salads are grouped together in a 4-foot section on refrigerated multidecks. Variety and selection are large. There's everything from signature items (such as organic apples, oranges and bananas) to somewhat seasonal soft fruit, citrus and berries.

Local Is A Signature

"Our niche, where we look to differentiate ourselves from the competition, is to offer our customers a large variety of fresh, quality, healthy foods," says Norberg. "One of the ways we do that is sourcing as much locally grown produce as possible. Our first option is always to buy from New Jersey farmers. In peak season, New Jersey produce represents about 20 to 25 percent of our total produce

sales. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture sends weekly emails that tell us what is harvesting and about to harvest. These are extremely helpful and so is physically going to the Philadelphia Market each week."

Flexibility is crucial to this business model. For example, Norberg had to work fast to take maximum advantage of this year's short season for New Jersey strawberries. He quickly responded by increasing the front center department display of berries, signed the product Jersey Fresh to let customers know of the fruit's early harvest in the state, and sold the strawberries for an attractive price. He also notified customers about the berry harvest via Facebook. Norberg uses social media to keep customers up to date with the availability of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Promotion Is More Than Price

"Social media is very important to us. It's a great way to communicate directly with our shoppers in real time. For example, we let them know as soon as we got back from the Philadelphia Market visit that strawberries were in, and they would be in store the next day. We recently posted that cooler weather set back the Jersey tomato harvest by a few days, and rain in the Pacific Northwest created short supplies; therefore, the result is a higher price for cherries. It's important to let our customers know what is happening, and they trust us to do this. We also offer serving suggestions and recipes on social media," says Norberg.

Beyond social media, Murphy's publishes a circular ad once every two weeks. About 20 fresh fruits and vegetables will be in the ad with around five of these items being organic. New Jersey-grown produce is signed with the Jersey Fresh logo. Nutrition information is called out in verbiage on select items.

Finally, Murphy and his wife, who still live in the same town where they founded their first store, are involved with many service organizations and big supporters of several community events and activities. In fact, Murphy's Marketplace caters the end-of-the-year picnics for public schools in Medford, NJ.

"It used to be junk food — cakes and cookies," says Murphy, about school picnic menus in the past. Today, we provide fruits and no small amount either. We go through about 75 watermelons for 1,200 students. That's good, because we like to help our customers and their families eat healthy and stay healthy."

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RETROSPECTIVE

RETAILER-TURNED-SUPPLIER, **BRIAN GANNON'S CAREER** SPANS MORE THAN 30 YEARS

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

An emphasis on freshness, a key point of retail differentiation, was just taking root in 1981 when Brian Gannon embarked on a produce career at Big Y, currently a 61-store chain based in Springfield, MA. Gannon started in the supermarket industry as a part-time grocery stocker while attending the University of Massachusetts. During the next 33 years, he held positions as assistant produce manager, produce manager, store manager, director of produce and floral, and director of process improvement. In 2014, Gannon moved to the supply side where he currently works as the Northeast sales manager for Delray Beach, FL-headquartered Pero Family Farms.



Where were you in 1985?

I was on the cusp of going from produce manager to store manager. Back then, the track to store management was from center store. I was able to work my way through the interviews and convince them that managing a perishables department was just as complex of an operation as managing grocery. For Big Y, promoting a produce manager to store manager ranks was good timing, as perishables in supermarkets were taking on a life of its own. Produce was starting to be used by supermarkets to create differentiation — it was becoming prominent in the blueprint positioning, and in the profit and loss statements.

What was the produce department like in 1985?

Produce was well on its way in terms of many SKUs being available year-round. Deep variety within the various categories had not yet begun. Fresh-cut back then was mainly back-room prepped items such as cut watermelon, melon trays and cut-up Hubbard squash. I don't even remember dealing with organics then.

How would you characterize the overall retail environment back then?

The "supermarket" retail environment was much simpler back then. Many supermarkets were the same, and were competing with each other on the "basics of the business": cleanliness, customer service, in-stock position and price. Now, there are many competing supermarket "formats" that built reputations on produce like Whole Foods Market, Sprouts Farmers Market and Earth Fare, from foodie retailers like Wegmans, and from big box value-based stores like Walmart, to value-priced retailers like Aldi, and the growth of produce offerings in the club stores. Now we're seeing online ordering like FreshDirect, Peapod and AmazonFresh come into the mix, reflecting changing customer demographics.

Supermarkets will really need to continually read the demographic shifts to stay ahead of what customers want and need for their fresh produce, and find creative ways to present those offerings in a brick-and-mortar environment that both satisfies the basic needs, but also entertains and takes the shopping

trip beyond just another "to-do" on their list.

When did things start to change and what were the drivers of change?

From the mid-1980s onward, supermarkets started really pushing the perishable part of the business model, both in adding on perishable "sub-departments" — floral, seafood, foodservice all used to be a part of another department — in the blueprint. Many retailers were grouping perishables into what became known as the "power alley." Perishables was one-third of the building blueprint, and it gave customers an exciting atmosphere to walk into. Since perishable departments merchandise much differently than center store, the visual was exciting, and changing, which made each trip by the customer a new experience.

What led you to the supply side of the industry? What insights have you gained on the supply side that you wish you had known as a retailer?

I chose to move to the supply side of the business as a growth piece in my total career path. I felt my years of retail experience could be leveraged to make significant contributions and allow me to effectively approach retail from a solution standpoint. I am constantly in the Northeast on almost a daily basis, taking in what retailers are doing and how they're going to market. These insights help me to help the retailers we already have relationships with. These insights also help me understand how to approach those retailers we don't have a relationship with.

Throughout my career in produce retail, I made it a point to see retail produce formats in all areas of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, and Europe. This aspect has always been a very stimulating part of my work: to see what others are doing, bring the good and

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What are some of the biggest innovations you've seen in the produce industry during the past 30 years?

Food safety has come on strong within the four walls of the supermarket. "Sanitation" used to be wiping your knife off on your apron before placing it back in the rack, and washing your hands with soap was something you might

do at the end of your shift.

How would you describe the produce department today?

The produce department used to be in direct competition and benchmarked itself off the closest competitor. Now, the lines are totally being blurred, and competition is everywhere — in many formats and offerings. If you're in "brick and mortar" retail today, you need to create "reasons" for customers to

come back again and again. If your department is sub-par, boring, or not fulfilling customers' needs and not making it worthwhile to shop, then you end up in a slow bleed of customer traffic overtime. You need to have a clear mission, and you need to train your people. Train them and communicate passion for fresh.

What do you think was the greatest lesson you learned about retailing?

There are two. One is the point of purchase, and the second is anticipating the customer's at-home experience. By focusing on those two customer points of impression, you can see and improve many things from the in-store operation to purchasing, warehousing, transportation, all the way back to the vendor and what they do. An experienced and effective produce retailer, can see "all" at the point of purchase. Too many people positioned in the various steps of the supply chain pay attention to one step down and one step back. But forcing yourself to pay attention to the point of purchase allows one to make improvements everywhere in the supply chain and get more people involved to help support an effective end experience for customers.

What do you think will drive the produce industry in the next one to two decades?

Demographics, and understanding where the majority of your desired demographic is, knowing what they want, and how they want to purchase it. Online fresh, value formats, and experiential formats will be the winners in the next 10- to 20-year period.

What are the challenges holding the industry back?

The biggest challenges in supermarket formats for produce lie in two areas. First is the labor model, and second, and this is huge, is getting in-store teams to do the correct things in the produce department in order to properly and effectively present the fresh offerings to customers. Fresh produce needs "employees" who care, know what to do, and when.

What advice would you give young retailers entering the produce industry?

Pay attention to the point of purchase by end customers. Plus, "be a customer," and take those insights and apply them to your place in the supply chain. Look at the supply chain environmentally. By that, I mean look to see the ecology of the environment, appreciate the complexity, but strive to see and influence it.

pb



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MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2015

The winners of this year's PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Awards span the gamut of the industry from wholesalers, to foodservice operations, to state departments of agriculture, to trade marketing ad campaigns, to individual shippers and marketers. All the winning campaigns speak to consumers and the industry in different ways with dynamic and effective initiatives.

We received an overwhelming amount of entries this year, and we applaud all companies for the impressive promotional strides. PRODUCE BUSINESS congratulates these 17 companies for shining the brightest.

4Earth Farms
Avocados from Mexico
California Avocado Commission
Colorado State Department of Agriculture
Columbia Marketing International
Cranberry Marketing Committee
FirstFruits Marketing of Washington
Giumarra/Nature's Partner
Idaho Potato Commission
Mann Packing Company
National Mango Board
Shuman Produce
SunFed
Sun Pacific
UMass Dining Services
U.S. Apple Association
U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

4Earth Farms

Rebranding Promotion

OBJECTIVES: 4Earth Farms' (formerly known as MCL Fresh, Inc.) aimed to refresh, simplify and consolidate the company's four brands (MCL Fresh, 4 Earth, Real Organics and RealSun Citrus) into one unified brand. The approach was to develop a more consumer-friendly and wholesome look for the new brand. The updated version needed to reflect the company's core values: supporting its people, delivering supreme product, and be good stewards for the planet.

CAMPAIGN: 4Earth Farms' rebranding method worked homogenously as a holistic approach from the inside out. The company created a logo for the conventional and organic produce. All aspects of corporate identity were uniformed from business cards to wrapped delivery trucks. Packaging was redesigned with new clamshells and bags that donned labels with health facts, product origins and nutrition stats. A new website was created with mobile capabilities. Other online components included social media participation (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), advertisements and press coverage.

RESULTS: Tangible results were collected via online analytics: 2,248 visits on launch day of website; 1,650 were unique from overall visits; 9,289 page views; and average time spent on site per visit was more than 2 minutes. In addition to these stats, the comprehensive strategy and implementation of the rebranding effort was well executed.



Avocados From Mexico

'Made With Love' Campaign at PMA Fresh Summit

OBJECTIVES: Avocados From Mexico (AFM) sought a specific approach to strengthen brand recognition and build excitement for its "Made With Love" campaign. The company used the Produce Marketing Associations' 2014 Fresh Summit conference to execute a fully integrated program featuring a new exhibitor booth, celebrity athlete appearances, on-site engagement and food sampling.

CAMPAIGN: A myriad of pre-show trade communications and strategies was implemented; for example, e-blast invites to the booth, on-site PR to garner coverage, and marketing collateral. AFM invested in a series of sponsorships ranging from co-sponsoring the opening session of the conference, to supporting the Produce For Better Health Supermarket Dieticians Event, to hosting educational sessions with supermarket dieticians. In addition, booth engagement activities were extensive. AFM food trucks and carts offered samples of avocados for every daypart. Soccer legends, Jorge Campos and Pável Pardo, made celebrity appearances. Exclusive premiums were offered to retail partners and key stakeholders.

RESULTS: All established objectives were met, executed on time, and came within budget. Booth traffic was more than 15,000 visitors; 11,800 AFM food samples were served; 49 retail customer meetings were held; more than 228,000 trade media impressions highlighted the "Made With Love" campaign; 9,240 e-blasts were distributed with a 25 percent open rate.



Making summer, *Special.*



California Avocado Commission

California Avocado Breakfast Promotion

OBJECTIVES: The California Avocado Commission (CAC) built on its strengths and created a campaign that aimed to make California avocados synonymous with classic California menu items — particularly breakfast dishes. The fall 2013 Avocado Tracking Study, conducted by Bovitz Inc. research firm, indicated 41 percent of avocado consumers in California ad markets reported eating avocados for breakfast. Additionally, the 2012 Avocado Menu Trak foodservice research showed a 64 percent increase in avocado menu mentions from 2005 to 2012 with a skew toward breakfast entrees. Based on these reports, CAC was able to refine its marketing trajectory for breakfast options.



CAMPAIGN: Designed to inspire consumers and convey flavors for the palate, the “Distinctly Californian” marketing campaign showed how to make a California omelet. Menu concepts were created by the CAC and culinary collaborators (from food truck operators to major chains) then shared with foodservice operators as well as culinary influencers. Partners included: CKreps and CKatering, Denny’s, Lyfe Kitchen, The Corner Bakery. Retail support included breakfast-themed merchandising materials and support from in-store dietitians. Registered dietitian CAC brand ambassadors included Michelle Dudash and Bonnie Taub-Dix. Chef ambassadors included Jessican Koslow (Sqirl, Los Angeles) and Maxine Sui (Plow, San Francisco). Eight blogger ambassadors also spread the word about breakfast recipes in addition to CAC’s company websites and social media. A portion of the marketing was dedicated to a co-branding sweepstakes effort with Naturipe.

RESULTS: Highlights from the CAC breakfast promotion include: 700-plus restaurants featured California avocados; 34-plus million consumer PR impressions; 225 supermarket registered dietitians participation efforts; and more than 55,000 breakfast website views. The compelling numbers were met with a detailed and complex campaign that spanned the foodservice and produce industry.

Colorado Department of Agriculture

Choose Colorado Promotion

OBJECTIVES: The Colorado Department of Agriculture takes grassroots to a new level with its domestic marketing program, Colorado Proud. Developed to help consumers, restaurants and retailers identify and purchase Colorado food and agricultural products, Colorado Proud aimed to increase consumers’ connection with Colorado products, increase awareness of the Colorado Proud logo, and educate consumers about the benefits of buying local.

CAMPAIGN: From July 1, 2014 to September 20, 2014, the Colorado Department of Agriculture orchestrated the “Choose Colorado” promotion. The organization contracted television advertising in addition to online exposure. Ads featuring Commissioner of Agriculture, John Salazar, and Governor, John Hickenlooper, were shown on Facebook. Colorado Proud also worked with a marketing agency to develop a public relations campaign to promote produce across the state with a 27-day road trip. Safeway and local farmers participated throughout the state to educate consumers about locally grown produce, the importance of buying local, and the economical impact. The tour made 17 stops in 11 cities and traveled more than 2,400 miles during 27 days.

RESULTS: Overall, success of the promotion was measured by determining the percent of consumers reporting a desire to purchase Colorado produce labeled with the Colorado Proud logo. The benchmark for Colorado produce recognition went from 66 percent to 71 percent; and 85 percent of consumers surveyed familiar with the logo, which was a higher percentage than 2013’s 78 percent. The television ads reached 100 percent of households an average of 28 times. Household impressions totaled 28 million; adult 25 to 54 years old impressions totaled 12 million. Tour events reached an estimated 7,000 Coloradans. The campaign secured 62 media placements and an estimated media reach of more than 30 million viewers/readers.





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Columbia Marketing International (CMI)

CMI's Signature Sweet Cherry Pop-Top Lid

OBJECTIVES: CMI's inventive new lid was created to provide export markets with a new way to display Northwest Red and Rainier cherries in the wholesale market. CMI set out to reinvent the way customers purchase cherries at the export market, since the standard practice was to remove the lids from the cherry boxes and have customers shop from the exposed box.

CAMPAIGN: CMI worked with carton engineers and printers to develop a new type of lid for export markets. The Cherry Pop-Top Lid incorporates a two-prong approach. The first element involves a simple pop-top opening revealing the cherries inside. The second element is a high-graphic display that folds from the lid to sit behind the cherries — creating a backdrop for endless marketing options. To set off the colors used in the design, a light blue modified atmosphere liner was used to preserve product during transportation and complement the artwork on the packaging.

RESULTS: CMI reports retailers gave positive feedback regarding the new boxes, and export customers appreciate the shopping convenience of the box and its look. The colorful and practical box is distinctive when displayed.



Cranberry Marketing Committee

Fourth of July and Summer Grilling Season Promotion

OBJECTIVES: The Cranberry Marketing Committee (CMC) commissioned Pollock Communications to promote cranberries around the Fourth of July and summer grilling season as well as to establish cranberries as the “all-American fruit.” In-store demonstrations were conducted in produce departments as well as throughout the stores to show pairing options using dried cranberries for salads, frozen cranberries for smoothies, as well as cranberry sauces for various grilling recipes.

CAMPAIGN: CMC partnered with Big Y supermarkets to increase exposure of the stores' Living Well Eating Smart (LWES) nutrition program run by Big Y's Registered Dietitians. The LWES program introduced shoppers to the health benefits, flavors and versatility of cranberries during the summer grilling season via newsletter, sales circular, and in-store endcap displays. Cranberry awareness was also promoted in-store with demonstrations including barbecue recipes, smoothies and potato salad. Recipe cards were distributed to shoppers. Giveaways were hosted on Facebook and Big Y's LWES website. In continuation with marketing approaches beyond the store level, a Connecticut-based registered dietitian participated in several local television segments, which aired throughout the Massachusetts and Connecticut areas, to amplify messaging around the benefits and versatility of cranberries.

RESULTS: The consulting with Pollock Communications and support from Big Y stores increased sales of cranberries by more than 50 percent compared to a straightforward product sale during the summer campaign. The 360-degree promotion resulted in: more than 150,000 impressions from newsletter placements in LWES print, online and Facebook outlets; sales circulars reached 1,200,000 consumers; 12 in-store culinary demonstrations reached approximately 1,200 customers in addition to the 1,200 sets of four recipe cards; more than 4,600,000 impressions garnered through geo-targeted Facebook ad; and 58,000 local television impressions.



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Social Media Contests

Bins and RPC Wraps

Store Demos
(partnering with a healthy complementary item)



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- New Printed and Digital Cookbooks



Printed and available digitally via website and eBooks, a first in the category

AvocadosFromPeru.com/retailers

 **Avocados** from Peru

The **Summer** Avocado

FirstFruits Marketing of Washington

Opal Apple

OBJECTIVES: FirstFruits Marketing of Washington, LLC is a collaborative apple marketing company owned by growers. The purpose of this promotion was to create awareness and drive trail of Opal apples.

CAMPAIGN: The programs included a range of retail demonstrations, local events, radio, public relations, bloggers, and word-of-mouth marketing. Opal brand ambassadors represented the apples at a winter festival and 5K run in New York City. One event unique to the Opal was Giving Tuesdays, on December 2, 2014, which piggybacks off of the holiday consumer crazes associated with Black Friday, Cyber Monday, etc. The public relations campaign highlighted the Opal's naturally non-browning feature. Five bloggers engaged the efforts by developing recipes to promote Opal's Youth Make a Difference initiative, which awards funding from sales of Opal apples to youth-led initiatives serving communities in the U.S. The initiative must address one or more of the issues of food security, nutrition, agriculture, food politics, and education.

RESULTS: The total monetary award from Youth Make a Difference was \$150,000. Opal apples were sampled in a total of 596 demonstrations at 13 retailers. Local event participation totaled 16, and around 41,000 Opals were given away outside of retail. Opals were promoted on five different radio station, featured on 16 blog posts, and received a combined total of 274,000 page views from 174,000 different people.



Giumarra/Nature's Partner

'Easy As Pie' Plum Promotion

OBJECTIVES: Giumarra's Nature's Partner brand of plums participated in an extensive program to increase volume of plum sales by at least 20 percent. Efforts to complete the task involved increased business at warehouse club stores, building on domestic programs for extension of Chilean or New Zealand stone fruit season, and brand awareness.

CAMPAIGN: Nature's Partner approached a variety of aspects to reach its goals. From a retail perspective, a 4-pound clamshell of plums and recipe was used in-store. Consumer messaging took a novel approach by targeting the 25- to 55-year-old consumers using the authentic endorser and retired stone fruit grower, Helen Krause. The packaging used high-graphic imagery on a 2-pound vented pouch bag with handle highlighting a recipe and QR code. The gimmick focused on the authentic plum-baking recipes by Mrs. Krause. The company used social media to post instructional videos with Mrs. Krause. The warehouse-club packaging featured a recipe label and shipper for 4-pound clamshells.

RESULTS: Sales expanded in major midwest retailers and eight national warehouse club store depots located in Georgia, Maryland, Arizona, California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and Washington. The brand was able to also garner interest by Chilean growers to extend the domestic program into the winter season.



2 lb Vented Handle Pouch Bag w/Recipe Label & QR Code



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Idaho Potato Commission

'Too Successful' Ad Campaign

OBJECTIVES: The Idaho Potato Commission's quirky "Too Successful" integrated retail trade marketing campaign was implemented back in September of 2014. The humorous campaign reinforces the reputation of potatoes from Idaho and increases retailer support by driving volume and growth.

CAMPAIGN: "Too Successful" used humor to showcase a variety of issues that being too successful might cause a produce director, category manager, or vice president of produce. The campaign depicts scenarios that these produce industry players might encounter by selling Idaho potatoes. For example, category manager, Loretta, is so successful stocking Idaho Potatoes that she wins multiple "Manager of the Year" awards — leaving her with no room on her trophy case to display them all. These tongue-in-cheek ads are represented in 10 different full-page print ads for retail trade in addition to online banner ads.

RESULTS: Though branded potato sales are not tracked, based on retailer feedback, the campaign generated positive support thus far. Increased exposure runs through August of 2015.



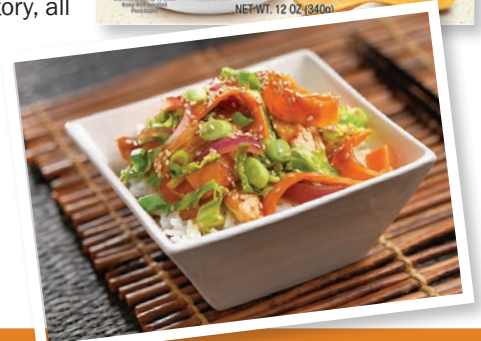
Mann Packing Company

Culinary Cuts Product Launch

OBJECTIVES: Mann's Culinary Cuts is a line of fresh-cut vegetables shaped distinctively for versatile use in side dishes, stir-frys, soups and casseroles. With products like Sweet Potato Ribbons and Butternut Squash Zig Zags, these items are ideal for pasta substitutes and low-carb paleo diets.

CAMPAIGN: The company chose to focus its efforts for its test market launch in St. Louis. In store, Mann leveraged local media and culinary influencers to help generate consumer awareness for the new products. First, a series of desk-side meetings was arranged for food writers and editors. Mann's RD, Serena Ball, was featured in cooking segments on St. Louis shows. Food bloggers were invited to attend a cooking demonstration event at Schnucks grocery store. This retail event included a cooking presentation, a separate Skype presentation from author, Karin Page, whose recipes inspired the event's menu. Invitees participated in a knife skills class led by Chef Barb Nack of the Kitchen Conservatory, all followed by a tasting.

RESULTS: Traditional in-store demonstrations were conducted in 34 Schnucks stores and 24 Dierbergs Markets. A micro-site was also created to provide a community for sharing recipes, serving ideas, and notifications about where to purchase product. Online editorial coverage was significant and spanned social media, local newspapers and magazines, as well as coverage on local television.



National Mango Board

Cooking with Mangos Foodservice Promotion

OBJECTIVES: The National Mango Board's (NMB) foodservice initiative focused on capturing consumers' attention at the restaurant-level. The NMB dedicated the program to educate chefs, college students and culinary instructors about handling and cooking with fresh mangos and inspire mango usage in restaurant kitchens.

CAMPAIGN: The educational curriculum entailed *Fresh Mango-The Basics For Foodservice* video and workbook-style text for culinary instructors, students practicing chef, etc. Completed material was eligible to be submitted to the American Culinary Federation to earn 8.5 continuing education hours. In 2014, the NMB collaborated with chefs from around the country to create the Mango Flavor Pairing Guide, so chefs could learn the definite, dramatic and daring ways to accent fresh mangos. During National Margarita Weekend, On the Border Mexican Grill & Cantina (160 locations) created a mixed drink called "Mango Strawberry Swirl Margarita." Marie Callender's Restaurant & Bakery (more than 75 locations) developed "Fresh Mango Braised Pulled Pork Street Tacos." Students at University of Massachusetts Amherst enjoyed fresh mangos in 11 recipes during a one-day promotion, "Mad About Mango." During the promotion, nutrition majors and students participated in an informational station where customers could win mango-related prizes.

RESULTS: The multiple efforts by the National Mango Board collectively reached remarkable numbers in sales and impressions. The UMass event gave more than 18,000 students and customers a chance to experience mango meal creations. More than 390 chefs completed the Fresh Mango curriculum.



Shuman Produce

Grilling for the Win

OBJECTIVES: Shuman Produce wanted to increase brand awareness through social media across multiple platforms. The company requested entrants share recipes and explain how they use RealSweet Vidalia onions in recipes and offered weekly giveaways in addition to the ultimate prize, a Big Green Egg branded grill.

CAMPAIGN: The Grilling for the Win promotion provided consumers with the opportunity to win a Big Green Egg grill by entering a contest accessible through both Shuman's Facebook page and a specialized landing page hosted on the Shuman's website. Entries served a triple purpose of collecting information on how consumers use Vidalia sweet onions in recipes, increasing social media presence, and collecting emails for future marketing usage. Approved entries were posted on Shuman's Pinterest page under the Grilling to Win Board. Weekly prizes were awarded through random drawing entries during each week.

RESULTS: With help from Idea Garden Marketing, Shuman created a content calendar for social networks and encouraged conversation with consumers. The entry goal of 7,500 was exceeded with 9,767 entries, and Shuman acquired 813 new Facebook fans, and 470 new Pinterest followers. Unique visitors to Shuman's Pinterest page was 11,842. Sweepstake entries totaled 7,712; unique website visitors were 10,415; consumer opt-in for RealSweet e-newsletter was at 42 percent. Two Big Green Egg grilling packages were awarded, and winners were selected from entries collected during the entire eight-week promotion.



SunFed 2015 Watermelon Bin

OBJECTIVES: SunFed's previous watermelon bins were industry standard, practical and showcased the watermelon. The company's challenge was to improve the bin without significantly raising costs. Creative inspiration was found in Roy Lichtenstein's Pop Art comic book-style paintings. The artwork was actually deconstructed and reconstructed to fit the needs of SunFed's messaging. Once the artwork was formulated, the caption text was created. The new bins not only complemented the colorful watermelons, but turned into works of art.

CAMPAIGN: SunFed started with printing the Lichtenstein-inspired scenarios on the outside of the bins, then added themed materials such as posters, cornhole (bean bag toss) games, as well as a wall mural for United Fresh's Fresh Summit.

RESULTS: The roll out was successful and generated increase business by 65 percent from last year. Some retailers went a step beyond the general display, broke bins down and created backdrops to the main displays. The company received recognition from retailers, industry friends and even an art teacher from a middle school in Bridgeport, CT, who learned about the artistic display by a student studying Pop Art in class.



Sun Pacific Cutie Curl Contest

OBJECTIVES: Sun Pacific focused on targeting a particular audience of moms and children who are loyal to the Cuties brand. The main goal was to evoke and reinforce the brand affinity and adoration within the consumers' minds. Moms like the healthy aspects of Cuties, and kids love to feel the independence of being able to peel Cuties on their own. The contest was created to encourage kids to peel a Cutie in one continuous curl.

CAMPAIGN: Launched at the height of Mandarin season, the contest was driven by consumer-generated photos. Promotion for the contest was done with how-to videos, online and social content, influence/blogger activations, and a song that kids could sing along to as they peeled their Cuties. In fact a Cuties station was created on Pandora online radio. Additionally, a mobile campaign with iBeacon shopping technology drove in-store purchases, Sun Pacific sponsored ads on public television's PBSKids.org for the contest, and a robust online pre-roll of ads touted the contest's details.

RESULTS: Cutie Curl media activity drove more than 31 million impressions. Over the course of a month, the company received more than 51,000 contest site visits, and more than 300 unique photo submissions in a three-week period with nearly 4,000 votes cast in a week for the Top 10 finalists.



UMass Dining Services

Mushroom Mania

OBJECTIVES: UMass Dining Services conducted a two-day extravaganza event for retail and residential patrons to promote healthy, sustainable and delicious cuisine by featuring a wide array of mushroom recipes. The event was hosted in partnership with The Mushroom Council (San Jose, CA) and celebrity Chef Jehangir Mehta of acclaimed NYC restaurants Graffiti and Mehtaphor.

CAMPAIGN: The cross-platform marketing campaign extended beyond the institution and into the digital food world as well as local news coverage. Cuisines were designed to showcase mushroom versatility. During the dining sessions, students could see dishes such as Tuna Mushroom Tartar, Mushroom Avocado Toast, and Chef Mehta's Graffiti Burger, being prepared. Nutritional and ingredient stats were provided for each menu option. Chef Mehta mingled with students during dining to answer questions and teach about mushroom nutrition and sustainability.

RESULTS: In response to the event, 100 percent of all burger sliders served at Hampshire Dining Common are now beef blended (70/30). Hampshire Dining Common now serves about 100,000 annually. Berkshire Dining Common features mushrooms at all food stations. Handmade mushroom blended burgers cost 20 percent less than 100 percent ground beef, which saves thousands of dollars per annum.



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U.S. Apple Association

28 Days of Apples

OBJECTIVES: U.S. Apple Association (USApple) devised an opportunity to highlight the health benefits of apples as well as provide national education. In alignment with 2014 February's American Heart Month, USApple created a groundswell of media coverage and online engagement for the 28 Days of Apples campaign, which provided a daily dose of heart-healthy messages and encouraged consumers to think differently about apples.

CAMPAIGN: The 2015 campaign was expanded with a turnkey toolkit for USApple member participants with more assets, which included: a tip sheet, press release templates, media pitches, e-news/blog copy, and social media images for sharing. A team was assembled within USApple to increase social media impressions as well as a general media impressions touting apples and heart-health.

RESULTS: By arming USApple members with these toolkit materials and garnering prizes from the organization's participants, the campaign generated 23 million media impressions, 3.2 million social media impressions, and 17,400 Facebook stories created by fans. USApple also conducted consumer and trade media relations outreach to national and local news outlet affiliates.



U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Little Changes, Big Rewards: Swap New Year's Resolutions for Little Changes

OBJECTIVES: The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), with the help of marketing firm PadillaCRT, collected data from research to establish the Council's approach to promote blueberries. The information that resonated was how "little changes to one's routine or diet makes people happier (57 percent), more confident in their ability to reach their goals (61 percent), and more likely to make positive changes (60 percent)," according to the November 2014, ORC International's Omnibus Poll consumer research. With that concept in mind, the targeted message would encompass ways to swap drastic New Year's resolutions for little changes toward a healthier lifestyle.

CAMPAIGN: USHBC and PadillaCRT utilized the PESO (paid media, earned media, shared media, owned media) model to design and implement a combination of tactics for the campaign. Elements included primary research, traditional media, digital media, a "Little Changes" calendar and landing page, blogger campaign, email marketing and advertising, as well as a sweepstakes for a chance to win a trip to Los Angeles to meet Alison Sweeney.

RESULTS: The effects were significant and covered: 14,602 new email opt-ins, 16,759 sweepstakes entries, three earned media placements of Little Changes poll results in top-tier consumer outlets, national media placement featuring spokesperson, Alison Sweeney, and 89 million gross media impressions for the Little Changes campaign.





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When Autumn Leaves Fall, Colorful Opportunities Arise

Tricks of the trade when marketing produce for the season.

BY KEITH LORIA



The weather's getting colder, the leaves are changing color, and football season is starting — this can only mean that fall is in the air. Starting with September, retailers begin thinking about the best ways to sell produce in the autumn months.

Produce merchandising in the fall accentuates color. Apples, melons, gourds, etc., provide a broad array of colors that help set the tone for the entire season. "Use color to make the entire department more appealing for shoppers," says Jeff Weidauer, vice president, marketing and strategy for Vestcom International, a shelf-edge marketing company for retailers based in Little Rock, AR. "Next, focus on uses. Back-to-school lunches, more dinners at home, Halloween and

the holiday season can all be used as themes for produce merchandising."

Maria Brous, director of media relations for Publix, based in Lakeland, FL, says having a well-stocked department grows sales. Having secondary displays, when appropriate, also helps. "Fall brings lots of variety and color to the department as well," she says. "In addition, there are produce specialty items such as cinnamon brooms, caramel and chocolate dipped apples that connect to the time of year."

Green Giant Fresh, headquartered in Salinas, CA, has a variety of premium fresh value-added products that are perfect for fall and winter, such as its Soup Blends line, cut vegetables for soups, stews, chili, casseroles and more. According to Jennifer Fancher, director of



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are the first of their kind in the marketplace. This convenient grab & go item is perfect for today's consumers who are health conscious, time-starved and want to prepare healthful meals for their families.

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“Customized fall displays would generate interest and set the tone to get people thinking about cooler weather foods and dishes ... and ultimately, the holidays.”

— Jennifer Fancher, Green Giant Fresh

marketing, Green Giant Fresh also has peeled and cubed butternut squash; trimmed and peeled Brussels sprouts; broccoli and cauliflower florets; sweet potatoes; and “our new Cauliflower Crumbles, which are convenient and versatile; they can be used in a variety of dishes and applications.”

Fancher notes that all Green Giant Fresh value-added products should be merchandised in the produce department with other fresh, convenience foods. “Customized fall displays would generate interest and set the tone to get people thinking about cooler weather foods and dishes ... and ultimately, the holidays,” she says. “Green Giant Fresh provides exceptional category support, as well as POS materials that help educate and inform consumers, while influencing retailer sales. We develop and provide recipe cards to retail partners, and support in-store promotions and specials with different products throughout the year to help grow the bottomline.”

Samantha McCaul, marketing manager for Concord Foods LLC, headquartered in Brockton, MA, believes that when fall comes around, retailers should include the company’s complementary products with apple displays.

“Our products, such as Candy Apple Kits, Caramel Apple Wrap and Pumpkin Spice Caramel Dip, add interest and variety to fall displays,” she says. “Concord Foods provides attractive, themed floor displays for all our

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popular fall products. These displays make it easy for stores to display our products adjacent to apples.”

For the upcoming 2015 fall season, Concord is planning an integrated digital campaign to promote its apple related products. This will include videos, blogs and advertising.

“The most successful displays have three critical ingredients, which are planning, location and promotion,” says McCaul. “Stores should focus on creating merchandising opportunities with key items, such as apples and non-perishable items that have a strong tie-in. Seasonal displays should be placed in prime locations and promotional signage should be used.”

Teri Gault, founder and chief executive officer of the grocery coupon savings site, TheGroceryGame.com, says she’s a big believer in recipes in the produce section along with unusual combination displays. “Recipes on tear pads grab customers’ attention. Lots of folks don’t know what to do with fall/winter squash, so they just pass right by,” she says. “A recipe with an eye-catching photo of the dish prompts sales of these relatively unknown vegetables. Sometimes busy shoppers are also busy cooks, so the 5-ingredient recipes are a big draw.”

HOW ‘BOUT THEM APPLES?

Apples may be a staple to produce departments all year long, having varieties and offering bulk, loose and pre-packed apples in the fall will go a long way to improving sales, says Brous.

According to Vestcom International’s Weidauer, selling apples in the fall is like falling out of a boat and hitting water — it’s too easy. “Again, focus on color, variety and

make sure to bring in some newer varieties to tempt shoppers,” he says. “Big, bold and colorful displays in the department, and smaller displays around the store will create a strong pull for shoppers to indulge. Don’t forget to focus on the healthful aspects, and make sure to offer a selection of conventional and organic options.”

Molly B. Zingler, director of marketing for the New York Apple Association (NYAA), based in Fishers, NY, says to sell more apples in the fall months, the organization recommends

an up-front, first-position display loaded with a full array of varieties and packages; totes, bags and loose fresh New York apples preferably in the high graphic Apple Country bins. Accompanying the displays should be our point-of-sale cards available for all retailers that highlight specific varieties, usage and health benefits.

“The NYAA provides bright, attractive point-of-sale material for retailers to merchandise within their displays; variety guides, usage charts, flavor charts and variety specific cards



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“The half-pallet display has five different products that make it the perfect one-stop shop, and our boxes have a rustic design that’s set a great fall ambience in the store.”

— Hollie Manier, Bay Baby Produce

help the consumer make an educated choice when choosing the right New York variety whether it is for snacks or cooking,” she says. “This year, we will unveil our updated New York apple variety guide featuring new recipes, variety information and tips for the consumer.”

Come fall, the NYAA will continue with its targeted media plan, radio, television and digital directing consumers to visit its website to educate themselves on their favorite New York varieties as well as to help consumers find farm markets, pick-your-own orchards, heirloom varieties, and fresh New York State cider using its handy locator map.

“At a retail level, we will continue to expand our digital coupon arena targeting the ever-growing population of shoppers who seek quality and value while utilizing their smartphones or Internet to guide their shopping experience,” says Zingler. “Fresh produce is a growing category for the digital coupon shopper, and we are proud to have initiated several, successful New York apple coupon programs with retailers.”

While New York apple displays with several packages such as polybags, totes and also fresh bulk apples are obviously the traditional approach to merchandising for fall, Zingler wonders: Why not add incremental displays of apples merchandised with an open-air cooler of cheese, New York cider, or even hard cider?

“Drive sales with a display of apples in the refrigerated pie-crust section or vice versa; add the pie crust to the produce section,” she says. “The sky’s the limit when it comes to cross-merchandising.”

Gault of TheGroceryGame.com notes that people forget how good apples are in a salad, and she recommends displaying them with celery and walnuts. She also suggests providing a recipe and pairing them with something unusual, such as basil.

“Pears and apples in one small basket added to the display are pleasing to the eye and evokes feelings of home and days gone by,” she says. “Together, pears and apples are beautiful just as a centerpiece in the kitchen or on the table, so displaying as such sparks the idea that these are like edible flowers for your home, and a lot cheaper too.”

PUMPKIN PATCH

Hollie Manier, sales manager for Bay Baby Produce, located in Burlington, WA, says each fall the company’s growers produce more than 200 acres of miniature and pie-sized pumpkins. “The best way to merchandise our product is to set a beautiful fall centerpiece in your store that shows consumers how they can mix the different products to create an aesthetically appealing decoration with ease,” she says. “We can provide headers to go on our pallet displays that serve as an example to consumers the ease to which they can create a stunning fall masterpiece. The headers can come with QR codes that lead to a Pinterest board with hundreds of ideas.”

Speaking of social media, Manier says Facebook is a great way to connect with consumers. “It’s our favorite avenue to show consumers where they can buy our products and how they can use our products — from decorating to cooking,” she says.

When it comes to increasing pumpkin sales, Manier notes stores that purchase a ready-to-go half-pallet display have a lot of success. “The half-pallet display has five different products that make it the perfect one-stop shop, and our boxes have a rustic design that’s set a great fall ambience in the store,” she says.

BACK TO SCHOOL

When school starts in September, parents and kids are looking for fun, convenient and healthy items to pack for snacks and lunches.

The NYAA’s Zingler says stores should provide the consumer with easy shopping displays with the New York varieties kids love. “Many New York shippers have smaller, ‘kid-sized’ New York apples that are the perfect size for lunches and afterschool snacks,” she says. “We have point-of-sale available that highlight the healthy benefits of New York apples, so moms and dads can be reassured they are making the right choice for their children’s snacks.”

Brous of Publix says having single-serve options such as vegetables and dip; snack packs like crunch apples or a mixture of apples and grapes; and snack packs that contain a juice box and fruit are all grab-and-go options that



are convenient for the customer and fun for the child. They also make great snack for portion control.

Bay Baby Produce's grab-and-go paint kits can be used to decorate apples and pumpkins and are a great promotion for back to school. "Parents can grab a few bags and bring them into the classroom for a fun fall back-to-school activity," says Manier. "Pumpkin Patch Pals are also a fun way for teachers to decorate the classroom, and we have lesson plans on our website to help give them ideas for using pumpkins in the fall."

Green Giant Fresh is committed to giving back, and the brand features Box Tops for Education clips — an important earning program that benefits participating schools.

"Creating promotions around this feature is a great opportunity for consumers — who are already in back-to-school mode — to participate in helping needy schools through this vital program," says Fancher.

Weidauer of Vestcom says artichokes are easy to prepare and a fun, alternative snack for lunchboxes come fall.

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

Come October, people purchase a lot of pumpkins for Halloween decorations, but both pumpkins and squash can be used in many holiday recipes. Thanksgiving is another holiday where produce sells well.

"This is where the gourds, winter squash and pumpkins come in, and really bring the fall colors along," says Weidauer. "Decorate the department with them, and show how to prepare things with squash and pomegranates. Don't forget the herbs — they are a big part of holiday cooking, and fresh alternatives are always better than what comes in jars."

Concord's McCaul says for Halloween, retailers should bring out the company's Halloween-themed floor displays for Caramel Apple Wrap and its Microwave Caramel Apple Kit. "This spirited display will add some excite-

"Greens are coming into their own in the fall, and it's a great time to promote them for lunches and dinners: broccoli bites, kale smoothies, and salads with endive, arugula and chicory are all nutritious options that shoppers don't often think about."

— Jeff Weidauer, Vestcom International

ment to the produce department," she says. "In addition, Concord Foods' new Pumpkin Spice Caramel Dip is perfect for Halloween or Thanksgiving apple displays. Our dip is made with real pumpkin and spices. It is delicious with apple wedges and other sliced fruit."

Zingler of NYAA says New York apples are the easy choice when it comes to the holiday season. "Starting with Halloween, our New York cider is the perfect choice for a witches brew recipe for consumers, and why not put a mock bobbing for New York apples display out to give shoppers a classic idea for Halloween fun," she says. "Thanksgiving is New York apple pie time; another great time to cross-merchandise pie crusts, mixes and cider preferably with

incremental displays of New York varieties."

With a return to schedules and more dinners at home, shoppers are always eager for healthful meal ideas.

"Greens are coming into their own in the fall, and it's a great time to promote them for lunches and dinners: broccoli bites, kale smoothies, and salads with endive, arugula and chicory are all nutritious options that shoppers don't often think about," says Weidauer of Vestcom. "Use the USDA MyPlate as a way to lay out the department for fall and show customers how easy it is to get the recommended servings of fruits and veggies. Smoothie demos are always popular, and a great way to sell more produce." **pb**


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GAME ON!

Produce can be the life of the tailgate party.

BY MARK HAMSTRA



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEL MONTE

If there were referees at tailgate parties, fans who got caught serving boring old hot dogs and burgers would get flagged with a 15-yard penalty.

Today's tailgaters — and those who host gatherings to watch sporting events from home as well (which is a pastime being coined "homegating") — are crafting more sophisticated fare that often includes produce used in innovative ways.

"Grilled fruits and vegetables are growing in popularity, along with trends of flavor and indulgent textures," says Tristan Simpson, chief communications officer, Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA. "Consumers are learning to be creative in their grilling and entertaining."

Using fresh ingredients at these types of events has become easier with the introduction of new, mobile cooking and cooling appliances, she says.

"Being able to prepare 'home-cooked' dishes allows grillers to become more adventurous with their tailgating menus," says Simpson.

“We see a definite opportunity for produce departments to create a grab-and-go space in the store dedicated to these consumers, with cross-merchandising selections that are ideal for these events. Bundling cross-category items with produce is another effective method.”

— Tristan Simpson, Ready Pac Foods



She cited 2014 research from Mintel noting that some 45 percent of the consumers surveyed reported eating a wider variety of fruit and vegetables than ever before.

“We can see that trend continuing — especially as Millennials become more independent and look to expand their palates without

compromising their health,” says Simpson.

She points to convenience and consistent freshness as key attributes “to attract the tailgater aficionado,” citing Ready Pac’s fresh-cut products such as its Complete Salad Kits and Fresh Fruit Party Platters.

Retailers can help promote tailgating sales by offering ideas for menus and preparation, says Simpson.

“All-inclusive ‘tailgating kits’ are a perfect solution for these events, because they provide ingredients for entire dishes and recipes,” she says. “We see a definite opportunity for produce departments to create a grab-and-go space in

the store dedicated to these consumers, with cross-merchandising selections that are ideal for these events. Bundling cross-category items with produce is another effective method.”

“Show consumers how easy it is to add produce to their tailgating menu,” advises Jenny Stornetta, marketing communications manager for Guadalupe, CA-based Apio, Inc. “Highlight products that can be thrown into their coolers to eat at the game without any pre-preparation. Vegetable party trays are a great example — they are ready to open and serve, and come in sizes that can feed just a few to an entire party.”

■ ON THE ROAD

Tailgating presents opportunities for experiential marketing.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Avocados from Mexico, as part of its extensive promotional plans for the upcoming fall sports season, plans to take its message right to the party.

The Denver, CO-based marketing agency’s “Tastiest Tailgate” promotional package, slated to run from September 15 to October 31, will include an Avocados from Mexico-sponsored booth at six college football tailgate events.

The Avocados from Mexico “Tailgate Tour” is just one example of the opportunities for experiential marketing at these types of events.

Dole Fresh Fruit, Westlake Village, CA, is a veteran of using food trucks and sampling tours to promote increased consumption of fresh produce, says Bill Goldfield, director of corporate communications at Dole.

For the past few years, Dole’s “Peel the



Love” food trucks promoted bananas and other tropical fruit at grocery stores and public events. “For 2015, we have greatly expanded on this idea with the ‘Get Up and Grow! Tour,’ which visits more than 44 cities across the U.S. and Canada between Memorial Day and Labor Day,” he says.

A joint effort between Dole Fresh Fruit, Dole Fresh Vegetables and the Dole Nutrition Institute, the tour challenges North Americans to improve their nutritional health through adopting a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.

“In all, our brightly wrapped vehicle, trailer and tent will stop at more than 480 retailers through September, driving incremental awareness, excitement and traffic to stores with hands-on activities, kid-focused fun, recipe samples, special takeaways and our interactive pledge and rewards program,” says Goldfield. **pb**

“These displays don’t need to be strictly in the produce section. A well-stocked and managed secondary display strategically placed next to traditional barbecue items elsewhere in the store can stimulate sales of fruits and vegetables outside of the produce section.”

— Bil Goldfield, Dole Fresh Fruit

THE MAIN INGREDIENT

It’s becoming more common for produce items to be a main-dish ingredient, instead of being used simply as a side dish or appetizer, says Bil Goldfield, director of corporate communications at Dole Fresh Fruit, based in Westlake Village, CA.

This is especially opportune in warmer

weather, when people are already cooking outdoors, he says. “We encourage adding fruits and vegetables to the grill at barbecues, tailgate parties and other events. On the fresh vegetable side, we see people discovering the great taste of grilled veggies, including non-traditional options such as Romaine lettuce.”

He notes Dole responded to consumer demand with new grilled produce recipes such as Grilled Romaine with Balsamic Glazed Strawberries and Charred Summer Salad. The salad includes cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, watermelon, pineapple, peaches, strawberries and Romaine lettuce, plus a grilled banana-cilantro pesto.

Goldfield says, in addition to grilled pineapple, grilled bananas “are increasingly popular,” which he attributes to Dole’s promotion of new usage ideas and recipes.

“In fact, Dole was an early leader in promoting grilled produce a few years ago with a unique campaign that promoted fun grilled recipes and highlighted the possibilities of bananas beyond being a breakfast or lunch



staple,” he says.

Goldfield suggests retailers capitalize on the tailgate possibilities of produce through unique, in-store merchandising and promotions themed to grilling.

“By merchandising grilling themes in the produce department, with preparation and pairing suggestions, recipes, POP and in-store sampling events — such as those of Dole’s Get Up and Grow! Tour [see “On The Road” on page 47], retailers can remind customers

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of the many unique possibilities of fruits and vegetables,” he says.

He also encourages retailers to extend summer-themed grilling promotions through the fall, when tailgating becomes even more popular.

“These displays don’t need to be strictly in the produce section,” says Goldfield. “A well-stocked and managed secondary display strategically placed next to traditional barbecue items elsewhere in the store can stimulate sales of fruits and vegetables outside of the produce section.”

Apio recently introduced a new line of Eat Smart Plant Powered Protein single serve salad kits, currently available in three flavors — BBQ Ranch, Super Caesar and Yogurt Curry. “What’s great about this new line of salad kits is that each contains at least 11 grams of protein and a third of the daily recommended value of fiber,” says Apio’s Stornetta.

CONVENIENCE IS KEY

For many tailgaters, access to items that require minimal preparation are important. Some produce suppliers are responding with items that are already partially or fully prepared.

“One of the biggest trends in produce right now is products that help consumers eat on the go and outside the home,” says Stornetta. “From single-serve salad kits to snack-size vegetable trays, there are a ton of new ways for people to incorporate produce into their tailgating menus.”

Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL, says the company offers some products that fit the bill perfectly, including Del Monte Fresh Guac and a line of fresh-cut grill trays that can be placed from the package directly on the grill.

“Most consumers do not want to have to prepare multiple items ahead of time, nor do they appreciate excess or difficult packaging,” he says, adding the Del Monte Fresh Guac product can be served directly from the container.

Christou suggests including tomatoes, bell peppers, onions and potatoes, among others, on the grill.

Grilling pineapple or bananas is an easy way to add a healthy, sweet and delicious dessert to the menu, he says. “Due to its high sugar content, grilling pineapple caramelizes the fruit, creating a golden brown color with a unique tropical flavor.”

In addition to the mixed vegetable grill trays, Del Monte also offers kabob kits, which Christou says, “are also ideal for tailgate

grilling.” Fruit is very versatile, says Christou, and it is important that the consumer is educated on the many ways to use it, he says. “Many of our products are perfect for tailgates and are great additions to your basic grill items.”

Del Monte works closely with its retail partners to develop promotional and merchandising activities designed to increase sales and educate consumers, says Christou. “This might include development of eye-catching POS for shelves, in-store demos and even working to improve labeling so information about the product is communicated directly on-pack,” he adds.

FUSION FLAVORS

One way to spice up a tailgate party is by tapping into consumers’ growing interest in ethnic cuisines. Sarah Pau, director of marketing for Pure Hothouse Foods, Leamington, Ontario, Canada, suggests the promotion of fusion condiments and toppings such as kimchi-style radishes or Tajin-flavored pickled cucumbers, which incorporate seasonings from Korea and Mexico, respectively.

“Some of the upcoming trends might not necessarily be in developing new products, but diversifying what is available by creating fusion condiments or toppings for the traditional dishes [such as burgers and hot dogs],” she says.

Pau also suggests promoting naturally-infused beverages with water or soda water to be used as a mixer, and notes that gluten-free options and healthy-snacking options can be promoted “to balance out the heavy meat consumption during big gathering events.”

For another twist, she suggests bun-less ground-beef sliders made with eggplant slices instead of bread. These can include apple slices, onions and herbs as well.

Eggplants can also be halved and partially hollowed out to be used as bowls for holding a vegetable-based stir-fry mix with peppers, onions and the diced eggplant, suggests Pau.

“Through attending various types of tailgating and social occasions, we studied and understood the importance of alternative options that are required and requested during these events,” says Pau. “We continuously provide different, unique ideas and cooking recipes for alternative cooking options through various types of platforms on social media.”

She says Pure Hothouse Flavor also used various tools to communicate with its consumer base, such as recipe cards inserted into packaged items, recipe suggestions on packages, and in-store demonstrations.

In-store demos, she says, can be used to

“visually give a consumer a better perspective of what their creation will become.” Other suggestions she has include offering grab-and-go snack packs containing produce, and cross-promoting vegetables near dips for tailgaters.

Doria Blonder, director of sales and marketing at New Limeco, the Princeton, FL-based grower/packer/shipper of mangos,

■ TAILGATING TEXAS-STYLE



One retailer that takes its tailgating seriously is San Antonio-based H-E-B, which is known for its partnerships with many of the Texas college and professional teams in the markets where it operates.

For example, the regional supermarket operator, with more than 360 locations in Texas and Mexico, recently inked an agreement to become the official sponsor of the Battle of the Piney Woods — an annual collegiate football game between Texas-based schools Sam Houston State University and Stephen F. Austin State University — for the next three years.

“For 110 years, H-E-B built a tradition that is truly Texas,” says Harlan Hooks, vice president of marketing and merchandising for H-E-B’s Houston division, in a statement. “We are proud to join this gridiron classic in its 90th year, and look forward to building a Texas-sized atmosphere for years to come.”

H-E-B’s ongoing sports tie-ins include extensive tailgating promotions, with such efforts as “Tailgater of the Game” competitions at National Football League Houston Texans games and those of several Texas universities.

Among its produce-centric tailgating recipe suggestions: grilled steak and vegetables with yellow onions, red bell peppers, zucchini, and Portobello mushrooms; salad with vine-ripened tomatoes and basil pesto; and seven-layer dip, with guacamole, iceberg lettuce, fresh tomatoes and green onions. **pb**

avocados and other produce, sees more Asian influences in recipes.

“We see mixing more local and exotic foods, as well as traditional mixed with exotic in recipes,” she says. Blonder notes coconut has been in high demand, and can be promoted for tailgating in the form of coconut bacon — made by mixing fresh coconut flakes with liquid smoke, smoked paprika and maple syrup. “Try that on a burger,” she says.

Some other tailgating recipe ideas include chicken, mango and papaya kabobs; grilled chicken and mango salad; avocado watermelon

salad; avocado deviled eggs; quinoa lettuce wraps with chicken, avocado and mango; and grilled lobster salad with avocados and papayas.

She says a staple at her barbecues and tailgates is an avocado, tomato and onion salad topped with a lime vinaigrette dressing. “Avocados are a great mayo substitute as well, so you are seeing that show up more in a lot of tailgate foods,” says Blonder. “Instead of sandwiches with mayo, avocado is being used in its place.”

She also suggests retailers offer recipe ideas and post signage in the produce area signaling

that items are “great for grilling.”

GUACAMOLE HIGHLIGHTS

Of course, no tailgate party is complete without guacamole, and Avocados from Mexico has big plans to promote its products this fall. The marketing group has a “Tastiest Tailgate” promotion slated for Sept. 15 through Oct. 31, featuring a new, unique display bin. The display will include a consumer sweepstakes and an offer of a free can of Ro*Tel diced tomatoes and green chilies with the purchase of three avocados — which are the two main ingredients in the guacamole recipe that accompanies the promotion.

Consumers will also be directed to the Avofan website for the a chance to win “The Ultimate Tastiest Tailgate Prize Pack.” Other media will include Avocados from Mexico posts on Facebook and Twitter, branded commercials on network TV, and an electronic billboard in Times Square.

There will also be opportunities for retailers to win prizes for creativity in displays.

Concord Foods in Brockton, MA, offers a Guacamole Mix. The company also plans to promote more at retail. “Consumers across the U.S. are becoming more familiar with avocados,” says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager at Concord Foods. “A lot of this is due to the popularity of guacamole, which has become a staple at tailgating parties. In fact, the Super Bowl is the top sales occasion for avocados on an annual basis.”

She suggests during football season, retailers should create prominent displays of avocados and Guacamole Mix. “It’s also best to use promotional signage; identify the products and the display’s intent,” says McCaul.

Concord Foods provides a football-themed floor display for its guacamole and salsa seasoning mixes, which make it easy for retailers to display the mix adjacent to the avocados. “In addition, it adds a bit of spirit to the produce department,” adds McCaul.

Last year Roche Bros., an 18-store supermarket chain based in Wellesley, MA, set up “Guacamole Outposts” in its stores, where it offered guacamole made-to-order and promoted it for tailgating (in addition to fresh Hass Avocados in the produce department).

“Handmade in store, our version contains fresh avocados, onions, lime, cilantro, salt and pepper,” the company said in promoting the Guacamole Outposts, which were available on game-day weekends when the New England Patriots played. “So simple, yet so mesmerizing that we love to roll out our guacamole carts to make this treat right in front of you.” **pb**



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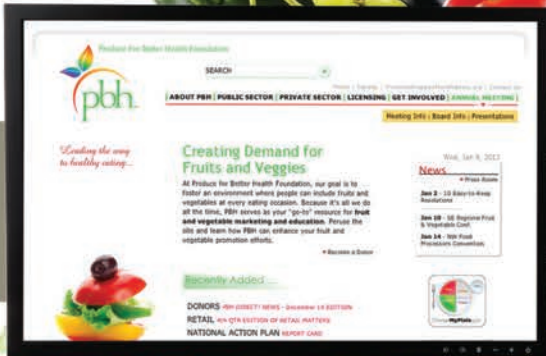
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Washington Apples Radiate

From Ambrosia to Breeze, a full pipeline of varieties shine from the Evergreen State.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Washington's fall apple season is a bit like returning to school after summer break — there are always plenty of familiar friends, but there are also some new names and faces to learn.

Early indications from the Wenatchee-based Washington Apple Commission (WAC) point to an ample supply of apples in the upcoming harvest, in terms of both quantity and variety. The Evergreen State accounts for 70 percent of the apple production in the U.S., and is also a major exporter, according to data from the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

This past season was a tumultuous one for growers in Washington. The state generated a record harvest of more than 142.8 million fresh bushels, according to the WAC, but a major setback was the labor dispute at West Coast ports, which took a big bite out of export volume.

With that unfortunate situation behind them, growers are hopeful that the upcoming season will be strong, if perhaps not quite as productive as the most recent cycle.

“We are on a growth trend in the state of Washington,” says Todd Fryhover, president of the WAC. “A lot of the growth is really in some of the new varieties.”

Fryhover projects volume in the upcoming 2015/2016 season will be down from the recent record crop, “but not significantly down.”

“We are conservatively looking at 125 million fresh bushels for 2015 through 2016,” he says. “I think the probability would be that it will be higher rather than lower.”

Many of the familiar mainstay varieties are expected to remain stable or to decline slightly, while newer varieties will likely continue to increase in production as more growers add these trees to their orchards.

Red Delicious, the largest variety at about 44 million fresh bushels last season, will likely

see a decline, as will Gold Delicious, with about 12 million fresh bushels, according to Fryhover. Granny Smith and Fuji, at about 15.6 million and 18.5 million fresh bushels, respectively, are stable.

Among the varieties seeing growth in volume are Gala apples, at 31 million bushels; Honeycrisp, at 6.6 million bushels; and Cripps Pink (alternatively known as Pink Lady) at about 4 million; plus “a host of other smaller-volume varieties,” says Fryhover.

Apple growers in Washington are planting denser orchards with more trees per acre, says Fryhover, which explains why production has been increasing despite the fact total acreage has been stable or declining slightly.

“We’re obviously producing more apples, but we are producing the right apples,” he says. “Consumers are going to be able to get everything they want out of the state of Washington, and I know it’s going to be a good experience that brings people back to eating more apples

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GAINING TRACTION

Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing at Columbia Marketing International, Wenatchee, WA, says he is looking forward to a strong harvest this year. “Obviously we have a lot of weather to get through between now and harvest, but all indications are this should be a stellar crop,” he says.

Lutz says his company is continuing to put a big effort behind its “big three” relatively new varieties — Ambrosia, KIKU and Kanzi.

“Ambrosia has been around the longest and is really getting traction nationally at the retail level,” he says. “KIKU and Kanzi are terrific new varieties that are already setting records with retailers. In addition, we will again put a big effort behind our Daisy Girl Organics apples and pears. Daisy Girl is the No. 1 selling branded organic apple in the U.S., so it’s been a big winner for us and has a great consumer following.”

Lutz says Columbia’s sales team puts a big effort behind these new varieties by targeting key retail accounts nationally. “We can’t be everywhere, so identifying retail chains that are excited about having a differentiated apple category is the key,” he says. “We then support the sales efforts with targeted store promotions, retail POS and custom display boxes to help catch the attention of consumers moving through the retail produce department.”

One of the biggest challenges for the industry, says Lutz, is the large number of

new, branded apples. “The problem with this variable is retail shelf space is limited and highly competitive,” he says. “So this factor puts the pressure on the producers of each apple to document for retailers why these apples belong on the shelf, who the target consumer is, and how best to merchandise and promote them.

“We’re past the time when retailers will take any new variety just because some grower out there wanted to plant it. If it can’t attract consumers and generate at least as much in retail sales dollars of the space of the item it replaced, why bother? And that’s a big part of our challenge going forward — to show retailers the best practices for being successful with new varieties.”

TRIAL STAGES

Keith Mathews, chief executive of First-Fruits Marketing — the sales entity for Broetje Orchards, Prescott, WA — says Broetje has several apples in the “trial stage.” Two of its newer apples that are in commercial supply — the Opal and the Sweetie — show strong promise for ongoing growth, he says.

“Apple growers are creative, and a historically large volume of ‘new’ apples are coming forward — Sonya, Envy, Cosmic Crisp, Ambrosia and many others,” he says. “The challenge is to match volume somewhat reasonably to projected sales, because retailers will likely highlight a ‘niche’ variety for a shorter period of time.”

This will be the company’s fifth year of commercial volume of the Opal, says Mathews.



It will be promoted through couponing, extensive social media, consumer events like fun runs and conventions, and other methods.

“Of course sales are through traditional retail, so we have interfaced strongly with good and long-term customers also,” he explains. “Working to drive awareness and experience directly through to the consumer has been successful for us, but the process is ongoing.”

Mathews says the company plans to double its production of Opal in the next two years, up from its current volume of 500,000 euro cartons.

Overall, retail competition helped keep shelf prices low — as low as 99 cents per pound — which drives high demand for Washington’s ample supply, says Mathews. “That ‘bargain’ for consumers increased the volume of purchases, and helped us sell through this large volume of fresh apples,” he says.

■ SAMPLING AT OKIE’S THRIFTWAY MARKET

One retailer that likes to showcase apples from Washington is Okie’s Thriftway Market, in Ocean Park, WA, a single-unit, locally owned and operated store.

Dwayne Smallwood, produce manager at Okie’s, says he likes to do a lot of sampling with new apple varieties. “We’ll also put them on an end display instead of just lining them up on the rack,” he says.

In addition, the ad group Okie’s belongs to will often feature new apple varieties for a week or two to introduce them, he says. The company buys all of its produce through Charlie’s Produce, a Seattle-based supplier with distribution centers along the West Coast from California to Alaska.

Among the newer varieties of apples, Smallwood says the Opal “has been a real big hit,” and the Jazz apple variety, origi-

nally from New Zealand but now grown in Washington and other places around the world, is also popular with customers. “It’s a nice, crisp apple,” he says.

Okie’s typically displays about nine varieties of apples, and keeps the “standard varieties” in stock at all times. It rotates others into the mix, including new varieties for short periods.

When it comes to sampling the new varieties, Smallwood says he trains his employees by giving them as much information as he can, tasting them, and providing them with clues about the flavors.

“When a customer is looking at something new, we just grab one right off the table, and cut it for them,” he says. “That usually draws a few people around [for group selling].”

NEW CROSS VARIETIES

Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Wenatchee-based Stemilt Growers, says Stemilt is focusing this season on the Sweet-Tango apple variety, which was developed by the University of Minnesota and is a cross between Honeycrisp and Zestar.

“It has the great juice and fracture of the Honeycrisp, with a great flavor twist from the Zestar,” says Pepperl.

Stemilt is a member of the NBT (Next Big Thing) group, the cooperative that has the license to grow and market SweetTango. Stemilt grows and markets this fruit for the West Coast retail region of the U.S.

Another apple Stemilt is working hard on is the Piñata apple, which is a cross of three heirloom apples: Cox’s Orange Pippin, Golden Delicious and Duchess of Oldenburg. “It is an incredibly beautiful apple with a flavor unique

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“We also see more club or niche varieties, and retailers are lining up various strategies on how to handle these newer varieties.”

— Chuck Sinks, Sage Fruit Co.

to the apple category,” says Pepperl. “It has a tropical overtone to it, which is where we get the tagline, ‘Classic apple flavors with a tropical twist.’”

Piñata volume has grown close to a half million boxes, he says, and is popular both as a fresh snack and for use in cooking.

Stemilt is also one of the largest Pink Lady growers in the U.S., and has plantings of the new early Pink Lady, which will allow retailers to get that variety on the shelves in early October. “It is unique in flavor, texture and firmness,” says Pepperl, adding that “Kids love it.”

Stemilt promotes new apple varieties in a few different ways, including providing pop-up bins to create impactful displays. “In the case of Piñata, we pack the fruit in one of the most colorful cartons ever made for apples,” he says. “It shows the Piñata floating in the ocean like an island with a palm tree for a stem. It ties in

with the ‘Classic Apple Flavors with a Tropical Twist’ tagline that we put on the box and in the marketing materials.”

Stemilt also provides demo programs, custom POS materials, and digital assets for retailers.

“Display contests are also a big deal at Stemilt,” says Pepperl. “They build excitement for the produce managers and consumers.”

Stemilt also features recipes for consumers online and partners with food bloggers to help spread the word. The Piñata and Pink Lady varieties are also a part of Stemilt’s Lil Snapper kids-sized fruit program, which features smaller fruit sizing in a laminated, re-sealable pouch bag.

In addition, Stemilt also has a new “Fresh Blenders” offering, which consists of a 5-pound bag targeted to consumers who like to use apples in juice blends and smoothies.

“Having Lil Snappers, Fresh Blenders,

Stemilt Artisan Organic, and our premium bulk program allows Stemilt to segment the crop for the optimum sales and needs of the consumer,” says Pepperl. “This is a first-of-its-kind mix of product from one grower/shipper/marketer. We are very proud of this lineup.”

NEW ZEALAND CONNECTION

Sage Fruit Co., Yakima, WA, is one of several growers that adopted varieties originally from New Zealand. Sage had been importing a small quantity of Breeze apples for the past couple of years from that island nation, but now it has plantings in Washington.

“This variety matures just before a Gala, so it is an early harvest apple,” says Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage. He describes it as having a pinkish-red blush over a yellow background. “The Breeze is aromatic and sweet with a very crisp, dense white flesh.”

Sinks anticipates Breeze production will increase during the next two to three years from Sage Fruit’s orchards. It is seeking to promote Breeze through demos and secondary display bins, and is offering them in several geographic locations around the country.

“Volume is small right now, but response has been very favorable as it is a very great-



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tasting apple," says Sinks.

He says he expects the retail emphasis on varieties to continue. "We also see more club or niche varieties, and retailers are lining up various strategies on how to handle these newer varieties," he says. "Some are bringing different ones in for a month a time, others are carrying a couple as long as there is availability.

"The apple category has more variety than ever, but varieties haven't really been removed from the mix. It will be interesting to see if some traditional varieties eventually are not handled by certain retailers in the future."

Chelan Fresh Marketing, the sales and marketing representative for Gebbers Farms and Chelan Fruit Cooperative, is another Washington apple marketer with a New Zealand connection. Mac Riggan, director of marketing, Chelan Fresh, based in Chelan, WA, says the company is planning a big push for its new Rockit apples from New Zealand this year.

"We are the North American licensee for the apple, which means we have the rights to grow it, pack it and ship it in the United States," he says. "We have some trees in the ground, and we anticipate having fruit this fall, but we are not sure yet if we will pack it. In two to three years, we will have some pretty good volume domestically, so we are pretty excited about that apple."

Chelan plans to promote the Rockit with a retail display called the "Rockit Launcher," which will be available in three different formats: It can be opened wide, or it can be bent around a corner, or it can be displayed as a cube.

"It's very versatile as far as where it will fit in the grocer's produce department," says Riggan. "It will have high visibility, and we'll probably also have some demos with it."

Chelan is also looking ahead to a new variety called the SugarBee, which is a cross between a Honeycrisp and an unknown variety.

"It's a very good storing apple, and an incredibly good eating apple, with a little thicker skin than the Honeycrisp, so it lends itself to packing, and is more grower-friendly," says Riggan. "It also seems to maintain its flavor throughout its storage life. It's been tested up to 11 months, with success. We are excited, and we are trying to get trees in the ground as quickly as we can."

Riggan says supply will be limited at

first, but the SugarBee was promoted at the upcoming Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit.

"We had about 15 bins last year, and we sent quite a few samples out to retailers so they know it's coming," says Riggan, adding it might be another couple of years before the SugarBee reaches widespread distribution.

SLICED VARIETIES

This season Crunch Pak, the Cashmere, WA-based provider of fresh sliced apples, is slicing Ambrosia apples for its variety-specific peel and reseal bags. Crunch Pak added Ambrosia apples due to the variety's sweet/tart flavor and firm texture.

"Our shoppers are apple savvy; they know what they like, and they look for their favorite varieties in store," says Krista Jones, director of brand marketing and product innovation at Crunch Pak. "We created the peel and reseal bag based on shopper feedback; consumers tell us they want to use one bag multiple times, and they want their favorite apples in a convenient form."

Crunch Pak is also adding Pink Lady to its selection of nationally known sliced apples. The branded Pink Lady slices are slated to launch this summer, and will be available in various sizes, including a 2-pound package.

Crunch Pak is also launching three new items — a DipperZ snack tray featuring the character Olaf from Disney's *Frozen* movie; a Tart Apple with Salted Caramel DipperZ; and a Sweet Apple with Strawberry Greek Yogurt DipperZ — as extensions of the Crunch Pak branded DipperZ line.

EXPORT POTENTIAL

Boosting hopes for the success of Washington growers in the coming season is the newly opened access to the massive Chinese market, notes Riggan of Chelan Fresh Marketing. "That's a real opportunity there," he says. "I am also hoping to see growing economies in India and Mexico, so they can afford a little better apple out of Washington."

Riggan notes, however, that the strong U.S. dollar does cloud some of the enthusiasm about exports. "But I'm bullish on the future," he says. "I think the world's economies are going to continue to grow, and hopefully will increase demand for high-quality apples. Washington apples are the best in the world. We grow a great product in a great area, and we have a world-class port right here in Seattle." **pb**





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Trade Packaging Molds To Consumer Demand



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHANTLER PACKAGING INC.

Convenience is key, and industry players are meeting needs in various ways.

BY BOB JOHNSON

The demand for the produce industry to enact strict food safety programs led to widespread use of trade packaging with labels that allow retailers to quickly determine where and when the contents of a case were harvested.

More recently, increasing insistence by consumers for convenience is changing the way fruits and vegetables are displayed in the produce department, and that is changing the packaging used to ship items to supermarket distribution centers.

With all the changes in labeling requirements and convenient consumer packaging, however, cardboard boxes are still the standard in produce and may prove flexible enough to adapt to this latest trend.

"Cardboard is No. 1," says Rachel Kenyon, vice president of the Fibre Box Association in Elk Grove Village, IL.

CONSUMER PACKS BRING CHANGE

More consumers than ever want to buy produce in packages that let them see the product, open and reseal it easily, as well as store it securely on their kitchen shelves or in the refrigerator.

Specifications for the trade packaging

that carries these convenient containers to the distribution center change depending on the nature of the consumer packaging that is put out on the produce department shelves.

"If you are shipping a container (such as a clamshell) the primary package can bear part of the responsibility for holding the product," says Kenyon. "A pouch can't bear the same responsibility for holding the product. Your box would be designed differently."

Cardboard is routinely customized to suit the contents that are being shipped in bulk or in packaging. The shape of the container and the strength of the material can be custom fit to the contents of the box.

"One of the great things about corrugated is you can make boxes any size or shape you want," says Doug Rethlake, marketing manager at International Paper in Memphis, TN. "Most of the consumer packs fit into standard boxes, but we can customize your inner pack, so you're not shipping air."

Because most cardboard boxes are designed for a very specific purpose, according to Kenyon, produce trade packaging can, and should be, adjusted as the consumer packages it delivers change.

"The biggest request I've heard in the past

12 to 18 months is convenience," says Sam Monte, director of operations at Monte Packaging in Riverside, MI. "That's not new, but consumer packs in pouch bags offer convenience and access. Pouching in resealable bags gives consumers something that will sit up in the refrigerator and increase shelf life."

These convenient, yet secure, packages are also in vogue, because they can easily carry information about the product and where it was grown.

"Consumers want information on the farm that grew their produce — including sustainability and growing practices. We also see a lot of our customers utilizing the label space to address these consumer concerns," says Kristin Yerecic, produce marketing manager at Yerecic Label in New Kensington, PA. "Traceability gained a lot of traction in the past few years, but I think the bigger trend is more about transparency."

There are also farmers or grower-shippers interested in using produce packages to tell their story. "Some of our customers are growers who created a local or regional brand they want promoted, and some are national brands," says Monte.

Consumer packs consisting of netting with

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a film can accommodate marketing graphics and product information. Tags and labels can also be attached to the netting, to further expand opportunities for information and promotion.

"We do the netting, tags, labels and film," says Jeff Watkin, graphic and marketing

manager at Collinsville, IL-based Sev-Rend Corporation, which is a printing manufacturer specialized in packaging produce. "We're seeing a lot more netted bags with full wrap film on them. It gives the grower/packer more surface area for recipes, information on their company, product origin info, and marketing

promotions."

Packaged produce can also accommodate the desire of some major retailers to move toward more private label. "You're definitely seeing more produce delivered in the netting," says Watkin. "We are seeing major retailers shifting to that packaging style, too. We're seeing more private label like Target's Market Pantry developing within the produce section of retail."

The shift toward consumer packs and away from bulk shipments also accommodates offering information on how to prepare and store produce. "There is a big push in produce now to include customer-driven information on labels such as recipes, storage information and finished dish photos," says Yerecic. "Consumer research shows consumers need help with how to prepare unfamiliar produce, and they want new ideas for their tried-and-true produce. We see more growers and retailers utilizing this information to really connect with shoppers at the point of purchase."

Cardboard box purveyors are hearing from retailers drawn to corrugated because it can display messages. "Retailers like corrugated, because they can print logos on the box," says Michelle Thompson, communications director for New York-based Corrugated Packaging Delivers, an organization of growers, packers and shippers, companies and associations in the U.S. and Canada that supports the use of single-use corrugated packaging.

Monte is also seeing interest by retailers and consumers in displaying produce in packaging that includes information on food preparation.

"You're seeing 12-ounce bags of jalapeños with recipes on the back," he says, "or packages of tomatoes with salsa recipes."

There looks to be a continuing trend for more produce to be shipped in consumer packages, rather than loose in bulk, the specifications for trade packaging are also shifting.

"Some commodities that may have been shipped in bulk before are in a corrugated master of some type," says Monte. "Pears, apples and table grapes were all packed in bulk before, but we're seeing a little bit of a shift to packaging ready for the consumer to grab off the shelf. It gives a better end user experience."

THE GLOBAL PACKAGE

While consumers want a package with the story of a farmer down the road, they also want a wide variety fruits and vegetables economically available 365 days a year, and that only comes with global supply.

And there are specifications for trade

■ PACKAGING GREEN ENOUGH FOR ORGANIC PRODUCE

Although trade packaging that is organic in the strictest sense of the word is virtually non-existent, packaging certified appropriate for the transport of organic produce is widely available.

Use of packaging material certified to be environmentally friendly can help when merchandising organic produce.

"It's a great way to differentiate the organic produce," says Sam Monte, director of operations at Monte Packaging in Riverside, MI. "It tells the consumer these people are even dedicated to reducing the carbon footprint in getting it to me."

Monte Packaging has a line of boxes called Greencoat that can be recycled or composted, because there is no wax used in shielding the cardboard from moisture.

"We have a line of eco-friendly, 100-percent-recyclable corrugated boxes," says Monte. "We had the product line going for two years. Last year was successful testing. We tried it with different commodities and people accepted it, but there has not been a major shift."

Monte also has compostable trays that can be used to display a number of different produce items.

"We're also the exclusive North American distributor of a 100 percent compostable palm fiber tray," says Monte. "That tray is popular for organic produce. It can hold a four count of tomatoes or two Portobello mushrooms. It's a great line to accommodate an organic commodity."

This is a compostable, recyclable, plant-based package that can be used to ship and display organic produce.

OMRI (the Organic Materials Review Institute) is the arbiter of what is and is not permissible in the production, processing and distribution of organic produce, in accordance with the USDA National Organic Program Rule."

OMRI's listing includes packaging that, while not organic, is approved for use transporting or displaying organic produce.

"To my knowledge there are no regula-

tions in place that differentiate packaging requirements between the packaging of organic and non-organic produce," says Roy Ferguson, chief executive at Chantler Packaging in Toronto, Canada. "We have been listed with OMRI for several years for our PrimePro MAP packaging materials."

PrimePro is a line of packaging that maintains freshness and extends the shelf life of produce by removing ethylene gas.

Cardboard boxes were among the first products to be recycled, and they remain among the most widely recycled materials.

"Ninety percent of all corrugated is recycled, which makes it highly sustainable," says Michelle Thompson, communications director for Corrugated Packaging Delivers, New York, NY.

Ironically, plastic containers can be also certified for transporting organic produce, because they conserve resources by being reusable. "Since 2008, IFCO RPCs (reusable plastic containers) are approved for use with organic produce by the Organic Materials Review Institute, a national nonprofit organization that determines which input products are allowed for use in organic production and processing," says Hillary Femal, vice president for global marketing at IFCO in Tampa, FL.

IFCO, which has 175 million reusable plastic containers in circulation worldwide, also claims there are numerous ways in which these containers help reduce food waste.

"Another important global trend is the desire to reduce food waste — the No. 1 cause of methane — the leading cause of landfill-based greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change," says Femal. "IFCO RPCs reduce fresh food spoilage and damage because they cool product faster and protect food better than one-way packaging, therefore maximizing sellable product, reducing waste and boosting efficiency along the value chain."

pb

packaging that can accommodate the global shipment of perishable fruits and vegetables.

“Our food supply is now truly global, with food and ingredients moving quickly and efficiently across borders and around the world,” says Hillary Femal, vice president for global marketing at IFCO in Tampa, FL. “IFCO moves pears from Argentina, pineapples from Costa Rica, bananas from Central America and kiwi from New Zealand to multiple markets around the globe.”

IFCO, an international player with its pool of reusable plastic containers (RPCs), promotes the notion that RPCs are more efficient and better protect produce on trips half way around the world or shorter journeys from the distribution center to the department floor.

“A recent study by researchers at Cal Poly showed that RPCs are more efficient, easier to handle and more effective in protecting fresh food than one-way packaging,” says Femal. “The study showed that in stores, RPCs are 5 percent more efficient than one-way packaging for product stocking and 53 percent more efficient when it comes to order picking, because RPCs are rigid, ergonomic, standardized and stackable. They are also 6 percent more efficient to transport to store shelves.”

The Cal Poly Packaging Research Consortium is supported by some of the major players in California agriculture including Tanimura & Antle, Earthbound Farm, Paramount Farms, Taylor Farms, and Ocean Mist Farms, as well as retailers and packagers.

Researchers at the consortium completed publicly available studies yielding a wealth of highly detailed information on various economic and environmental aspects of produce packaging.

As the battle over paper or plastic reaches new levels of research, Corrugated Packaging Delivers also cites scientific studies claiming that corrugated is safer when it comes to containing major food safety threats.

If imported produce is to be displayed in consumer packaging, it is most likely shipped in bulk and packaged in the U.S.

“A majority of the netted packaging is in the U.S., but we have some we ship to Canada and some to Mexico,” says Watkin of Sev-Rend Corporation.

One crucial advantage of cardboard containers is the ease with which they can be designed to suit their purpose, even if that means they have to hold up for thousands of miles.

“Most corrugated products are designed for what they ship,” says Kenyon of Fibre Box Association.

They are designed for what they are holding. All corrugated boxes are designed for what they carry, except for some stock boxes that are used mainly for moving.”

There may be some advantages in using plastic to ship relatively small quantities of produce.

“Globally, retailers are placing a premium on efficiency because of the growth of smaller-format urban retail locations that have less storage capacity and floor space and that need

more frequent deliveries,” says Femal. “RPCs are the perfect solution to meet this trend in the U.S. and around the world.”

The leading RPC purveyor has software that retailers can use to evaluate the efficiency of their system, including the packaging used.

“We developed an economic modeling tool, freshIMPACT, that we are using to help retailers examine their input costs and to reduce the costs of transporting and displaying fresh food in stores,” says Femal. **pb**



The graphic is a promotional poster for the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Show. At the top, there is a horizontal strip of seven small images showing various food service and retail scenes. Below this is a large green circular logo with the text "FLORIDA Restaurant & Lodging Show". The main text in the center reads "DISCOVER WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT & WHAT'S TRENDING!" in large, bold, white letters, followed by "Feed Your Foodservice Success Strategies" in a green, handwritten-style font. Below the main text is a green banner with white text listing highlights: "— HIGHLIGHTS —", "Ferdinand Metz Foodservice Forum", "Food Trends Experience • Fresh From Florida Pavilion", "NEW! Beer, Wine & Spirits Pavilion", "Culinary Demonstration Theater • ACF Culinary Competitions", and "New Product Gallery • 500+ Leading Vendors". At the bottom, a white banner contains the dates "OCTOBER 6-8, 2015", the location "ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER", and "ORLANDO, FL". Below this are four columns of logos and text: "Presenting:" with the Ferdinand Metz Foodservice Forum logo; "Sponsored by:" with the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association logo; "Produced & Managed by:" with the Urban Solutions logo; "Featuring:" with the Food Trends Experience logo; "Introducing:" with the Beer, Wine & Spirits Pavilion logo; and "Competition Sponsor:" with the American Culinary Federation logo. At the very bottom, it says "GAIN A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR BUSINESS" and provides the website "www.flrestaurantandlodgingshow.com".

Working Through The Challenges Of Organic Supply



Using specialized organic distributors can smooth out the supply chain and maintain consistency.

BY BOB JOHNSON

of produce sold in the U.S. is organic.”

As organic growers work to bring their yields and control of weeds, pests and diseases to levels reached by their conventional cousins, shippers and retailers face their own challenge: find organic suppliers who developed a network that lets them ship produce grown

in many regions.

THE SUPPLY CHALLENGE

Some major mainstream supermarkets try to offer organic options for all the items in the produce department.

“Our goal is to have at least one organic

Even in an age when most consumers have grown price-conscious, organic fruits and vegetables continue to grow as an essential in a well-stocked produce department.

“You’ll find organic produce — and lots of other organic products — available in pretty much every retailer these days,” says Samantha Cabaluna, vice president for marketing and communications at Earthbound Farm in San Juan Bautista, CA. “Almost every grocery store now carries at least some organic produce. According to the Organic Trade Association’s 2014 *Organic Industry Survey*, about 11 percent



counterpart to the conventional produce offering,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets in Lakeland, FL. “We wouldn’t say it’s more difficult to source organic items; however, there are required certifications and limited growers of organics.”

There are a few organic growers with the resources to reliably supply a few important items all year, to virtually every region of the country.

“Organic produce is distributed pretty much in the same way that conventionally grown product is distributed,” says Cabaluna. “Just as is the case with most of the produce industry, we sell our organic salads, fruits and vegetables FOB, which means retailers and wholesalers pick up their orders at our cooler.”

The distribution of Earthbound Farm salads can be much like conventional produce because the company is a national leader in an item (packaged salads) that Nielsen reports is nearly 25 percent organic.

When grower-shippers are of substantial size, the organic and conventional supply chains are similar.

“Organic harvest, cooling, shipping, and distribution practices parallel with conventionally grown produce,” says Kyle Vilhauer, sales executive at Lakeside Organic Gardens in Watsonville, CA.

Lakeside uses a system common among major California vegetable growers to provide a 12-month supply of scores of organic vegetable varieties, complementing its operations

“Although improving with international sourcing, organic produce tends to have more gaps regarding consistent supply.”

— Mitch Blumenthal, Global Organics

in the Pajaro Valley near the coast with winter production in the Imperial Valley desert region.

Some items, however, are not always as easily and reliably sourced as packaged salads and other green vegetables, and consistency of supply is essential for a good organic retail effort.

“There are organic produce items Publix tries to have all the time,” says Brous. “However, availability is dependent on several variables including time, season and weather conditions just to name a few.”

“Retailers like to offer an item only if it is going to be available to them for a good period of time,” says Mitch Blumenthal, founder, farmer and chief executive at Global Organics in Sarasota, FL. “For example, we tray wrap corn for several major chains. When our own Florida crop ends, we scramble to find other growers so we can keep the item available.”

Despite advances in organic growing, however, supply of some items is still less

predictable.

“It is challenging to grow corn organically due to worm pressure that conventional growers can more effectively spray for,” says Blumenthal. “Buyers don’t want to hear this, and we don’t want them to remove it from their order guide. If they do, it can take the less flexible chains a few weeks to activate that item again. Although improving with international sourcing, organic produce tends to have more gaps regarding consistent supply.”

While there can be supply gaps of a few items, the price fluctuations caused by temporary shortages in conventional produce may also be even more pronounced in organics.

“We can have organic broccoli going for \$32 a box for days, and all of a sudden it’s \$18. That’s a big disparity,” says Andy Martin, president of A&A Organic Farms in Watsonville, CA. “It’s worth whatever they’re going to pay for it.”

Many mid-sized farmers first switched to organic in order to get out from underneath the razor-thin margins of mainstream commodity production, and some of these growers are still looking for scarce but desirable organic varieties.

“We try to find the niche items that always fetch a good price,” says Martin. “We’re mostly a sales agent, but we’re invested in some of the farms.”

Gaps in supply have become far fewer and farther apart, however, because organic growers, shippers and wholesalers developed their own mature system of producing and



organic marketing

shipping fruits and vegetables.

“Organics is a mainstream category, and it’s not only a large part of the growers’ business today, but it’s also a large part of our business and the retailer business. So issues that you may have had 10 years ago don’t really apply today — as far as having to consolidate organics — because the volume isn’t there,” says Nick Mascari, assistant director of procurement at Indianapolis Fruit Company in Indianapolis, IN. “The issue today is actually having your whole order filled due to demand exceeding

supply.”

As a result of this maturation, stores that concentrate on offering a full range of organic produce are able to rival the variety of conventional fruits and vegetables displayed in large supermarkets.

THE GAP IS CLOSING

“The only difference would be variety offered, but I believe the gap is closing between what a Whole Foods Market offers and a traditional mainstream grocery store,” says Mascari.

Medium-sized organic shippers may sell to larger distributors, who in turn sell and ship the produce to the supermarket distribution centers, adding a step to the process.

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There can be situations where using specialized organic distributors can smooth out the supply chain and maintain consistency in offering many varieties.

“Successful retailers understand the importance of using an organic distributor such as ourselves,” says Blumenthal. “We are tuned into the market and know who has what and when. We know when it’s time to stop buying organic kale from Florida, because it is too hot.”

This Florida-based operation counts on an aggregator to also line up organic produce from California farms.

“We use a consolidator in Los Angeles,” says Blumenthal. “We have many small farms ship their products to this central location, and then we send our trucks to pick up all the different items as one stop. I only know of one retailer who does this as well ... again, this is something that we are doing for them, here in our facility.”

Increased volume also brought transportation costs in line with conventional, by significantly reducing the cost of shipping organic produce.

“I can’t speak for every company out there, but for a full service wholesaler like Indianapolis Fruit Company, we are able to procure in volume. Where volume procurement is not possible, we are either loading at the same sheds as our conventional suppliers, or we are loading in the same area, so it makes it possible to keep supply chain cost down,” says Mascari.

Both shipping costs and the distributor margins for organics shrunk to levels close to those for conventional produce.

“The freight is the same for organic, so I would imagine each distributor has its own formula for the mark up,” says Martin. “Organic is so competitive right now there is a good reason not to mark it up.”

At the end of the day, the challenges in

“Product delivered direct to individuals in small amounts are being sold through wholesalers like us, because they don’t have the means to procure in volume or the space to warehouse the product.”

— Nick Mascari, Indianapolis Fruit Company

producing and shipping organic produce are the same for the organic supply chain as the conventional.

“With organics, as with conventional, you still have to: get the right product to the right customer, at the right time, at the right place, in the right condition, in the right quality at the right cost,” says Mascari. “If I had to say there was a specific difference, it would be turning the organic faster than conventional due to shelf life.”

DISTRIBUTION CENTER MODEL

The largest natural food store chains use the familiar system of receiving produce at large regional distribution centers, and shipping it from there to individual stores.

“Whole Foods distributes through regional distribution centers just like other major retailers; so there really is no difference in the way they distribute organics,” says Blumenthal.

The largest mainstream supermarkets also use distribution centers as hubs for their organic produce.

“All of our purchasing occurs centrally, and then product is delivered to one of our five produce distribution facilities,” says Brous from Publix. “From there, product is delivered to our stores and merchandised accordingly.”

This system has benefits that go beyond the efficiency of receiving and distributing the produce.

“The larger retailers all want their produce to go through a distribution center so they can control quality, consistency and pricing, with bar codes,” says Blumenthal.

The distribution center also provides organic shippers economies of scale in their transportation costs.

“As with most companies, we have a minimum size order to stop the truck,” says

Blumenthal. “Large retailers don’t have trouble meeting that minimum. Since we are warehousing organic produce in our coolers, we can handle lower volume items that probably would not make sense for them.”

The cost per unit of shipping less than a pallet of produce, whether organic or conventional, can be exceptionally high.

“Low volumes, or less than a pallet of produce, can become very costly,” says Vilhauer. “Delivery costs on a pallet of produce from Watsonville to Los Angeles or San Francisco

is \$75 per pallet. Whole truckloads from Watsonville to Eastern Canada can cost in the ballpark of \$8,000 to \$10,000.”

Medium-sized organic shippers may sell to larger distributors, who in turn sell and ship the produce to the supermarket distribution centers, adding a step to the process.

“We sell direct to chain stores, but most of our sales are to distributors,” says Martin. “In Southern California, you might deal with a distributor who deals with Kroger. In the states back East, the distributor may deal with

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“In most cases, we try to have the same conventional buyer purchase the equivalent organic item, so a buyer can understand the category in its entirety.”

— Maria Brous, Publix Supermarkets

a larger population.”

Wholesalers supply relatively small amounts of organic produce to fill gaps, much like wholesalers of conventional produce do.

“Product delivered direct to individuals in small amounts are being sold through wholesalers like us, because they don’t have the means to procure in volume or the space to warehouse the product. Supply chain cost would make it inefficient,” says Mascari.

Some organic grower-shippers even offer custom packs to suit the needs of particular retailers.

“A very valuable service we provide our retail partners is the custom pack size,” says Blumenthal. “Here is an example: organic colored peppers come in either an 11-pound or 25-pound carton. We have retailers that have us make an 8-pound box; a 10-pound box and a 12-count colored pepper. Some sell by the each and others by the pound. Some say 12 organic colored peppers is the perfect amount for their stores, others say they should have only a 10-pound box.”

INTEGRATION WITH CONVENTIONAL

Some retailers have the same buyers source both conventional produce items and the organic counterparts.

“In most cases, we try to have the same conventional buyer purchase the equivalent organic item, so a buyer can understand the category in its entirety,” says Brous.

This system can work, in part, because many farming operations grow both organically and conventionally, so the supermarket buyer can enjoy one-stop shopping.

“The supply chain is really the same,” says Martin. “There are even some of the same players because some major producers grow both organic and conventional. A lot of our base buys both.”

There is, however, no one way of sourcing both organic and conventional versions of the



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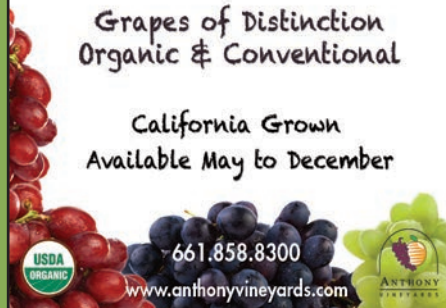
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same produce variety, and some stores have dedicated organic buyers.

“Some buying teams buy organic and conventional side by side,” says Vilhauer. “Others separated the two due to the growth and demand of organics. I’m sure we will see more companies separating the organic and conventional buying departments as organics

grow.”

A few factors come into play when retailers decide to integrate organic with conventional or to merchandise organics separately.

“Everyone does it differently,” says Vilhauer. “For example, Sprouts Farmers Markets stores have a very defined line in the stores, making it clear to the consumer that they are buying

organic or conventional. The organic section in most stores gets bigger everyday as consumers continue to demand organic.”

The advantage of displaying them next to each other is the consumer can easily compare the produce, and the price.

“It’s tough to say whether integrating organic produce with conventional is better,” says Lindsey Roberts, marketing communications representative at Lakeside Organic Gardens. “Personally, I prefer integration, so consumers can most easily compare side-by-side the appearance, texture, smell and price — all those factors determine what someone will buy.”

For Publix, display of organic produce in the store is also generally integrated with conventional produce.

“In many of our locations, we have integrated the organic produce with the conventional produce items,” says Brous. “If the produce items are loose or in bulk, dividers are used for separation. The other organic produce is packaged. We average more than 160 SKUs of organic produce items. Depending on the time of year, that number can increase to more than 200.”

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8 Tactics To Consider When Merchandising Onions



This popular item can drive sales throughout produce and beyond.

BY BOB JOHNSON

The familiar onion is showing up these days in a variety of new places, including sandwiches, salads and sauces. As we embrace more ways to use this zesty vegetable, it is enjoying a rise in consumption that is unusual for such a mature commodity.

“We are consuming slightly more onions than 10 years ago; it was 18 pounds per capita, and now it’s 20 pounds,” says Kim Reddin, director of public and industry relations at the National Onion Association, Greeley, CO.

Red onions are what is new, and the Sweets are mainstream staples, but the familiar yellow variety remains the choice of most cooks.

“Yellow is always going to be the No. 1 choice, because so many recipes call for them,” says Sherise Jones, marketing director at the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee’s USA Onions, Parma, ID. “Reds are the choice in fresh items, or where heavy heat is not required.”

The overall statistics show red onions are a growing commodity, but yellow remains, by far, the dominant onion.

“We think yellow onions are about 85 percent, red between 8 and 10 percent, and white is the rest,” says Reddin. “We have seen red onions become more popular than they were 10 years ago, especially in foodservice. You see them in a lot of sandwiches. We probably see it more in foodservice, but we know that red onions have seen growth overall.”

With sales of onions steadily rising, usually so does carrying purchases of complementary items, so it may be worth asking if someone is gaining on you?

“If you are competing with a store that has a larger red onion display than you, or has larger sweet onion promotions, it is possible they are attracting a customer that you are missing,” says Matt Curry, president of Curry & Company, Brooks, OR. “Understand your competitors pricing also. Although onions are a maintenance item, there are prices that can drive sales.”

The added consumption coupled with our population growth during the past decade add up to a significant opportunity, and onion insiders offer eight tactics to keep in mind to make the most of these occasions.

1. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

Onions are so versatile there are almost too many items to choose from in building a cross-merchandising program that increases sales throughout produce, and even beyond.

“Sweet onions offer ample opportunity for promotion and cross-merchandising with a variety of products in and out of the department,” says Marty Kramer, vice president at Keystone Fruit Marketing, Greencastle, PA. “Today’s innovative packaging includes usage tips, recipes, and nutrition details. The health and flavor benefits are an easy sell for consumers looking to cook tasteful food without salt and cholesterol.”

Consumer research identified some items as natural onion partners, because they are being purchased together.

“At store level, try displaying onions with other items that are frequently purchased with onions,” suggests Greg Smith, marketing manager at Bland Farms, Glennville, GA. “Research shows a shopper who is purchasing a sweet onion is 5.6 times more likely to have peppers in their basket as well. In addition to peppers, sweet onions buyers are most likely to also have celery, mushrooms, squash, herbs/spices, or carrots in their basket. Co-promoting

sweet onions with these fresh products, all of which are used as ingredients, is an effective technique.”

Most salad ingredients generally make good cross-merchandising partners for onions. “Based on recent research we conducted with Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group, there is a variety of great cross-merchandising opportunities for sweet onions and related products within the produce department,” says John Shuman, president and director of sales for Shuman Produce, Reidsville, GA. “We suggest cross-merchandising sweet onions with other produce items such as peppers, tomatoes, mushrooms and bagged salads to increase sales.”

There are also opportunities to cross merchandise onions outside the produce department with secondary displays near the condiments or grilling meats.

“During the summer grilling season, tie-ins with popular cookout items (such as peppers, tomatoes, burgers, sausage) and even center store items (such as mustard) work well to build a meal solution consumers can easily utilize and purchase as a complete package,” says Shuman. “Vidalias are typically on promotion this time of year, presenting a perfect opportunity for incremental increases.”

Onions can be an important piece of a display that provides an answer to what’s for dinner or for a backyard barbecue. “Merchandising sweet onions alongside additional products that can be combined with produce as easy meal solution draws consumers in and ultimately raises the ring at the register,” suggests Shuman. “Consider displays outside of the produce department to maximize sales during the summer and fall months when grilling is top-of-mind for consumers. Sweet onions make the perfect pairing for burgers, sausage and chicken on the grill, and research shows merchandising them together increases sales of both products.”

It always helps when offering a meal solution to include promotional pricing. “Put onions on special more often, and try to keep the prices lower,” advises Ron Myruski, general manager at Raymond Myruski, Goshen, NY.

2. KEEP THE DISPLAYS FULL AND CLEAN

It doesn’t help to draw the eye if the onion displays look sparse or, even worse, littered with loose skins.

“You have to go through the bulk and clean up the skins,” says Jones of USA Onions. “When you have packaged as well as bulk, it reduces your cleanup of skins.”



Marketers suggest displaying an array of onions and signage to highlight variety or local elements.

Maintenance of the bin is a regular task, and it must include making sure the display is fully stocked.

“Keep your shelves full; many times you go into a store and see the shelves bare,” advises says Maureen Torrey, vice president at Torrey Farms, Elba, NY. “Go through the onions, and make them look sharp at least once a day.”

Time spent stocking, culling and cleaning the display will be rewarded with increased sales. “As a store, you can help grow your category by realizing that onions aren’t only a maintenance item. A nice onion display, with fresh looking onions, will increase sales,” says Curry.

3. CONSIDER THE DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics go a long way toward letting produce managers know how many onions their customers will buy, which varieties they will prefer, and even whether they are likely to buy them bulk or bagged.

“Every retailer has a different ethnic group or clientele,” says Torrey. “If you have a lot of Hispanic shoppers, then they might buy more packs, since they tend to cook with lots of onions. If you have a lot of single people, then they might buy from the bulk.”

There are also identified demographic differences in the consumers of the various types of onions. “For example, regions with a higher Hispanic demographic will likely see larger sales in their white onions,” says Curry. “You can have two stores, just a few miles, or even blocks away from each other, which will have a different onion sales leader. By knowing your stores, you can really push onion sales. Retailers can capitalize on the ethnic uses of onions by understanding their demographic at each store.”

Demographics do matter, but the onion remains a versatile food that finds its way into

almost every sort of diet. “Being such a versatile, year-round product that is also ethnically diverse, onions transcend most veggie trends,” says Teri Gibson, director of marketing and customer relations at Peri & Sons Farms, Yerington, NV.

“Every season presents opportunities to incorporate white, red, sweet or yellow onions into whatever is on the menu. Onions add flavor, fiber and health-promoting phytochemicals as well as nutrients to popular food movements such as Paleo, Mediterranean, gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan. Red onions are a summer-salad staple and white onions cook up beautifully in anything from fajitas to a stir fry. Sweet onions are also a summer favorite, because their mild flavor profile works well eaten raw or grilled in slices on the barbecue.”

4. RED IS HOT

The colorful red onion is fashionable in quick-service restaurant sandwiches, on cooking shows, and in other foods where a colorful splash is warranted.

“Reds gained a lot of popularity during the last few years,” says Jones. “They are on the cooking shows and in the blogs; chefs love the color. They’re being added to salads, pizzas and flatbreads, anything you can add color to. They are more popular. Everybody likes the purplish color. The flavor is good, but the color is what grabs people.”

The color on the plate, or in a store display, is making the red variety a rising star.

“The red onion has become more popular because of the color in salads or side dishes,” says Torrey of Torrey Farms.

This colorful onion is so popular that one major Salinas Valley vegetable grower devoted the resources to develop its own trademarked variety. “The versatility of Artisan Sweet

Red Onions are their most attractive trait,” says Anthony Mazzuca, sales & commodity manager at Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA. “The *mild* flavor perfectly complements and never overpowers. They are easily used in raw and cooked capacities. Tanimura & Antle Artisan Sweet Red Onions are the only ‘year-round’ Italian Sweet Red Onion commercially available. One hundred percent of the production is domestic. The peak production is May to October.”

5. PROMOTE THE STORY BEHIND ONIONS

Led by the extraordinary popularity of the Vidalias, sweet onions have become a mainstream item in every corner of the country.

Growers from just 20 counties in Southeast Georgia, the only ones allowed to call their sweets “Vidalia” onions, have done an extraordinary job promoting their local product.

“The Vidalia sweet onion remains the most highly demanded variety of sweet onion,” says Smith of Bland Farms. “Sweet onions are a great source of flavor and they can also be eaten raw due to their mild sweet flavor, unlike storage onions. They increase the depth of a flavor profile without adding fat. So, they’re a healthy flavor-adding ingredient.”

The Vidalias feed the hunger for foods that have a story from a specific locality.

“I think consumers seek out the story behind a product in order to try regional or specialized cuisine, and the story behind a Vidalia sweet onion combined with their flavor makes for a great experience,” says Shuman of Shuman Produce. “We believe a great way to capitalize on consumers trying unique items new to them is to share the story of the product with your customers. In the case of Vidalia, we recommend that our retail partners utilize in-store signage to build displays that highlight the unique growing region and the farmers behind the product. Similar information can be used in ad circulars and social media to alert customers that Vidalia onions are now available.”

The harvest from 12,000 acres in this area of Georgia dominates the sweet onion market when they are available.

“Vidalia takes up some of the market when they are available,” says Myruski from Raymond Myruski.

The Vidalia season, however, is limited as the first of its sweet onions hit the market in late April and many shippers are already out of supply before the end of summer.

The sweet onion category has become so popular that other varieties are counted on

to fill the gap and provide year round supply.

“With the growing popularity of sweet onions from both coasts, additional varieties were developed or imported,” says Kramer of Keystone.

As the supply of Vidalias dwindles in the summer, the next wave of sweet onions comes largely from the West.

“Our season for a tested-sweet onion, our proprietary Sweetie Sweet, begins in mid-July with onions grown on our farms in the San Joaquin Valley of California,” says Gibson of

Peri & Sons. “Once September rolls around, we begin packing our Nevada Sweetie through December. Seed companies are working with growers to produce varieties grown for the storage months that have true sweet flavor characteristics. The challenge is to provide a domestically grown sweet onion during the months of January through March, because the longer an onion is stored, the more it loses its sweetness. Texas is known for its spring sweet varieties during late March and April. Florida is experimenting with sweet varieties to offer

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during the month of March. The growing industry is still working on domestically grown solutions for the months of January and February.”

Some shippers have supplies of both Vidalias, when they are in season, and Western varieties, when they are not.

“We are selling our Vidalia Sweet onions right now, and have people asking us when Walla Walla Sweets will start as well,” says Curry of Curry & Company. “When you have people asking for onions, you know there’ll be demand.”

Curry & Company also has a sweet onion variety grown specifically for local markets in Oregon. “We are excited about our Lake Labish Sweet Onion program grown in Oregon’s Willamette Valley,” says Curry. “This used to be a larger onion growing area, but it gave way to other crops for years. We started planting Lake Labish Sweet Onions last season and had a nice run with them locally in Oregon. We will continue to focus on this onion as a local/regional brand until volumes build.”

Signage is important to differentiate the Sweets, and to identify *where* they were grown. “The more a retailer can differentiate the sweet

onions from the yellow onions, whether it’s with signage or separate positioning, the better,” says Gibson. “Now, more than ever, when it comes to food, consumers want to know who, what, when and where. Knowing who the grower is and where the produce is grown is important to them. We think the country of origin is important information that should be prominently noted on the signage for every produce item in the marketplace. Reports indicate savvy consumers are even concerned about fair labor and sustainability practices.”

The Sweets are *not* a specialty item, as their sales place them on a par with any other onion type. “Sweet onions account for nearly a third of total onion category sales, and have become a staple in many consumers’ kitchens,” says Shuman of Shuman Produce. “They’re valued for their mild, sweet flavor and inherent versatility in a variety of dishes. Consumers are still frequently cooking at home, and sweet onions are a popular ingredient in some of the most creative recipes.”

6. BULK AND BAGS GO TOGETHER

Both bulk and bagged onions have a place, and they can complement each other well as the bulk capture the smaller purchases, while

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“Retailers should carry not just bulk only, but consumer packs as well. It’s almost an impulse to buy the bag. In most stores, the 3- or 5-pound bag is most popular. In some big boxes, they like 10-pound bags.”

— Sherise Jones, USA Onions

the bags minimize the clean up chore.

“Retailers should carry not just bulk only, but consumer packs as well,” advises Jones. “It’s almost an impulse to buy the bag. In most stores, the 3- or 5-pound bag is most popular. In some big boxes, they like 10-pound bags.”

As the category increases in sales, some retailers detect a modest shift from bulk onions toward smaller bags.

“Customer demand for onions remained steady throughout recent years, although there has been a shift in customer interest from bulk options to smaller packages,” says Dan Donovan, spokesperson for Giant Eagle, Pittsburgh, PA.

There may be a modest spike in sales of the bags at the beginning of every month as consumers stock up. “We continue to see larger onion purchases during the first week or two of the month — as a lot of people are buying their onions for the month,” says Curry. “Bagged onion sales in particular can be stronger at the start of the month as consumers with money for the new month often use this as their stock-up shopping trip.”

There is something of a tendency for some types of onions to do best in bulk, and others in bags.

“You see a lot of bulk with jumbo size or specialty onions,” says Torrey of Torrey Farms. “You move more yellow globe packed, and most of the sweet onions and red onions are sold in bulk. The packages are usually 2 or 3 pounds; once in a while you’ll see 5 pounds.”

Although bags are predominantly yellow cooking onions, sweet onions have grown so popular it may be wise to carry them, too, in both bulk and bagged.

“Due to increased demand of sweet onions, many retailers found it advantageous to carry bulk or loose jumbo sweet onions as well as a consumer bag of medium sweet onions,” says Keystone’s Kramer.

Bags of Vidalia sweet onions have almost caught the bulk displays in consumer prefer-

ence. “Research shows 67 percent of shoppers purchased Vidalia onions individually in bulk displays, but 48 percent purchased Vidalia onions in 5-pound bags or less,” says Susan Waters, executive director at the Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, CA. “Therefore, we recommend including both bulk and bagged onions in the merchandising display to appeal to a range of consumer preferences.”

Some sweet onion shippers go the extra mile to take advantage of the popularity of their bagged product. “We’ve seen the popularity of our consumer bags steadily increase since its introduction to the market,” says Shuman Produce’s Shuman. “They currently account for just under half of our total annual volume shipped to market. The bright colors and imagery on our bags make them easy to merchandise and both the consumer and the retailer win at the register — the consumer with the added value of a package purchase and the retailer with an increased ring.”

7. THE DEMOS ARE DONE FOR YOU

Onions are so versatile that demonstrations can boost sales by introducing consumers to the possibilities. “In-store demos introduce new recipes — emphasizing quality, flavor, nutrition and food safety differences of authentic sweet onions over regular cooking onions,” says Kramer. “Point-of-purchase materials and signage help showcase the nutritional benefits and outstanding flavor of high-quality sweet onions.”

To a great extent, these demos are done for you, as the food media is already including onions as they spread the good word about produce.

“Celebrity chefs, cooking shows, and all forms of media brought awareness to all fresh fruits and vegetables — onions are a big part of this awareness as a staple ingredient, which naturally resonate through to increased consumption and higher sales numbers at the store,” says Kramer.

Trade groups are leading the way in educating opinion shapers about the many uses of onions. “The National Onion Association is doing a good job of demos for the food writers, or food editors,” says Torrey of Torrey Farms. “More people are cooking with onions. They’re caramelizing them, putting them in sauces, or on the grill.”

The Association conducts a multi-faceted campaign that reaches an audience ranging from grade school students to food media professionals. “A lot of our members are doing onion promotions, and we do quite a bit of education,” says National Onion Association’s Reddin. “We have fourth- to sixth-grade lesson plans for teachers that include math, science, writing and social studies. Some of the lessons include plant development, and others have a health and nutrition aspect. It’s a popular area on our website.”

The lesson plans, other educational materials, and recipes are on the Onion Association’s website. “We have culinary education materials for both secondary and post secondary students, high school and culinary programs beyond high school,” says Reddin.

The largest sweet onion association also has its own collection of recipes on the internet. “Vidalia Onion Committee has a large database of recipes available online,” says Vidalia Onion Committee’s Waters. “The recipes highlight the versatility of Vidalia Onions and the wide variety of options appeal to multi-cultural consumers. We encourage retailers to use these recipes both online and in-store.”

Some shippers add their own easily accessible treasure trove of recipes and other onion information. “All of our retail packages invite consumers to join our free Onion Obsession Club through the website or QR code, which is also where we provide new and interesting

merchandising review

recipes based on onion variety, ethnicity and by the type of dish,” says Peri and Sons’ Gibson. “Our daily Facebook posts are filled with new and interesting recipes as well, and we offer retailers free recipe cards, POS and display materials to entice and educate consumers about cooking with onions.”

Outside education is so extensive and effective that in store demos may not be necessary. “While onions are often promoted and cross-merchandised as a complement to products like potatoes and other vegetables, they are not currently being used as feature ingredients in cooking demonstrations,” says Donovan from Giant Eagle.

8. MAKE THEM VISIBLE

While some customers come to the store with onions on their minds, especially at the beginning of the month, others are open to visual persuasion.

“Displays drive sales,” says Shuman. “That’s why we provide bags, bins and boxes that work well to complement each other and feature the product with bright and colorful imagery to draw consumers’ eyes and attention.”

Strategic placement for the onion displays is the first step in effectively getting the consumers’ attention.

“Endcaps, stand-alones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift,” says Kramer.

Numerous shippers or producer groups lend a hand by offering packages, bins and other displays that catch the eye.

“Using packages of onions, such as our colorful high-graphic three pound packs, to create division between the areas displaying bulk onions can help the display look colorful and clean,” says Gibson.

Some of these colorful display materials are especially suited for cross-merchandising onions with companion produce items.

“We offer high-graphic bins for retailers to create both a featured and/or secondary display,” says Waters. “We recommend retailers also cross-merchandise with related items such as tomatoes and avocados.”

Make onions visible, and offer the full complement of onion varieties on a regular basis. “Year-round, customers will find yellow, red, white and sweet onion varieties available at their local Giant Eagle supermarket.” says Donovan. “Onions are a flavorful ingredient in many recipes, and Giant Eagle is dedicated to delivering customers a high quality onion selection.”

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Mushrooms On The Move



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL

By touting the health benefits and including value-added lines, retailers can position these products to sell.

BY LISA WHITE

Mushrooms are one of the most perishable categories in the produce department, so minimizing shrink helps maximize sales for added profits. Successful merchandising is not just about proper placement and eye-catching displays. It's also important to know the store's customer and offer the variety that matches its demographics.

"Demographics play into this, but nationwide the industry is seeing a 5 percent increase in brown mushroom sales, while white mushrooms are flat," says Mike O'Brien, vice president of sales and marketing at Monterey Mushrooms, based in Watsonville, CA. "Organic mushrooms are showing a growth rate of 20 percent."

According to Chicago-based Information Resources Inc.'s FreshLook Marketing Data

ending March 15, 2015, mushroom category dollar growth outpaced total produce in the four-week period, but 52-week total U.S. dollar sales lagged total produce's growth trend by about 1 percent.

"In our sales reports, we see browns and specialty mushrooms are continuing to increase, not just button mushrooms anymore," says Kathleen Preis, marketing manager at the Mushroom Council, located in San Jose, CA. "This factor results in more visually appealing displays of different types and sizes of mushrooms and leads to a greater awareness of these products."

PLAYING THE HEALTH CARD

Mushrooms are not only being touted for bringing unique flavors to meals, but also as a nutritious option. As with most vegetables, mushrooms are low in calories, fat-free, cholesterol-free, and low in sodium. But many are not aware this food also is a good source of B vitamins, including riboflavin, niacin and pantothenic acid, which help to provide energy by breaking down proteins, fats and carbohydrates.

Mushrooms also provide important minerals, including selenium, an essential antioxidant that protects body cells and strengthens the immune system, as well as copper and potassium.

"The health focus is starting to become a trend, and we're seeing many supermarket chains with nutritionists on staff," says Kevin J. Donovan, national sales director for Phillips Mushroom Farms, in Kennett Square, PA.

The Mushroom Council also is touting the nutritional and health benefits of these products, promoting the use of this vegetable





PHOTO COURTESY OF HIGHLINE MUSHROOMS



as a meat blend or substitute to reduce sodium, fat, calories and cholesterol, while adding nutritional benefits.

“Since mushrooms are also hearty and filling, this food increases low-energy-density foods to reduce calories and fat intake,” says Bill Litvin, senior vice president of sales and national account manager at Giorgio Fresh Co. in Temple, PA. “Mushrooms and ground meat blend seamlessly to add an extra serving of vegetables, while enhancing and extending the meat.”

In addition, mushrooms’ broth-like or meaty flavor (also known as umami) works well with healthy dishes. “Not only are they low in sodium, but mushrooms can be added to just about any dish, from hamburgers to pasta,” says Monterey Mushrooms’ O’Brien.

One of the larger marketing initiatives for

Monterey Mushrooms involves promoting the health benefits within the category — particularly highlighting the fact mushrooms are the only produce item with natural vitamin D. This is essential for bone health like calcium, but also is beneficial for a healthy immune system.

Although nutritional information is a challenge to include on-pack because of regulations and limited packaging real estate, vitamin D attributes are being called out most often.

Oakshire Mushroom Farms, based in Kennett Square, PA, added health information to its mushroom labels that call out the healthy attributes, which has been well-received.

“The healthier aspect angle is bigger, and the adjustment to labels in the past couple of years has been successful,” says Oakshire’s president Gary Schroeder. “Exotics are used for blending with meats, which not only creates

a healthier product, but provides options and opportunities for a secondary merchandising location in the meat department.”

Cottonwood, CA-based Holiday Market, a 12-store chain based in Northern California, focuses on the fact its mushrooms are locally grown.

“We advertise this, and it’s a big focus for the category,” says Rick Rutte, director of produce.

Stores mainly sell white, Cremini, Portobello and Shiitake types, but also offer dried, sliced, bulk and organic mushrooms.

These are situated in one display in the refrigerated salad case, which keeps the products at the proper humidity and temperature.

“We sell our whole mushrooms in bulk,” says Rutte. “We also cross-merchandise these items with meats and shish kabobs.”

SELECTION AND SHRINK

Successful mushroom merchandising depends largely upon having the appropriate selection and controlling shrink.

Mushroom displays are typically comprised of 65 to 70 percent white, 20 to 30 percent brown and 5 to 10 percent a combination of specialty, exotic, value-added and dried varieties.

“Following the recommended space allocation can translate into increased sales and volume,” says Bill Litvin, senior vice president of sales and national account manager at Giorgio Fresh Co., based in Temple, PA.

Giorgio works with customers on planograms to determine the optimal number of facings for each mushroom variety in a retail display.



Manufacturers recommend allocating at least 8 feet to mushrooms in the produce department.

“With more retail chains offering prepared food, mushrooms can be cross-merchandised to add to displays,” says Kevin J. Donovan, national sales

director at Kennett Square, PA-based Phillips Mushroom Farms.

It is extremely important for retailers to display mushrooms at the proper cooler temperature and remove any outdated products in order to help maintain mushroom sales.

Giorgio Fresh Mushrooms developed its CARE program to improve shrink and help the mushrooms sell better:

C - Cool the product to 34 degrees F for maximum shelf life.

A - Avoid spray misters and over stacking (three high max).

R - Rotate the product to keep the display case fresh.

E - Entice customers by keeping the product attractive.

FOCUSING ON VALUE

Convenience and value are always factors when selling fresh produce, and mushrooms are no exception.

Evidence of this is Holiday Market's value-added sliced mushrooms, which are one of its top sellers.

Mushrooms are a primary component of kabobs, and stuffed mushrooms have become summertime staples. However, the most recent trend is blending mushrooms with ground meat. Not only does this add flavor, but also

creates a healthier, lower fat dish.

"Consumers are trying to eat healthier and have been cutting back on red meat, which provides mushroom blendability opportunities," says Hsian Kim, corporate communications manager at Highline Mushrooms, located in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. "The blend is a healthy value-added offering that reduces shrink in the produce department and works well in the deli, foodservice and meat departments."

Also, heartier exotic mushrooms, including

"Replacing a portion of proteins with mushrooms has the potential to improve overall sustainability, increase cost savings and add an extra serving of vegetables to a meal."

— Bill Litvin, Giorgio Fresh

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King Oyster and Shiitake, along with Portobello and Cremini, are being used as meat substitutes.

Highline Mushrooms' blended packs have been gaining traction, as more consumers are experimenting with exotic mushrooms.

Giorgio Fresh's stuffed Baby Bellas and Port Caps have been strong sellers in the value-added produce segment.

"Retailers benefit by offering new healthy value-added products in the produce, deli and meat departments," says Giorgio Fresh's Litvin. "Replacing a portion of proteins with mushrooms has the potential to improve overall sustainability, increase cost savings and add an extra serving of vegetables to a meal."

Growth in sliced Baby Bellas is rising along with mushrooms used in salads, and stuffed programs have been successful in many supermarkets.

Even with flat white mushroom sales recently, other items are filling in the gaps. "It's a very healthy market and commodity," says Oakshire Mushroom Farms' Schroeder. "The category continues to grow with sales from browns, like Portobello and Baby Portobello."

With today's consumers more educated about the different mushroom types and characteristics, trial continues to grow. Along with more familiar types, interest is evident in specialty mushrooms, including mild trumpet, a delicately flavored mushroom also known as King Oyster, and Maitake (also called "Sheep's Head" or "Hen of the Woods").

"Portobellos and kabobs are definitely gaining ground during the grilling season, and stuffed mushrooms are popular during the holidays," says Phillips Mushroom Farms' Donovan. "It's important for retailers to provide customers with recipes and conduct sampling at the store level."

“It’s best to merchandise specialty mushrooms like ours next to traditional types, which helps overcome the barrier to purchase.”

— Meg Hill, Gourmet Mushrooms

CREATIVE MARKETING TACTICS

Recipes and in-store demos are effective tools in moving mushrooms. Also, special promotions such as “Meatless Mondays” are helping mushrooms gain popularity as well, encouraging consumers to try produce items as alternatives to their usual proteins.

“The ‘Blendability’ initiative is keeping mushrooms top-of-mind,” says Monterey Mushrooms’ O’Brien.

Holiday Quality Foods runs promotions on mushrooms once a month with price cuts.

Gourmet Mushrooms, Inc., headquartered in Sebastopol, CA, only sells specialty forest mushrooms that are grown under lights in bottles using sterilized fertilizer. In the past eight years, awareness spread about this high-end product, which is carried in Safeway stores as well as Whole Foods Markets, among other chains. The product is mainly found in organic produce sections.

“It’s best to merchandise specialty mushrooms like ours next to traditional types, which helps overcome the barrier to purchase,” says Meg Hill, Gourmet Mushrooms’ director of sales and marketing.

In addition to providing in-store signage, the company is in the process of creating an extensive produce manager training program to help staff become experts in the field.

The company’s biggest sellers are its Chef Sampler and Trio packs as well as both the 4- and 8-ounce Shiitake.

“Our buyers know their shrink and purchase accordingly,” says Hill. “Chains that can accommodate bulk mushrooms do well with Maitake and mild Trumpets.”

Certain retailers are offering usage ideas on shelves and find value-added blend packs offer the most information regarding usage ideas. It also helps to position the store as a health and wellness destination.

“In terms of nutritional information, retailers like Meijer have been working closely with registered dietitians to provide consumers

with solutions to help with personal health issues, offer insight on nutritional information, and offer expertise on healthy meal solutions,” says Highland Mushrooms’ Kim.

Marketers are emphasizing mushrooms’ variety of uses and integrating them into meals to make flavorful, unconventional dishes. For example, mushrooms can make a vegetarian dish a meaty-tasting meal, or they can be added to breakfast or ethnic foods to enhance the flavor and nutritional profile.

On the backs of Giorgio Fresh’s labels are recipes that demonstrate the mushrooms’ variety of uses in hamburgers, salads, kabobs, etc. Also, QR codes on the labels link to the recipe listing on the company’s web page.

“By highlighting the nutritional value, financial benefits, and variety of uses for mushrooms, marketers are appealing to a variety of consumers,” says Giorgio Fresh’s Litvin.

Mushrooms provide the means for consumers to eat healthier without giving up their favorite foods. Also, substituting exotic mushrooms for meat also adds an extra serving of vegetables.

The Mushroom Council recently developed a website (MushroomsAtRetail.com),

which focuses on blends and expanding mushroom points of sales. The site also includes case studies, assortment guides and resources for retailers to help with mushroom merchandising.

The council also worked with registered dietitians, arming them with nutritional information and providing messaging points to create mushroom delegates.

“This ensures everyone is on the same page with the mushroom message,” says Mushroom Council’s Preis.

The Mushroom Council’s new Assortment Guide can also be found on the site. The Guide is divided into six regions, detailing the type of mushrooms being sold in different parts of the country.

In addition, the Council runs regional promotions with different chains, as well as blend promotions. It also can provide point of sale material, sampling and recipe cards.

“We’re fortunate that mushrooms are grown all year and can be served for breakfast, lunch and dinner,” says Preis. “It’s up to produce managers to keep these vegetables top of mind and get creative with cross-merchandising and seasonal promotions.”

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It's Always Raisin Season



Health benefits and convenience drive year-round sales.

BY SUZANNE SMITHER

Healthy, portable and practically nonperishable, raisins are for all ages and all seasons. Marketers agree that consumers need eye-catching displays and advertising to keep this dried fruit in mind for uses beyond the traditional snacks for schoolchildren and ingredients for holiday baking. These category leaders share ideas for lifting raisin sales year-round.

“Promote the healthy snack,” says Rich Paumen, senior vice president of retail sales and marketing at Sun-Maid Growers of California, based in Kingsburg, CA. “Antioxidants and natural sugar tied to a fiber, which is absorbed at a slower rate,” make raisins a great choice nutritionally. They are also “very satiating,” he says, citing scientific studies showing “children who eat a serving of raisins feel full and don’t continue snacking” and “raisins are very good

for endurance athletes, because of that sugar tied to fiber.”

PROMOTIONS FOR EVERY SEASON

“Raisins react well to displays, suggesting impulse versus planned purchases,” says Jane Asmar, senior vice president of sales and marketing for the National Raisin Company, headquartered in Fowler, CA.

“Raisins are promotionally driven, so the best opportunity is to market them in incremental displays, which are important to have during key buying periods,” says Stephanie Harralson, senior product manager for SunSweet Growers Inc., based in Yuba City, CA. Noting that SunSweet’s core product is prunes, the company sells raisins mostly under the Del Monte brand. In the Northeast market, SunSweet sells jumbo red flame raisins in ShopRite stores.

Key periods for sales of Del Monte raisins, says Harralson, include back-to-school (a good time to promote raisins for office snacks as well) and the holiday season (September through December). “Raisins are very popular for cookies and breads. When the weather gets cooler, that’s when people start thinking about

baking, and [consumer] magazines publish recipes.”

Once the fall and winter holidays are over, Paumen says he finds opportunities to boost sales in the new year, keeping in mind “the second back-to-school period in January” and consumers’ desire to resume “eating healthy after holiday meals.”

Harralson says she sees “another promotional opportunity in the spring for baking at Easter and Passover and traditional dishes such



The National Raisin Company licenses for the Newman’s Own Organics Raisins and dried fruit.

“Raisins have been around so long that people forget about them. With thousands of new snack items every year, how do you rise above that noise and clutter?”

— Rich Paumen, Sun-Maid

as sweet breads and Jewish dishes like *charoset* (a mixture of various dried fruits including raisins and prunes). Another seasonal trend she notices is “consumers are likely to make their trail mix using dried fruit in summer, when sales go down, because more fresh fruits are available.”

To drive fourth-quarter holiday sales, Asmar suggests including raisins with other ingredients in a baking bar. She adds, “Raisin displays are effective at generating incremental sales even outside the fourth quarter, where shoppers are looking for healthy snacks. The most successful retailers authorize side-stack displays throughout the year. We like to tell our retailers that it’s not just an event-driven promotion. Raisins have great consumer appeal. You can put up displays virtually every

month and generate incremental sales.” Another significant advantage for retailers, she says, is that “raisins are a great hedge against shrink.”

INNOVATIONS TO BOOST YEAR-ROUND SALES

The need to get raisins on consumers’ shopping lists year-round prompted these executives to develop new marketing strategies.

“Raisins are one of the more profitable items in the produce department, because there’s no spoilage,” says Paumen, noting that “retail business grows an average of 2 percent a year. The 20-ounce carton and six-pack raisins are the two ‘big guns.’”

The marketing challenge, he says, “Raisins



Sun-Maid’s 20-ounce carton and six-pack raisins are the two “big guns,” according to Rich Paumen, senior vice president of retail sales and marketing for the company.

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have been around so long that people forget about them. With thousands of new snack items every year, how do you rise above that noise and clutter?" Paumen says consumers need to know "raisins are not just for kids — they're even better for you now. Americans are going from three meals a day to five smaller ones."

Sun-Maid "started a Twitter campaign: 'Remember Raisins.' It's a dual approach — remember them from your childhood and remember them in the store," says Paumen.

Private labeling is an effective way to boost sales, says National Raisin's Asmar. She points out, "raisins are a highly developed private label segment," and quotes April 2015 data from the Chicago-based market research company IRI: "approximately 36.6 percent of raisin pound sales are private label; about twice that of the total ACV (all-commodity volume). Retailers that actively support a private label brand have significant potential."

Asmar suggests another way retailers can boost sales is "to authorize a private label golden raisin. If Golden Raisins were their own category, they would rank No. 7 across all dried fruits. The majority of Golden Raisin sales are in the 15-ounce bag-in-box. Selling a 15-ounce private label golden raisin just makes sense." She says, "private label is National Raisin's No. 1 business" and she's happy to help retailers start on this path to produce department prosperity.

GROWTH TRENDS

The executives differ in their views about growth trends for raisins.

"California raisins are among the most desirable in the world, and they command the highest price," says Asmar. "Consumers and manufacturers like the consistent dark, rich color and sweetness of California raisins, and they can be found in lots of areas in the supermarket in addition to produce and the dried fruit section.

"As with any agricultural product, raisins faced issues that threatened availability, including land developers buying much Northern California farmland, significant periodic buy-ins from the wine industry, vine-pull (in favor of other crops) and, most recently, water. Improvements in farming techniques and irrigation resulted in consistent supply," she adds.

Paumen says he hasn't noticed a significant influx of table grapes. "Ninety percent of the raisins grown in the U.S. are grown in a 50-mile radius around Fresno, CA," he explains. "The Thompson seedless here are grown for table grapes, raisins and grape juice concentrate. Wineries are taking less of the crop, because



Del Monte raisins are marketed by Sunsweet Growers, Yuba City, CA.

they can get them cheaper offshore."

"We have seen raisins decline," says Harralson. "We haven't seen as much advertising for raisins in the past year. I don't know why. There could be some commodity constraints."

GROUPING AND PACKAGING FOR USAGE

The highest percentage of usage for raisins is "adding them to hot and cold cereal and general healthy snacking," says Harralson. "A lot of retailers are successful with grouping them for a meal or a usage"; for example, alongside ingredients for baked apples or trail mix. Pairing "sweet dried fruit with veggies like carrots and spinach" is another great use to promote, she says, and providing recipe cards or suggestions for use can also drive sales.

"Raisins are healthy and conform to many consumer lifestyles. Raisins have significant household penetration and are used for many things, so they're easily conveyed to consumers," says Asmar. "One of the packaging trends we see at National Raisin Company is toward consumer benefit call-outs. Consumers seem to identify with "great source of energy" and "nutritious, great-tasting snack!" messaging.

A relatively new product from National Raisin, "Raisels" — golden raisins in sour "Lemon Blast," "Orange Burst" and "Watermelon Shock" flavors — is selling well in school lunch programs for the past couple of years, reports Asmar.

ORGANICS ARE GOING STRONG

"Organic raisins historically posted higher growth rates versus their conventional counterparts," says Asmar, adding that National Raisin licenses for the Newman's Own Organics dried fruit line. "Recent supply issues impacted sourcing, but the growth trend was expected to resume with new crops, which were scheduled for harvest in August."

Paumen reports that the organic segment is growing well. "That's probably growing 8 to 10 percent a year versus 1 or 2 percent with the naturals," he says. "The average consumer

"Retailers with dried fruit in produce have as much as 50 percent higher dollar-sales-per-million velocity than those where dried fruit is merchandised in grocery."

— Jane Asmar, National Raisin Company

perceives organics as better; although, in the case of raisins, that's not really true. The label on the box says just raisins — that's it." Since California regulates the use of pesticides so well, he explains, there's very little difference between natural and organic.

PERENNIALY THRIVING IN PRODUCE

These category leaders agree that produce will always be the best retail home for raisins.

The best placement, says Harralson, is "entry points to the produce department. It's common to see that now."

Produce is "an area where consumers are used to looking around and paying attention to the environment," says Paumen. He commended Wegmans for being a retailer that "does an outstanding job of engaging the consumer with prepared foods and meal solutions."

"Our data suggests that produce is the highest-velocity location for dried fruit," observes Asmar. "Retailers with dried fruit in produce have as much as 50 percent higher dollar-sales-per-million velocity than those where dried fruit is merchandised in grocery. Consumers seem to identify with dried fruit next to fresh fruit, and produce managers like the low-shrink, minimally handled, year-round dependability of dried fruit."

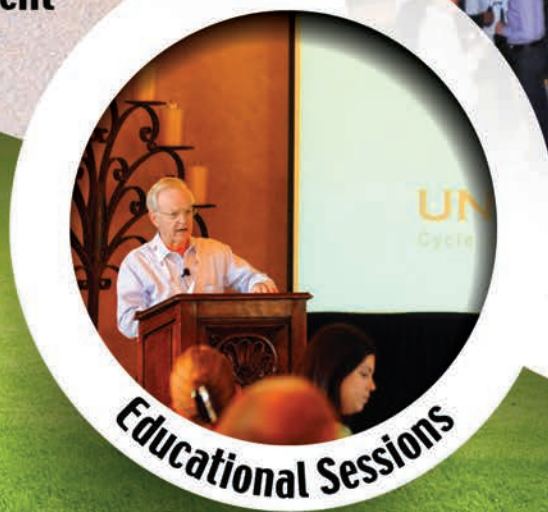
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Take Another Look At In-Store Processing

BY DON HARRIS

There are many opinions on what activities in the produce department make the best and the most efficient use of labor. Management tends to lean toward the opinion that any use of labor that does not directly apply to the production of sales is of low priority. This is yet another case where management does not understand or appreciate the inner workings of a produce department and how best to generate the momentum that drives sales. Once again, “they just don’t get it.”

In previous articles, we discussed various ways to utilize labor that improves the overall operation of the department and ultimately result in better sales and profits. Occasionally, a new way of utilizing labor to meet a perceived need comes along and becomes a sort of “bandwagon” that every operation examines and many adopt. One such method is the utilization of produce department, or other store labor, to prepare fresh-cut fruit and vegetables — presenting them as a convenient alternatives to the regular bulk product.

On the surface, this opportunity seems to offer the benefits of meeting a consumer need for convenience as well as providing an outlet for product that may have a defect or be past its prime condition for sales, thus reducing shrink. These are all good intentions, to be sure, but we must look at whether this use of labor is wise and if there is not a better alternative that accomplishes the same end result — allowing labor to sell more total product.

First, let’s examine the cost of utilizing produce and/or store labor to prepare the items for sale. The act of cutting and preparing the various commodities requires an allocation of labor in terms of hours of effort. The key factor to the cost of labor within the store — whether from produce or other departments — is typically unionized, or more costly, wages. Many retailers choose to support fresh-cut items by outsourcing the preparation. The outsourcing cost is almost always substantially lower than the labor cost in the store. Utilizing the outside source for this product ultimately saves money versus the cost of having the union labor perform the tasks as well as freeze up the produce and/or store labor for more productive activities.

Second, let’s examine the freshness of the product offered. Many contend that by preparing produce in-store daily provides the freshest possible product, while utilizing an outside source would provide product that would have more “age.” It is true that product prepared daily in-store would have an advantage over items prepared outside of the store. The successful retailers use both methods with good

results. The key to successfully using either method is the selection of supplier or processing personnel and a tight ordering procedure to ensure quick turnover of the product. Given this use of tight protocols evens the playing field in terms of freshness and provides a viable alternative to in-store processing.

Lastly, let’s look at the efficiency of the operations as well as the potential to reduce shrink. The simple fact is an outside processor employs people to do the same procedures day in and day out. These processors have a substantial edge in terms of efficiency and production. Store personnel has other functions and responsibilities each day. They are only devoted to the production of these products for portions of the day, and their compensation is part of their total week’s work.

In terms of reducing shrink, there are other factors. The fact remains that the products being processed — if removed from the sales floor — already had a substantial investment in labor for preparing and displaying the product. These embedded costs must be added to the cost of the processing with the higher union labor and contrasted against the monetary savings from less operational shrink to determine its benefit. In most cases, the figures cancel each other out, so there is no net benefit. Unfortunately, more often than not, there is an additional cost to the department for using its own product. Many retailers found a better use for this product that is removed from

the sales floor. The logical step is to provide samples of the product to customers to stimulate sales.

In order to determine the benefit of either one of these options, a retailer must do a careful analysis to determine the overall benefits of processing in-store. This assessment only covers some of the cost factors, but a retailer must also consider the food safety controls and preparation that is necessary to prevent any foodborne illness. This is another case where careful analysis must be performed instead of “jumping on the bandwagon.”

pb

Unfortunately, more often than not, there is an additional cost to the department for using its own product.

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.



Are Trade Shows Still Relevant?

BY ALAN SIGER

I attended my first United Fresh conference 37 years ago in February of 1979. In the past 36 years, I probably missed attending the show just a few times. Add to that 30-plus Produce Marketing Association meetings, at least that many United Fresh Washington Public Policy Conferences, and a few miscellaneous regional association meetings. That's more than 100 industry conferences in my career. After all these years, why do I keep attending? What keeps my interest? And most importantly, what value do I get for my investment of time and capital?

The chief reason I choose to attend industry meetings is to network. Starting with my first meeting in New Orleans in 1979, I made contacts that have been critical to my success, and to that of my former company, Consumers Produce. Over the years, I developed relationships with principals of other wholesalers from around the country. Because the companies were from different regions and did not compete, we formed a share group and learned from each other's best practices. Meeting twice a year and visiting each other's facilities served as a wonderful learning experience.

As a wholesaler, I always looked forward to spending time with suppliers at industry conferences. As a regional distributor, I was able to jump in a car for a few hours and visit almost any customer. However, visiting growers and shippers from across the country and beyond required much more time, effort, and expense. Suppliers attend the national trade shows, as it's an efficient way to visit with wholesalers and retailers. Sharing an adult beverage or breaking bread is a great way to catch up with long time suppliers, and an effective means to develop relationships with new ones.

Whether at a national conference or regional show, the trade show is always a major focus at industry meetings. Trade shows provide a chance to get a first look at new products, compare equipment from different manufacturers, and meet with exhibitors who are present or potential suppliers. Regardless of the size of the show, it's also a great place to catch up with other attendees who are walking the aisles. I don't think I recently attended a show where I haven't been pleasantly surprised to run into a friend from years ago.

The hidden gems of these meetings are the smaller educational sessions. I recognize that the general sessions have the glitz with the big-name speakers; most folks are drawn to hear the chief executive of Roundy's talk about the future of retail, or NFL Hall-of-Famer Mike Ditka talk on just about any issue. While I enjoy the general sessions, often times it's the smaller sessions that offer the real take-home

value for the attendee.

For example, I attended a seminar at this year's United Fresh titled, "Strategic Planning for Family Businesses" led by Andrew Keyt, executive director of the Family Business Center at Loyola University of Chicago. I no longer have a family business and was lucky that when I did, I was blessed with family members who were supportive in every way. However, I've witnessed too many instances where family business disagreements resulted in the breakup of the business, family members not speaking to each other, or sometimes both. Mr. Keyt talked about the importance of communications and transparency in family businesses, and the importance of distinguishing between ownership and governance. Judging by the Q&A that followed his presentation, and the rush of many in the room to speak with Mr. Keyt after the session, his presentation was well received.

The highlight of this year's United Fresh meeting was being present to see a dear friend, Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda's Inc., recognized at this year's Women in Produce reception. To say that Caplan is an industry leader is an understatement — she was the first woman president of United Fresh, has been a director of the Federal Reserve Bank Board of San Francisco (Los Angeles branch) and received countless industry and community awards.

As Caplan spoke to the overflow crowd, I looked around and realized how far our industry has come. When Caplan's mother, Frieda Caplan, started the company in 1962, there were virtually no women in the produce business; the situation wasn't much different when Karen joined the company in the late 1970s. However, she and her mother led the fight to break through barriers in the business world so that other women could follow. I'm not sure if we're there yet, but as a father of a successful woman in the business world, I thank the Caplans for their work to level the playing field.

From seeing old friends and building new relationships, to learning from folks like Andrew Keyt and Karen Caplan, I believe my past investment in industry trade shows was time well spent, and I look forward to attending those that are ahead. **pb**

Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.

The hidden gems of these meetings are the smaller educational sessions. ... While I enjoy the general sessions, often times it's the smaller sessions that offer the real take-home value for the attendee.



The Significance Of The US/EU Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership

BY JOHN GILES

While many countries around the world are busy negotiating Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with emerging markets, such as India, China and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) bloc, a mega deal between the U.S. and the European Union has been bubbling away in the background since 2013. This deal has the potential to be a real game changer in terms of economic development, job creation and international trade.

Some of the potential gains are staggering — with the EU standing to benefit by an estimated US\$135 billion per annum alone. So why on earth would anyone be against the transaction? A good question, and one to which there might be no easy answer. In the world of EU trade discussions and negotiations, there rarely seems to be. Getting consensus amongst 28 individual Member States of the EU is a major challenge.

While there is enthusiastic support from many political and business stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic, there are some serious critics of the planned partnership too. The basic premise of the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) is to reduce the level of import tariffs and non-tariff barriers for trade between the U.S. and the EU significantly. In many cases, these are relatively low to begin with, but agriculture is maybe an exception. The farm sector, in the past, has been a major thorn in the side in international trade talks at forums such as the WTO (World Trade Organization) between the U.S. and the EU.

In terms of horticulture, this is probably not a key sticking point compared to the likes of the dairy, meat and cereal sectors. The role of genetically modified (GM) foods is probably the most contentious area of all, with widespread acceptance of this technology in North America and increasingly many other parts of the world. In the EU though, there is still a good deal of resistance from consumers as to the use of GM food and agri inputs per se; although, in the commercial supply chain, farmers and food processors are beginning to accept the benefits.

Many, but far from all, see the introduction of GM technology as being inevitable, if not even desirable. Views on this still vary around the EU, as they do with most aspects of economic, social and political policy and as is seen in the wide range of views as to how the EU Common Agricultural Policy should be reformed over time. The danger for the fresh produce trade is that it might get caught up in a wider debate over other agricultural and food products.

The key objective for TTIP is to reduce the costs of business between the EU and the U.S. In farming and food, this often comes down to the technical procedures and details by which standards of food safety are met. Ironically, both sides agree that the differences

in the level of food safety are not at all dissimilar. The debate therefore comes down to how well recognised the respective technical standards are, their interpretations, and the future development of food industry regulations that do not overtly inhibit trade between the two regions. Critics of the TTIP suggest that this harmonisation of technical standards might see them lowered, and this would lead to potential problems in areas such as consumer and environmental protection. Protection of intellectual property, the transport sector and financial services are other potential sticking areas. They might all involve the produce sector to some extent.

Even if the TTIP sets out a new trade and investment framework, for leading U.S. produce exporters, the lure of other emerging markets in Central and Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa and parts of the Middle East might still prove to be too strong to switch the direction of trade back to the EU. U.S. produce exports to the EU have been falling for much of the past 10 years due to a combination of the mature nature of many EU markets, intense competition, stringent commercial, and technical standards imposed by leading EU customers beyond what the statutory regulations

might ask for as well as the nature of CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) protection to European growers.

The TTIP might well end up addressing many of these areas, of course, but in the intervening period, the attention of the U.S. produce sector may switch to other parts of the world. Reducing the regulatory burden on U.S. exporters is all well and good. And it is clearly a step in the right direction to encourage U.S./EU trade, but growers and traders from California, Washington state, Florida and the like will need to build strong marketing relationships with key importers, wholesalers and retail/foodservice companies in the EU in order to develop sustainable commercial relationships in a new TTIP era. This might be easier said than done.

There still seems a long way to go before the proposed timetable of completion-talks by the end of 2015 is achieved. This effort is increasingly looking unrealistic on both sides of the Atlantic. Not least in the U.S., the government is still looking to finalise the Trans Pacific Partnership, which involves 11 countries including the U.S. and Japan, but not China. The TTIP will eventually be a landmark agreement between the U.S. and the EU. The impact on the horticultural sector could be huge, but we will have to wait and see how the scenario plays out over time. It really is a case of “watch this space.” **pb**

John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, the value-chain-consulting arm of Genus plc, and a specialist in international produce markets.

The TTIP will eventually be a landmark agreement between the U.S. and the EU.



Adapting To Trends And Coding Regulations In Produce Packaging

BY SERGIO ZAMORA

An ongoing shift in consumer eating habits is increasing demand for innovative solutions that deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers in handy packages without drastically increasing the cost. Produce marketers are finding that interest in ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables is on the rise as consumers look to combine healthy eating with convenience.

Future expectations are that there will be growth in most packaging categories, especially bags, pouches and tray sealed packaging. In addition, produce organizations are finding a greater need to differentiate packaging in order to stand out. Features such as easy opening and closing, single-serving and compact sizes, controlled portions, portability and food protection are becoming more appealing to today's convenience-minded and health-conscious consumer.

Along with these demands on produce growers and packers, the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI), an industry-led effort, adopted new standards to increase the use of electronic traceability for every case of fresh produce. To meet the standards, growers and packers must apply a Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) code, along with a human readable lot or batch number, to allow suppliers and retailers to trace each product's origins.

Coding Solutions For Unique Produce Packaging Demands

These changing consumer demands and complicated regulatory requirements can be met by utilizing the right printing and marking technologies. Therefore, when choosing the right printing and marking solution to address the latest packaging trends and regulations, produce packagers should carefully consider various technologies to find what is most effective on particular packaging materials.

Corrugated Boxes: Currently the leading produce packaging type, corrugated boxes are valued for their relatively low cost, light weight, good protective performance, graphics capabilities and well-established recycling infrastructure.

- Label Printer Applicator (LPA) and Print and Apply Labeling systems are designed for integration into packaging lines to apply labels on cases.
- Large Character Marking (LCM) technologies have high and low resolution capabilities for printing on a range of porous materials like corrugate. Some systems can print complex information, combining text, logos and barcodes in a variety of ink colors.
- Thermal Inkjet (TIJ) technology provides high resolution print suitable for text, logos and a wide range of barcodes including DataMatrix and stacked symbologies.
- Laser Marking offers high resolution and permanency without consumables such as inks and solvents that are often required for other marking technologies.

Plastic Containers: It is predicted that these containers will experience the fastest gains among major produce packaging types through 2017 due to growth in berry applications and widening use with other produce items, according to *Packaging World* magazine (a trade publication for packaging and manufacturing automation).

- Continuous Inkjet (CIJ) systems can print on almost any flat or curved substrate including rigid plastics.
- Lasers can provide high resolution marks on PET and other plastic materials.
- Thermal Transfer Overprinting (TTO) can be used to print text and barcodes onto the film layer used in tray-sealed packaging, or directly onto package labeling.

Bags, Liners (including breathable) and Pouches: Increasing in demand even faster than bags and liners, pouches are less expensive than rigid containers and valued for being display-ready with good aesthetics for product merchandising.

- Thermal Transfer Overprinting (TTO) technology delivers high-resolution images on flexible packaging films and labels. Available long ribbon lengths help minimize downtime and costs associated with frequent ribbon replenishment and production changeovers.
- Continuous Inkjet (CIJ) is ideal for printing on the flexible surfaces of bags and pouches.

Green/Sustainable Packaging: Finding alternative materials to petroleum-based packaging is increasing. Plastics made from wood, vegetable starch, plant starch and corn starch are becoming popular choices.

- In addition, various printing and marking technologies offer benefits to produce packagers as well.
- LPA and Print and Apply Labeling systems employ solvent-free TTO or direct thermal printing
- Lasers employ minimal consumables
- TIJ predominately uses water-based ink technology for low odor impact and low VOC emissions.
- Certain CIJ inks employ MEK-free solvents, such as acetone, ethanol and other solvent blends.
- New low-odor, high performance CIJ inks are now available for many applications where only MEK based inks were available in the past.

Regardless of the type of packaging, code accuracy remains critical to produce packagers to maintain food safety through whole chain traceability and to meet regulations including PTI standards and Country of Origin Law (COOL).

pb

Sergio Zamora is a vertical marketing manager at Chicago-based Video-jet Technologies, a company specializing in the product identification market, providing in-line printing, coding, and marking products, application specific fluids, and product life cycle services.

THE DAWN OF SONS

When proud and momentous occasions — like the one pictured for Yakima, WA-based Borton & Sons, Inc. — are captured, it's inspirational. The photo incarnates a point in 1941 when the farming operation was still relatively small — approximately 120 acres then, and is now more than 6,000 acres. "At this time, the fruit was being sold through a broker," recalls John Borton, co-owner of Borton & Sons. "With it still being a smaller operation, it was all hands on deck for whatever was needed depending on the season."

Byron S. Borton (pictured far right) stands with his three sons (from left to right) Don, Richard and Byron E. Borton. At the time, Don was about to ship off to WWII and eventually became a Lieutenant in the Army before being killed in 1944 while leading a reconnaissance mission behind enemy lines. Richard had not moved back home to join the family business fulltime yet. He was pursuing a career in electrical engineering and was working for Pacific Power and Light. However, Byron E. and his father Byron S. manned the operation. In 1942, Richard returned to the family farm to work with his dad and brother.

"This picture represents the first and second generation of Borton Fruit," says John. The most dramatic shift for the company came in the 1970s when third generation Bortons, John (Richard's son) and Bill Borton (Byron E.'s son) joined the business. "We began to expand the orchard and warehouse operations," he says.

John explains as new technology in farming and automated



Photo: (L-R) Don Borton, Richard Borton, Byron E. Borton, Byron S. Borton

packing became available in the 1970s, it allowed for growth on both the farming and packaging side of the business.

In 1979, the original Borton packing line and storage area burned down. "This tragedy presented an opportunity to become an industry leader with new technology," says John. He and Bill purchased the first computerized electronic sizer and color sorter in the U.S. "This dramatically improved the accuracy of sizing and color sorting of fruit with less labor and provided a platform for continued growth and expansion for Borton Fruit," he says. **pb**

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Floral Business	19	561-994-1118	www.floralbusinessmagazine.com
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Foodsource Organics	69	800-366-8755	www.buyfoodsource.com
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Pacific Tomato Growers	42	209-450-9810	www.sunripeproduce.com
Peri & Sons Farms	74	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
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United Fresh Produce Assoc.	50	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
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