

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



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- Columbia Marketing International
- Cranberry Marketing Committee
- Idaho Potato Commission
- Lighthouse Foods
- The Mushroom Council
- National Mango Board
- Ocean Mist Farms
- Produce for Kids
- Sakata
- Shuman Produce
- USA Pears
- U.S. Apple Association
- UMASS Dining/Avocados from Mexico



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INSIDE

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES SHRINK, REBATES AND MEASURING THINGS THAT ARE EASY
KEIL'S FRESH FOOD STORES • FALL MERCHANDISING • TAILGATING
WASHINGTON APPLES • POMEGRANATES • DISPLAY PACKAGING • ONIONS
SUMMER CITRUS • MUSHROOMS • ORGANIC SUPPLY • RAISINS
LOCALLY GROWN • REGIONAL PROFILES: CLEVELAND & DES MOINES

New!



Grill It, Sear It or Chop It!

Introducing DOLE® Chef's Choice Salad Kits,
an exciting addition to your Romaine Heart or Value-Added Salad Section



Great
upsell from
Romaine
Hearts and
Caesar Salad
Kit



**MUST WASH
BEFORE USE**
PERISHABLE - KEEP REFRIGERATED

DOLE® Chef's Choice is a new line of salad kits for salad lovers who enjoy preparing fresh head lettuce but want the convenience of a kit. Each kit contains two heads of mini Romaine, flavorful toppings, plus Dole's Signature dressing. The bag has step-by-step instructions to create the perfect grilled, seared, or chopped salad that serves four people. With DOLE® Chef's Choice Salad Kits, it's never been easier to prepare a restaurant-style salad in minutes.

To add the **NEW DOLE® Chef's Choice Salad Kits** to your stores, contact your sales representative.
See how simple it is to prepare at www.youtube.com/user/DoleTube

MERCHANDISE IN A REFRIGERATED LOCATION
Must be refrigerated due to inclusion of cheese and dressing.



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CORRECTION

On page 32 in the Veggie-Forward cover story of the July 2016 issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, Dig Inn was incorrectly identified as Dig Inn season market. Our apologies for the error.



GET RIGHT TO THE HEART

OF THE GLOBAL PRODUCE INDUSTRY

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produce quiz

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



FRANK MACHI
Produce Buyer
Paragon Foods
Warrendale, PA

Frank Machi of Warrendale, PA-based Paragon Foods admits his 35-year career in the produce industry is not by chance. "I grew up in the business," he says. "My father owned a produce company with his father and brothers."

As a produce buyer for a distributor, one needs to be flexible and a skilled multi-tasker. "I co-ordinate warehouse moves, and set up my buying for each day. I place orders and co-ordinate trucking for the loads. I match up pricing, and I am constantly evaluating prices to make the best decisions [for

our customers] — although quality is first at Paragon. I am also involved with our quality assurance person to discuss questions on loads that may come in suspect."

Paragon Foods' business serves about 10 percent retail and 90 percent foodservice customers. "We are known for our specialty items, which are popular in both segments," he says.

Machi appreciates his team members and enjoys the aspects of the industry. "I enjoy the atmosphere in produce. It is like no other job and a unique business."

How To Win! To win the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our October issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

WIN A VIDEO CAMERA DRONE

Used for work or play, this drone is easy enough for beginners. The rechargeable, remote-controlled Video Camera Drone has four rotors and a built-in gyroscope that makes it easy to fly outdoors — especially with LED directional lights — in a 500-foot range. Plus, it has a built-in video camera that shoots high definition AVI videos. You can download videos to any computer via USB to share or edit. The 9-ounce foam body includes 2GB memory card and USB card reader.



QUESTIONS FOR THE AUGUST ISSUE

- 1) What are the two flavor options for the Dole Chef's Choice Salad Kits? _____
- 2) What woman-owned company is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its Broccoli Cole Slaw? _____
- 3) What brand offers the Tuscan Style Cantaloupe? _____
- 4) Which kind of utensil is included with Bloom Fresh's Pomegranate Arils? _____
- 5) What company partnered with the American Institute for Cancer Research to educate consumers on ways we can stop cancer before it starts? _____
- 6) What directory is linked to the QR code on the ad for the New York Apple Association? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Email _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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 Produce Business is published by Phoenix Media
 Network, Inc. James E. Prevor, Chairman of the Board
 P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425.
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 Printed in the U.S.A.
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Vermont's GMO Labeling Law Prompts Historic Federal Legislation



BY PARKER LINN, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ASSISTANT

Implementation of Vermont's GMO labeling law has been a long time coming. In May of 2014, the state passed Act 120 requiring foods produced through "genetic engineering" be labeled as such at the point of sale and prohibited labeling or marketing genetically engineered foods as natural. Since its passage, food producers of all types grappled with what this might mean for sales in Vermont and other states, whose legislative bodies could start considering their own GMO legislation, creating a nightmarish patchwork of different regulations across the country. With growing pressure for GMO labeling from consumers, and no sign of federal legislation to create a national standard, food giants General Mills, Mars, and Kellogg, among others, decided to voluntarily begin labeling their products with or without a federally mandated national standard.

It appeared that Vermont's GMO bill would take effect on July 1, 2016 without any federal government preemption. But on June 24, 2016, just weeks before the Vermont law was set to take effect, the Senate Agriculture Committee's Chairman Pat Roberts and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow announced an agreement had been reached on a bill that would create a national GMO labeling program and set of standards for labeling on packages. Despite widespread support from all sectors of the food industry and unanimous approval by the Senate Agriculture Committee, several Senators expressed displeasure with the compromise bill, including Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Jon Tester (D-MT), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), who vowed to hold up its passage.

Roberts' and Stabenow's agreement creates a mandatory disclosure for foods that are derived from bioengineered (BE) products. It gives companies the flexibility to disclose this information in one of three ways: 1) text on the package; 2) a symbol on the package; or 3) an electronic link to a website where the information is posted. This allows for companies to utilize digital smartphone codes as an option in lieu of text on-package, which was required by the Vermont law. Furthermore, the agreement sets in statute a definition for bioengineering which is consistent with the current definitions already commonly used for BE products. These disclosure requirements will apply to all human food subject to labeling requirements under the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act as well as some meat and poultry products.

Now that there is a bill calling for mandatory GMO disclosure, the produce industry should take a position on this legislation. It is important to note that very few genetically engineered fruits and vegetables are available for sale in the U.S. marketplace. Only a few varieties of sweet corn, squash, papayas, and potatoes are approved for sale. Also, one variety of apple, the Arctic apple, is approved but not yet on the market. The bill places the requirement of labeling BE foods only on the companies that introduce such products into the marketplace. This had been a concern by companies who thought they might have to seek out a "non-GMO" verified label. Also, given the above mentioned options for labeling, the bill provides significant flexibility to companies that use BE foods. Finally, this bill creates a coherent, consistent national labeling program, which will

prevent a 50-state nightmare of patchwork legislation that could arise without national standards.

In response to this legislation, over 75 produce companies and organizations joined the entire food industry and signed on to a coalition letter in support of this bill. The letter was sent to the Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Harry Reid in strong support of the agreement, urging timely consideration on the Senate floor, and pledging to work with Senators on both sides of the aisle to provide swift passage of the bipartisan agreement.

As of this writing, and after nearly 30 hours of debate, the Senate passed Senate Agriculture Chairman Pat Roberts' and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow's compromise GMO labeling bill by a vote of 63-30. Chairman Roberts called the Senate's action, "the most important vote for agriculture in the last 20 years."

The bill must now pass the House where supporters of the legislation hope it will be considered before legislators leave Washington, D.C. for their parties' conventions and for activities in their congressional districts. The House has long supported a voluntary national labeling standard and had already passed legislation last year creating such a program. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway has indicated that he is working with House leadership to find a way to bring the measure to the House floor that helps to ensure passage.

As this matter continues to be debated, United Fresh will continue to work with our colleagues in agriculture to promote policies that are science-based.



• GET UP •

AND GROW!™

together

Dole is making healthy living a team sport in 2016! For the second year in a row, we're launching a nationwide summer tour and providing unique new recipes and action-inspiring incentives, all to challenge Americans to get healthy together by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Here's how:

TOUR



Free recipe samples, fun activities, and gifts with purchase at over 400 tour stops this summer!

CHALLENGE



Our new Healthy Living Challenge encourages consumers to join together in eating and living healthier for a chance to win culinary experiences.

RECIPES



Developed by our Culinary Nutrition team, our newest fresh fruit and vegetable recipes are ideal for sharing with family and friends this summer.

LEARN



Armed with the latest fruit and vegetable insights and meal prep tips from the Dole Nutrition Institute, eating healthy together has never been easier.

Visit Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow for more information. #GetUpAndGrow

DOLE AND RELATED MARKS ARE TRADEMARKS OF DOLE FOOD COMPANY, INC.

TRANSITIONS



Johnny Spina Jr.



Joe Martins



Joe Gularte



Jerritt Barr

**UESUGI FARMS
GILROY, CA**

Uesugi Farms hires four new employees to position the more than 70-year company for major growth. Joining the company are **Johnny Spina Jr.**, farm manager; **Joe Martins**, raw product procurement manager; **Joe Gularte**, production supervisor and **Jerritt Barr**, sales representative.

TRANSITIONS

**FIRSTFRUITS
YAKIMA, WA**

FirstFruits Marketing of Washington announces the expansion of its sales force by welcoming **Cory Zeigler** (right) and **Craig Barnes** (below) to its in-house sales team.



Zeigler previously worked for a wholesale packaging and foodservice distributor for more than six years and spent the past three years in outside sales within the fruit and hop industries. She spent an additional two years in the fresh produce industry prior to her current position working in sales support for L&M Companies.



Barnes brings more than six years of experience in the fresh produce industry to the FirstFruits' team. He previously worked for Sage Fruit Company as an account manager where he was responsible for sales in the apples, pears and cherries divisions as well as establishing and maintaining relationships with customers.

**T&G GLOBAL
NEW ZEALAND**

T&G Global is pleased to announce the appointment of **Joe Barsi** as president of its T&G North American pipfruit business through its subsidiary (EPI). Barsi officially takes the newly created role with T&G Global - North America Pipfruit this month and will be based in T&G Global's Washington state office in Wenatchee. Barsi has broad experience in the produce business having started his career with CH Robinson Worldwide where he achieved the role of general manager. He later held a role at California Giant Berry Farms for seven years as vice president of business development. Most recently he was president of Tradin Organics, a division of SunOpta, Inc., which sold 150 organic products including fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and sweeteners from over 50 countries.

TRANSITION



TRANSITION

**MISSION PRODUCE
OXNARD, CA**

Mission Produce hires **Gwendolyn Jackimek** as the company's wholesale sales manager. Jackimek comes to Mission after spending 12 years in fresh fruit sales with Dole Fresh Fruit, where she was the district sales manager responsible for key accounts in tropical sales. She managed fruit allocation for all sales in pineapples and bananas in the western half of the United States, and maintained wholesale market sales in that territory. In her role at Mission, she will be responsible for creating and driving strategy to service wholesale customers at the company. A native of Chicago, Jackimek has a degree in business marketing from Illinois State University.



TRANSITION

**PMA NEW ZEALAND
SOUTH YARRA, VICTORIA,
AUSTRALIA**

The Produce Market Association Australia/ New Zealand announces **Darren Keating** will take over for Michael Worthington as chief executive. In accepting the role, Keating says in the company's press release, "I am very excited to take on this leadership role with PMA ANZ and look forward to proactively working with the members and all the other stakeholders in building on existing initiatives and unearthing new opportunities to further strengthen our services to members and our contribution to the fresh produce industry."



TRANSITION

**MARKET FRESH PRODUCE
NIXA, MO**

Market Fresh Produce announces the addition of **Berrah Brown** as a produce intern with Market Fresh. Berrah's initial onboarding will consist of working in the operations, sales and marketing departments. Berrah will start in the Monett, MO-based campus to garner a full understanding of the company's repacking and distribution centers. His training will then move him into sales, marketing and sourcing training. Berrah joins Market Fresh Produce with experience in management, maintenance, and sales. His background includes time with the U.S. Marine Corps, where he earned several awards — one of which was the Chesty Puller award. He most recently worked for Aspen Chemical and Supply in sales and service.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**L&M GRAND OPENING
IN HAMILTON, MI**

L&M kicked off its Midwest summer season with the grand opening of a warehouse and new farm acreage in Hamilton, MI. The company completed construction on its 20,000-square-foot facility with state-of-the-art cooling, multiple temperature zones and new offices. The new facility was welcomed by L&M manager, Jake Parker, who spent the past five seasons in Michigan.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**APIO, INC. EXPANDS
HANOVER OPERATIONS**

Apio, Inc., (Guadalupe, CA) — a wholly owned subsidiary of Landec Corporation and a national producer of fresh-cut vegetable products for the United States and Canada under the Eat Smart brand — completed a major expansion of its Hanover, PA, operations. The \$19.5 million expansion triples the size of the facility to 64,000 square feet and increases production lines from two to 10 — helping Apio to better serve its retail customers in the Eastern U.S. and Canada.



ANNOUNCEMENT



PRESIDENT OF NEWSTAR FRESH FOODS OFFICIALLY PURCHASES COMPANY

NewStar Fresh Foods, LLC (Salinas, CA) announces the official acquisition of the company by longtime employee, and current president, Anthony Vasquez. With 20 years experience in agriculture, including more than a decade with NewStar, Vasquez is seizing the opportunity to continue and expand his relationship with the Salinas-based grower/shipper. NewStar's growth continues from the ground up with its increasing list of prime growing regions including several new areas in Baja and expansion into Oxnard.

ANNOUNCEMENT

DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES LAUNCHES DOLE CHEF'S CHOICE

Dole Fresh Vegetables (Monterey, CA) announces the launch of DOLE Chef's Choice, an industry-first new line of salads that combines the versatility of head lettuce with the all-in-one convenience of a salad kit. Salad users can use the ingredients to create their own grilled, seared or chopped salad masterpiece. DOLE Chef's Choice Salad Kits in Caesar and Tuscan styles contain two fresh-picked heads of mini Romaine, toppings, and a Dole signature dressing.



Shipping in mid-August for national supermarket availability by October 1 for \$4.99; and it serves four people.

ANNOUNCEMENT



FIRSTFRUITS MARKETING DONATES OVER 350,000 POUNDS OF APPLES TO LOCAL FOOD BANKS

FirstFruits Marketing (Yakima, WA) finished its sixth annual Take a Bite Out of Hunger program at select retailers with a collective donation of 350,000 pounds of apples to local food banks. This brings the total program donation to approximately 1.6 million pounds over six seasons. FirstFruits created Take a Bite Out of Hunger with the goal of helping feed the underserved while bringing attention to the problem of food insecurity in the United States. In its sixth year, FirstFruits continues to partner with retailers and wholesalers to make fresh apple donations. Donations are made in a retailer's name to local food banks with the retailer contributing the cost of freight. This year's participating retailers and wholesalers included Ahold, Charlie's Produce, Dave's Marketplace, Good Food Stores, Harvey's, McKay's Markets, Northwest Grocers, Red Apple Markets, Roundy's, Stater Brothers, Super 1 Foods, Thriftway and United Supermarkets.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MELISSA'S LAUNCHES A COLLECTION OF 6 BOUTIQUE GRAPE VARIETALS

Melissa's/World Variety Produce (Los Angeles) celebrates the California summer grape harvest with a collection of six boutique varietals. Each variety offers a unique taste and texture experience to discerning grape lovers looking for flavor and quality that is "just a cut above the rest." The delicate Champagne grape, the Candy Sweets grape and full-bodied Jelly Drops grape will be marketed in a convenient 1-pound clamshell and available through late August. The tiny seedless Champagne is prized by culinary professionals for its high sugar content and multitude of uses from garnish to fine sauce. The Candy Sweets grape is named for

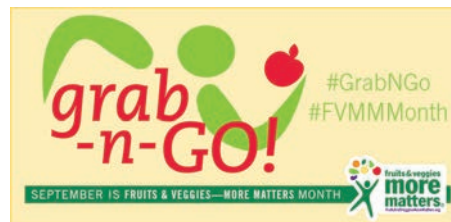


their sweet taste profile. The deep purple-velvet color of the plump and juicy Jelly Drops has a rich, full grape flavor reminiscent of the classic Concord.

ANNOUNCEMENT

GRAB-N-GO WITH PBH DURING SEPTEMBER

September and Fruits & Veggies — More Matters month is an opportunity to celebrate with the Hockessin, DE-based Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH). Based on industry feedback, the organization is using the Grab-N-Go theme — with a new twist. The theme focuses on the ease of grabbing and eating fruit and veggies. For 2016, the Grab-N-Go theme will also include a fun social media photo share campaign encouraging consumers to snap a picture and share with PBH how they, their family and their friends "grab" and eat their fruit and veggies on the go.



ANNOUNCEMENT

D'ARRIGO BROS. OF NEW YORK RECOGNIZED FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW YORK CITY ZERO WASTE CHALLENGE



Gabriela D'Arrigo, Marketing Director for D'Arrigo Brothers of New York, Bronx, NY

D'Arrigo Bros. of New York, one of the nation's largest distributors of fresh fruits and vegetables, was recognized by New York City for its participation in the Mayor's Zero Waste Challenge, part of Mayor Bill de Blasio's comprehensive OneNYC plan to send Zero Waste to landfills by 2030. This Zero Waste Challenge comes ahead of the new commercial organics law, which will require certain subsets of businesses to source separate food scraps and other organic material for beneficial use in 2017, as well as new commercial recycling rules that simplify the City's current commercial recycling rules, making them easier for businesses to follow. To successfully complete the Zero Waste Challenge, D'Arrigo committed to divert at least 50 percent of waste from landfill and incineration.

ANNOUNCEMENT

BALDOR AND WHOLE FOODS MARKET LAUNCH THE BALDOR FORAGER

Baldor Specialty Foods (Bronx, NY), collaborates with Whole Foods Market's Northeast Region by making the company's selection of unique culinary items available to home cooks for the first time through an in-store, digital kiosk called The Baldor Forager, which launched exclusively on July 26 in coordination with the grand opening of Whole Food Market Williamsburg, located at 238 Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, NY. Baldor will curate items based on uniqueness, seasonality and popularity with celebrated restaurants like Estela and Daniel. At the launch, offerings included fresh, water-grown wasabi root, white strawberries and an unusual variety of lavender-hued mushroom from France called a Bluefoot.



Produce & Floral Watch are regular features 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



Smoke-and-mirror Retailing

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When an external enemy attacks, it tends to create a response. Look at how Wal-Mart, most recently with its acquisition of Jet.com, is consciously trying to respond to the threat posed by Amazon.com and the growing onslaught of online shopping.

Obviously some adversity can't be overcome, but the clarity of the threat and the instinct of organizations to be self-defensive often leads them to find a way to survive and thrive. They defeat the competition or get out of the way of the competitor, or they find a way to co-exist.

When the undoing of an organization is internal, it is harder to battle. When the problem is one's boss, the challenge is substantial.

And such is the dilemma faced by many, perhaps most, supermarkets today as supermarket CEOs insist on policies that hurt the whole produce department.

What is the issue we speak of? What surreptitious force is undermining produce departments? And why would CEOs act in a way that weakens one of their most important departments?

The answer is that retail produce departments suffer because they are compelled by supermarket CEOs to match competitive banana prices. Sometimes it is with another supermarket, sometimes directly with Wal-Mart... in many cases, it amounts to the same thing: One supermarket in a region decides it must price compete with Wal-Mart on bananas, and the whole market is pricing with Wal-Mart on bananas.

The driver behind this disruption is rarely the produce executives at retail. It is top corporate executives who have decided that bananas are the marquee produce item, that consumers will flee a chain in search of better banana prices, that consumers will remember competitive offers on bananas and that being high on bananas will powerfully impact consumer price perception of the entire chain.

Yet CEOs' perceptions may be out of date. You can hear them focus on bananas and iceberg lettuce, as memories bubble up of their younger days spent in the stores. Yet iceberg lettuce has become a minor item and, though bananas have long been the best-selling produce item — and that remains true today — bananas are rarely the best-selling category these days.

Thirty years ago, it was not uncommon for bananas to account for 15 percent of produce department sales in less affluent stores. All this was destined to change. An explosion of counter-seasonal fruit meant that bananas would have more winter competition. An explosion of fresh-cuts meant that many convenient snacking options would appear. More flavorful grapes, tree fruit, apples and berries were more competitive. Easy-peeling citrus made a whole new category develop. Innovations in packaging would allow many produce items to be handled conveniently — think of Naturipe's blueberry packaging used in McDonald's superseding a world where bananas, almost uniquely, had this advantage naturally.

Yet while there are good reasons why bananas would not dominate

produce as they once did, this natural trend has been accelerated because prices have been set so low that profitability has been drained from the category, and that means retailers are loathe to advertise, market or give prime display space and more copious room to bananas. Imagine you had a brilliant merchandising idea that would result in sales dropping for berries or grapes by \$1 million but would see banana sales climb \$2 million. For most stores that would be a loser because the gross profit on bananas is typically so low.

If this all resulted in the department's Number One item being drained of profitability, we could probably lament that and go on living with it. But it is much worse. When top corporate executives order low banana prices, they do it as a form of advertising for the overall store. They want to impact the price perception not just of the produce department but of the whole store and of the banner name. Yet, rare indeed is the CEO who both says to produce executives that A) I want you to lower banana prices and B) I am going to treat the lost margin as a corporate advertising expense and reimburse the department for lost margin.

Instead, most top corporate executives at retail expect the department to meet the same margin goals as before, but without the profits from its highest volume item. Translation: Produce departments have to raise prices on every other produce item to maintain overall margin when they are getting little or no margin from bananas.

This depresses consumption, consumer trial, and everything the industry hopes to achieve. And for what? We actually don't have good data indicating that consumers won't pay a fair price for bananas. And there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that the elasticity of demand on bananas is not high.

Retailers have seen this story before. In the "wet salad" department in the deli, vendors came to offer the big three salads on the cheap — that is potato, macaroni and coleslaw. But the price shift of moving all the profitability to small volume salads — cucumber, beet, carrot raisin, etc. — made these items excessively expensive and suppressed consumer demand.

The idea of price matching is a relic of days when retailers were comparable. Now the specialized retailers, such as Trader Joe's, Aldi and Whole Foods, have different cost structures, different merchandising approaches, different clienteles. It will be impossible to match price and assortment with these radically different concepts.

Building a reputation for good prices shouldn't be done through shifting margins from one item to another — that kind of smoke-and-mirror retailing won't be the way forward. Reputations need to be built on sustainable profitability. We can start by urging CEOs to set banana prices free.

Produce departments suffer because they are compelled by supermarket CEOs to match competitive banana prices.

pb

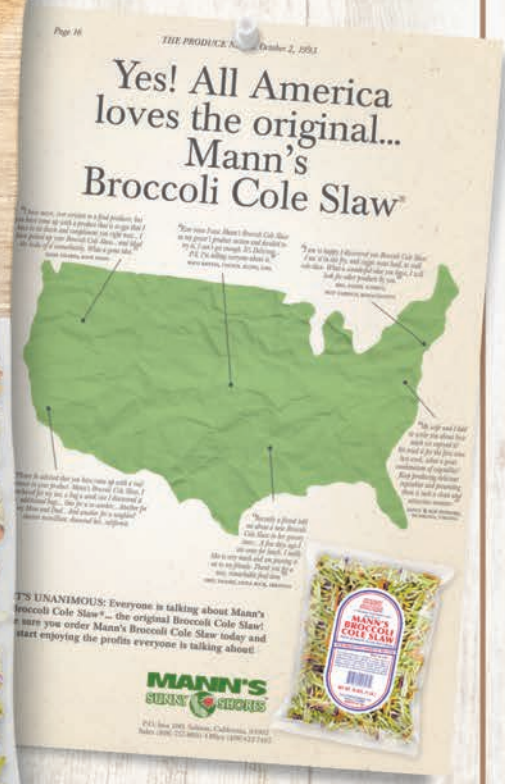


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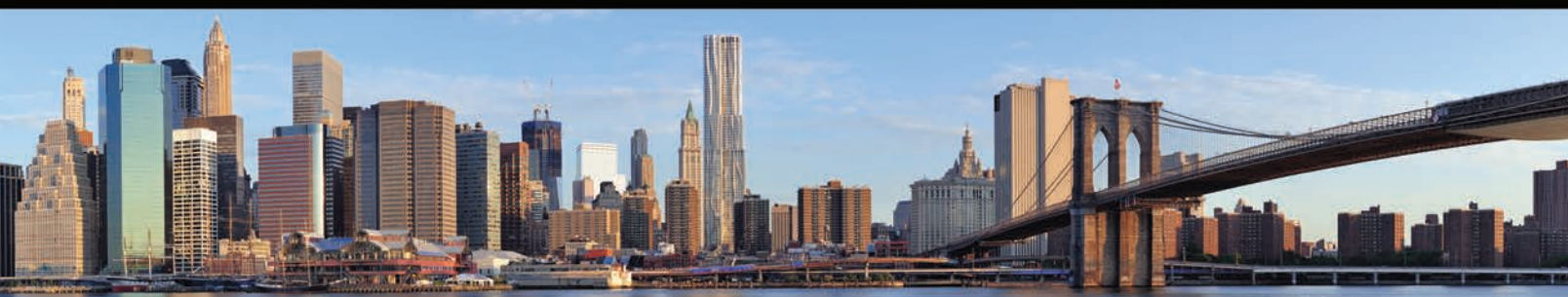
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CELEBRATING
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Driving Fresh Mushroom Category Growth

BY BART MINOR, PRESIDENT, MUSHROOM COUNCIL

According to a recent purchase-behavior study, “Fresh Mushrooms Fast Facts — A Quick Guide to Shopper Purchase Behaviors” — conducted by the Mushroom Council based on data from the National Consumer Panel (NCP), an IRI and Nielsen operational joint venture — mushroom consumers are found to be receptive to both new varieties of mushrooms and new ways to incorporate mushrooms into their meals. Fresh mushroom purchasers average six mushroom buying trips per year for a total annual spend of \$15.78 on fresh mushrooms. Over half of U.S. households purchased fresh mushrooms in 2015.

The Mushroom Council actively developed initiatives to increase mushroom consumption ranging from school nutrition to utilizing registered dietitians at retail. The Council is driving fresh mushroom category growth and encouraging consumers to use fresh mushrooms.

NEW INITIATIVES PROMOTE MUSHROOM CONSUMPTION

The Blend

Consumers, chefs, foodservice operators and retailers are using The Blend to increase produce consumption and enhance and extend meat. The Blend is the culinary technique of blending fresh, chopped mushrooms with ground meat. Finely chopped mushrooms blend seamlessly with ground meat to make meals more delicious, nutritious and sustainable. The diced mushrooms are mixed with proteins such as beef, turkey, lamb or pork to make hamburgers, meatloaf, meatballs, tacos and more into healthier versions of classic meals.

Consumers are actively looking for ways to eat better without giving up the flavor and the foods they enjoy. Approximately 100 million transitional meat consumers (those looking to reduce red meat consumption) are looking for an improved alternative to their diet. This consumer group is comprised largely of Millennials and Baby Boomers.

By reaching consumers with new mushroom usage suggestions the industry is increasing growth potential for fresh mushroom sales.

Eating better for this group means making an effort to seek nutritious alternatives to their existing high caloric and high fat diets.

Supermarket Registered Dietitians

Supermarket Registered Dietitians activate their passion for improving public health by helping shoppers make healthier choices at retail. They have been instrumental in educating the foodservice, deli and meat departments at retail to carry Blend products for their customers. Many retailers showcase the Blend through cooking demonstrations, healthy meal plan displays and recipe cards. Consumers find the Blend technique incredibly easy to make and love that they are improving the nutritional value and flavor of their family’s favorite recipes. Retailers are finding a positive sales result in both the mushroom and meat categories.

School Nutrition

Thanks to their hearty texture and likeness to meat in terms of taste and texture, mushrooms are used to makeover school meals. To meet National School Lunch Program guidelines, foodservice directors use The Blend to appeal to kids while still meeting rigorous nutrition requirements. Many school districts have introduced mushrooms into their meal cycle with great success. The mushrooms in school nutrition program encourages students to try mushrooms, understand the health benefits, and become a mushroom lover, which helps create mushroom shoppers for life.

VALUE OF THE BASKET INCREASES WITH FRESH MUSHROOMS

Household dollar sales of fresh mushrooms reached over \$1 billion in sales in

2015. Research suggests that the average dollars spent on mushrooms per shopping occasion has increased steadily to \$2.69. This indicates shoppers are spending more during their shopping trip.

If mushroom buyers spend \$1 more per year on mushrooms, it would translate to a \$66 million increase in annual fresh mushroom sales. A 1 percent increase in household penetration represents an annual sales opportunity of over \$19 million.

Increasing household usage is a prime growth opportunity for fresh mushrooms. Research indicates that the shopping basket value increases 82 percent to \$75.62 when mushrooms are included in the basket. Over the last four years, the value of the basket with mushrooms has grown faster than without, up 8 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

By reaching consumers with new mushroom usage suggestions the industry is increasing growth potential for fresh mushroom sales. Not only can consumers become excited about trying The Blend, retailers can become excited to increase fresh mushroom category growth.

Data Source: IRI Consumer Network™ 2015 / Fresh Mushroom Fast Facts – A Quick Guide to Shopper Purchase Behaviors



The Mushroom Council is composed of fresh market producers or importers who average more than 500,000 pounds of mushrooms produced or imported annually. The mushroom program is authorized by the Mushroom Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act of 1990 and is administered by the Mushroom Council under the supervision of the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service. Research and promotion programs help to expand, maintain and develop markets for individual agricultural commodities in the United States and abroad. These industry self-help programs are requested and funded by the industry groups that they serve.

Increase Consumption One Item At A Time

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

The globe is awash with various promotional programs designed to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables. In the United States, *5 A Day The Color Way*, *Fruits & Veggies More Matters*, *Eat Brighter!*, and more have all served in this role.

It is fair to say that the premise, spoken or unspoken, behind these kinds of promotional programs is some combination of education and affiliation with beloved characters will lead to increased produce consumption.

Unfortunately, the evidence for any rise in produce consumption is thin. Despite decades of efforts, we can't point to an increase in consumption that has been prompted by this approach.

Now, the Mushroom Council offers the industry a different approach. Is it possible that money invested in product development could be more effective in boosting consumption than generic promotional efforts? It is a big change in approach.

The traditional approach "blames" the consumer; it assumes they need to be educated or inspired. With this new approach, the Mushroom Council suggests people do things for rational reasons, and current consumption patterns reflect the known utility of our products.

If our industry wants to change consumption patterns, a good way to do so is to change the known utility of our products.

In pursuit of this goal, the Mushroom Council worked hard with The Culinary Institute of America, among other organizations, to create, perfect and identify uses for "The Blend." In other words, rather than just urging people to consume more mushrooms, the focus shifts to creating usage opportunities that did not exist before.

The idea is to take mushrooms, chop them up, and mix them with ground meat to create burgers, meatballs, meatloaf, etc. — which are essentially *mushroom-meats*. The advantages are obvious: The blended products are lower in calories, less expensive,

We should look deep at our product portfolio, and instead of saying consumers are at fault for not being sufficiently appreciative of our products, we should commit resources to product development to make our products more delicious, more useful, and more convenient.

place less strain on the environment, etc. In addition, the blended product (depending on the ratios used) can maintain or even enhance the flavor and mouthfeel of the entrée.

This author has personally sampled the blended product and can attest that it is delicious. Indeed, the mushroom seems to make most ground meat dishes more juicy than straight ground meat. We would say that, in many applications, we find the mushroom-blended product to taste superior to the meat alone.

We noted great enthusiasm for the product in the school foodservice market. In primary and secondary schools, price seems to be a strong driver, as budgets are so thin.

In college and university foodservice, environmental concerns seem to drive a general push toward more plant-based foods, and thus, more interest in blends.

Of course, even if "The Blend" is a fantastic product, marketing still poses big problems. What is "The Blend"? It is neither meat, nor a mushroom. Can we change consumer perceptions to accept such a hybrid? We all know what a hamburger is or a veggie burger. What do you call, and how do you market, a hybrid?

New products can create utility. Think of pomegranate arils and how easy it is to

add them to fruit cups and salads when consumers or restaurants don't have to cut up pomegranates.

New techniques create sales. Think of the enormous volume of protein-inclusive salads, such as Ready Pac's Bistro Bowls, that are now sold in produce. Think of demand built by new varieties of grapes and berries or any of a dozen apples that superseded Red Delicious in growth.

What all these products share, and what the Mushroom Council pioneered, is the idea that each organization in the industry should accept individual responsibility for boosting consumption.

We should look deep at our product portfolio, and instead of saying consumers are at fault for not being sufficiently appreciative of our products, we should commit resources to product development to make our products more delicious, more useful, and more convenient.

Then, the products must be marketed, and using paths such as school foodservice and retail dieticians can only help. But we need to have innovative, game-changing items to market. "The Blend" is an example for the entire industry. Kudos go to Bart Minor, president and chief executive at the Mushroom Council, and to the entire mushroom industry for having the vision to support the initiative.

Shrink, Rebates And Measuring Things That Are Easy



James F. Prevor

JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Unfortunately, the methods used to reduce shrink — ordering less, buying grass-green bananas, etc. — also cause a boom in out-of-stocks and cause sales to crash, which kills profitability.

reduces both sales and profits. It is also possible that vendors are pretty sharp and will get back the required rebate — perhaps with a premium for making them jump through hoops. It is also possible that requiring rebates, which typically require time and effort to set up, serves to constrain the supply base, and thus increase cost of goods.

Yet, many a CEO has evaluated his CFO based on what is easy to see — checks coming in for rebates — and

One of the most dangerous moves in business is evaluating a situation based on what is easy to calculate rather than what is important.

At retail, we have seen this problem manifest itself many times. One common expression is in the form of shrink reduction programs, which are often undertaken with horrid consequences. What happens is that a high-ranking corporate executive reviews the financials and notes a line in the budget that corresponds to shrink. The corporate executive, typically lacking any experience in produce, does not know how to increase produce sales and would find it difficult to demand more effective procurement.

Yet, one element stands out clearly on the financials — that large line item for shrink. So, the corporate executive notes that if he can just reduce shrink 50 percent, he can add a few million dollars to the bottomline. So a program is developed, produce managers are incentivized based on shrink and, lo and behold, lower shrink targets are achieved.

Unfortunately, the methods used to reduce shrink — ordering less, buying grass-green bananas, etc. — also cause a boom in out-of-stocks and cause sales to crash, which kills profitability.

Appropriate levels of shrink are a byproduct of good operational practices. But nobody can look at a P&L and declare that operating practices are optimal. This requires studying that takes a lot of effort

and expertise. So, all too often, the easy category to measure (shrink) gets the attention, while the important assessment — whether operational practices are optimal — gets ignored.

Another industry example is the desire of some big buyers to get rebates from vendors. Of course, there are arguments in favor of such an approach: A retailer working on gross margins may think requiring rebates from vendors will raise the cost of goods, and thus the margin requirement will be on a higher base — resulting in increased chain profitability. A large buyer may also think his vendors are not very sharp and, if he demands a percent or two, the vendors will eat the cost in whole or in part.

In many cases, though, the demand for a rebate program is more simple. Perhaps the CFO, aware that people often pay excessive attention to what is obvious rather than what is important, enjoys walking into the CEO's office and showing him the monthly rebate check for hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. The implicit message: "Look what a brilliant CFO you have who was able to set up such fantastic deals for our company."

But are the deals fantastic for the buyer? That is a thesis at best unproven. After all, it might be that artificially raising the cost of goods, while maintaining margin requirements, makes a retailer's pricing to consumers excessive, and thus



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has not done the work to ascertain if those checks represent real value for the company or are just a chimera.

As the Internet grew in importance and the options in trade marketing on the Internet proliferated, this phenomenon of judging the things that are easy to judge rather than the things that are important has also proliferated and led to enormous waste of funds.

What turns on some people in marketing is that websites are quantifiable. There is so much data one can derive from a website — click-through rates, impressions, unique visitors, share of voice, time on site, geography, what device people used to access the website, etc.

What is easy to do gets done, so countless interns spend their summers gathering spreadsheet upon spreadsheet of the available data.

Of course, this data is pretty much meaningless. Perhaps a consumer-oriented ad campaign might find value in these statistics; if the product is toothpaste, which is inexpensive and ubiq-



uitous, these raw numbers might be instructive, because all the consumers are very similar.

In the trade, though, this makes little sense. Buyers are not interchangeable commodities. They differ from each other in powerful and important ways. Size is the most obvious one; a buyer from Wal-Mart carries different weight than a buyer from a local fruit stand. But it is not only size that matters — fit is crucial as well. Is the vendor upscale, downscale, or producing innovative products? Do you

sell products that appeal to a particular ethnicity?

If one's interest is shipping trailer loads of core commodities, then one is just being bedazzled by website metrics claiming millions of viewers. The numbers may well be correct, but since there do not exist millions of buyers of trailer loads of core commodities, the numbers add more smoke than light.

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Keil's Fresh Food Stores

The San Diego-based retailer intertwines family and community.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

Some grocers claim to be neighborhood markets. Keil's Fresh Food Stores is the real embodiment of such a category. Consider that the general manager at the Clairemont location of this family-run two-store chain based in San Diego, CA, met his wife in the grade school down the street and was once the community's paperboy.

The produce director has been working at the store a long time, and his brother works at the supermarket's second location in San Diego's San Carlos neighborhood. What's more, customers who visited the store as kids continue to come back with their children not only to shop weekly but also to visit Keil's must-do annual community Pumpkin Patch, which is staged in the parking lot at Halloween. This neighborhood theme carries straight into Keil's produce department.

"Produce is more than just another department in the store," says general manager, Brian Haire. "It's the gateway to the store. As you

make your way through the store, one of our four produce employees greets and welcomes customers by name."

It All Began Up North

Otto Keil, grandfather of Keil's owner, Rick Keil, opened the first namesake market in the early 1920s. Otto's son, Ron, took over the operations opening more stores throughout the Pacific Northwest in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Rick, Ron's son, moved south to southern California to attend the University of Southern California and worked in retail meat departments while obtaining his business degree. This training, plus frequent talks with his father while growing up akin to some families talk sports or current events, gave Rick a great education about the grocery business. In 1990, Ron and Rick had the opportunity to purchase two Vons stores, one of which was located at 3015 Clairemont Drive.

"I started here on the first day Keil's opened after hearing what the Keil family stood for

in terms of family and community. I worked at Vons, but at the time, I felt like I was just a number there," says Haire.

The father-and-son Keil team opened a second location at 7403 Jackson Drive, in the San Diego suburb of San Carlos in the early 2000s.

According to San Diego's government website, the Clairemont and San Carlos communities, both located north of downtown San Diego, are home to collectively some 100,000 people. Clairemont is the larger of the two population-wise with proportionally more Hispanic, Asian and African American shoppers, although in both communities Caucasians form the major ethnic group. Family sizes in both areas follow the national average of two to three people.

Quality Is The Sourcing Keyword

Produce is ordered weekly by Ed Garcia, produce manager at Clairemont for more than two decades. Garcia's brother, Jessie, does the

same at the San Carlos store, where he has worked for more than a decade. Garcia has such a passion for produce that he says its frequently the topic of conversation when he and his brother's family gets together for dinner.

The produce order is placed daily just before Garcia leaves at 2 p.m. Keil's main produce supplier is Vernon, CA-based Nature's Produce, located two hours north near the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market. The wholesaler makes deliveries five days a week to several supermarkets in the San Diego area, including Keil's.

Other suppliers for Keil's include Coast Citrus, Albert's Organics, Ready Pac and Charlie's Produce. Garcia relies on buyers at Nature's Produce for hot sheet and special buys on fruits and vegetables. It's a loyal relationship the two companies forged over decades of doing business. Deliveries usually arrive the following day, or five days a week, thus enabling Keil's to quickly respond to customer demand. Requests by shoppers are encouraged by produce staff who actively sample at any time.

"Our sourcing strategy is all about quality. You can source by price all day long, but if the apples are bruised, and the strawberries have green on the shoulders, people don't buy them," says Haire.

Produce First

Produce is the first department shoppers see upon entering the front door. It's adjacent to an aisle of bottled nutrient supplements. The thinking at Keil's is that supplement shoppers are fresh produce buyers too, so why not group the two side-by-side to increase sales of both.

What first catches the eye is the colorful display of bulk vegetables on wet racks that easily stretches some 60-feet horizontally along the parameter wall. The produce is set off by mirrors in the back that reflect its quality as well as its abundance.

Produce staff clean the mirrors daily with a vinegar and water solution so no fingerprints or other marks get in the way of the attractive display. This presentation is to Garcia's credit. In fact, it's an everyday expression of the greater talents he used to win display contests for avocados and potatoes. The recent addition of all LED lighting makes not only the wet rack but entire produce department look bright and vibrant.

The produce department at Keil's Clairemont location occupies approximately one-sixth of the 27,000-square-foot of floor space and generates 12 percent of store sales,



or more than the meat department generates, according to Haire. There are over 1,000 items that ring through produce. This number includes produce and non-produce items such as caramel dip, croutons, salad dressings and seasoning mixes. Approximately 95 percent of offerings are conventionally grown, while the remainder is organic. Bagged salads and bananas are major organic offerings.

Haire says the emphasis on conventional corresponds to customers in these working class community's greater willingness to pay for quality over growing method, especially when the latter can be much more expensive. Likewise, quality also trumps local.

"Local strawberries for us, for example, mean Carlsbad." He adds that if the quality is not the best, then the store defaults to product from Watsonville, CA-based Well-Pict Berries.

Produce also features prominently in

promotions. Each Thursday, Garcia, Haire and other department heads meet with Keil to select items that will go on ad and lock in pricing. Thanks to the nimble nature of a small independent and long-standing relationship with its major supplier, Kiel's is able to set ads one week in advance.

Ads run Wednesdays through Tuesdays and will usually feature eight to 12 produce items, including one or more on the front page labeled Keil's Deals. No loyalty card is needed by customers to take advantage of price promotions.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are merchandised attractively in other sections of the store. For example, the deli 'buys' produce from the produce department, then cuts it in-house to make bowls, platters and trays sold out of a multideck case located next to the service deli counter. The deli also prepares items on the salad bar as well as gets the ring. Produce on the salad bar includes Romaine lettuce, Spring Mix, mushrooms, cauliflower, assorted colors of bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, red onions and tomatoes.

It Takes A Neighborhood

What makes produce more than just another department at Keil's is that it's the event headquarters of the company. Haire and Garcia organize every community donation and holiday event out of produce. For example, Keil's donates produce such as apples and oranges to schools and churches in the community that host jog-a-thons and other events. Another great example — and Keil's biggest promotion of the year — is its Pumpkin Patch in October. Pumpkins (orange, white and striped) are laid out in a trail for customers and kids in Halloween costumes to walk through.

There's also a huge pumpkin for a guess-the-weight competition. Around these big bright orange fruits are activities such as bobbing for apples, retailing opportunities such as floral tent sales and a mini Haunted House. The Pumpkin Patch is a break-even community event that has become a 20-year tradition and source of pride for the produce staff. It's also something that differentiates Kiel's from its big corporate competitors that, as Haire says, set out a couple of pallets of pumpkins and calls it Halloween.

"The way we work is that one person will have an idea, we'll all brainstorm around it, and try it out. The customers will tell us if it works. Success is all about direct feedback from our customers in the neighborhood," says Haire.

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2016 WINNERS

- California Avocado Commission
- Columbia Marketing International
- Cranberry Marketing Committee
- Idaho Potato Commission
- Litehouse Foods
- The Mushroom Council
- National Mango Board
- Ocean Mist Farms
- Produce for Kids
- Sakata
- Shuman Produce
- USA Pears
- U.S. Apple Association
- UMASS Dining/Avocados from Mexico



A PPLAUSE, APPLAUSE! Congratulations to the companies and organizations recognized for winning PRODUCE BUSINESS' 28th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards. By sharing this collection of winners (listed alphabetically) and revealing some of the efforts involved in reaching the trade and capturing consumer attention, we celebrate creativity, determination, cleverness and innovation.

In a fast-paced world where excessive information is merely a click away, the underlying theme of many marketing excellence entries seems to link with the movement of "Influencing the Influencers." The approach to build a team of disciples by engaging consumers through various social media platforms continues to impress the judges.

Especially appreciated are the photos and inventive visuals drawing shoppers into the produce departments. There were surveys, contests, recipes, samplings, e-blasts and blogs. And, of course, there were plenty of posts, pins, tweets and likes. Sharing glimpses of these successful promotions is a way we can motivate industry members to engage in efforts to help build awareness, sales and consumption.

Special thanks to all of the entrants. We enjoy seeing the impressive strides to promote produce and the many products and services involved. With great celebration, we congratulate the following 14 winners. They show they know what clicks!



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CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

#BigGameAdd

OBJECTIVES: Encourage retailers to be a part of Super Bowl “buzz” without the enormous expense of advertising. Garner significant awareness of and engagement with California avocados during the Super Bowl period. Connect with big food and beverage brands advertising during the Super Bowl to include California avocados in their social conversations.

CAMPAIGN: California Avocado Commission’s (CAC) #BigGameAdd program interjected California avocados into the very active social media conversations surrounding the Super Bowl. Recipes were offered along with recipe preparation videos integrating California avocados with food and beverage brands advertising during the Super Bowl. The CAC engaged in significant digital and social media activity including teaser posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Targeted retailer support was included. (Think Doritos nachos topped with avocados or avocado chocolate and candybar cookies with flavor inspiration from Butterfinger.) California avocado season was just beginning, so distribution and retail promotion were tightly focused to accounts merchandising the fruit.

RESULTS: The campaign was groundbreaking for the CAC with an 876 percent increase in impressions, and that number doubled with engagement. There was a 553 percent increase in brand mentions. With the 662 total media posts, the potential audience impressions was 2.7 million. The 180,587 social media engagements generated a 13.3 percent engagement rate.



COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL

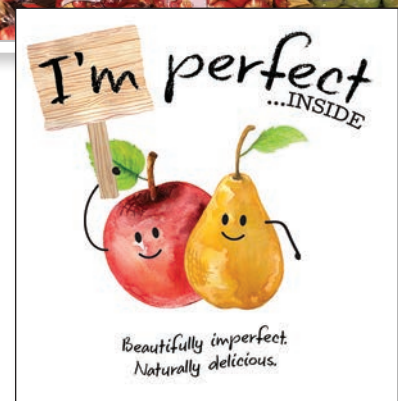
I'm Perfect Program

OBJECTIVES: Columbia Marketing International’s (CMI) imperfect fruit program was designed to make imperfect fruit available to consumers and retailers that are more aware of the waste in produce. I’m Perfect apples and pears are the slightly blemished or marked fruit.

CAMPAIGN: As much as 30 percent of apples and pears are set aside for cosmetic reasons, never reaching the grocery store produce section. Usually, these “quirky” fruits are sold to commercial wholesale companies able to remove the skin and use the sweet flesh inside in juices, apple sauce, or baked goods.

CMI created a program to attract the eye of the consumer and give imperfect fruit a second chance. Ads went out to retail publications and sell sheets were directed toward retailers. With a nod to “It’s what’s inside that counts,” retailers were encouraged to use the 3# and 5# poly bag as a way to display and promote the program.

RESULTS: Retailers and consumers are very knowledgeable on food waste in America. By increasing the efficiency of our food system, we can make better use of natural resources, provide financial saving opportunities along the entire supply chain and enhance the ability to meet food demands. According to CMI, getting food from the farm to fork eats up 10 percent of the total U.S. energy budget, it uses 50 percent of U.S. land, and it swallows 80 percent of all freshwater consumed in the United States. Yet, 40 percent of food in the U.S. today goes uneaten. I’m Perfect apples and pears are just too good to waste. Retailers and consumers are enjoying the program knowing they are getting a great product and helping the environment as well.



CRANBERRY MARKETING COMMITTEE

Cranberry Friendsgiving Photo Contest Social Media Campaign

OBJECTIVES: To reach the Millennial audience and drive cranberry consumption, the Cranberry Marketing Committee launched a strategic social media campaign designed to create a paradigm shift around the fall season and engage a younger audience — specifically Millennials — through a cranberry photo sharing contest timed to the Friendsgiving holiday.

CAMPAIGN: Friendsgiving is a Millennial-driven trend in which this generation celebrates the holiday with friends in the days and weeks before and after Thanksgiving. The campaign capitalized on an existing event through social media to capture the interest and attention of this important audience in order to create cranberry buzz, drive cranberry sales and generate creative contest entries on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. Millennials' love for food and social media, participation in Friendsgiving celebrations and admiration of social media influencers steered these actions: a) develop a social media photo sharing contest focused on creative cranberry recipes and décor to generate news about the versatility of cranberries and their myriad uses; b) time the contest to Friendsgiving to maximize interest and social media buzz; c) partner with social media influencers to motivate Millennials to purchase cranberries, enter the contest; and d) conduct in-store promotions to reach Millennials at the point-of-purchase.

RESULTS: The campaign resulted in hundreds of cranberry contest entries, significant social media chatter about cranberries and impactful sales increases across all cranberry products. Traditional and social media generated more than 200 million impressions. The partnership with retailer, Redner's, reached more than 1.2 million shoppers through an in-store circular.



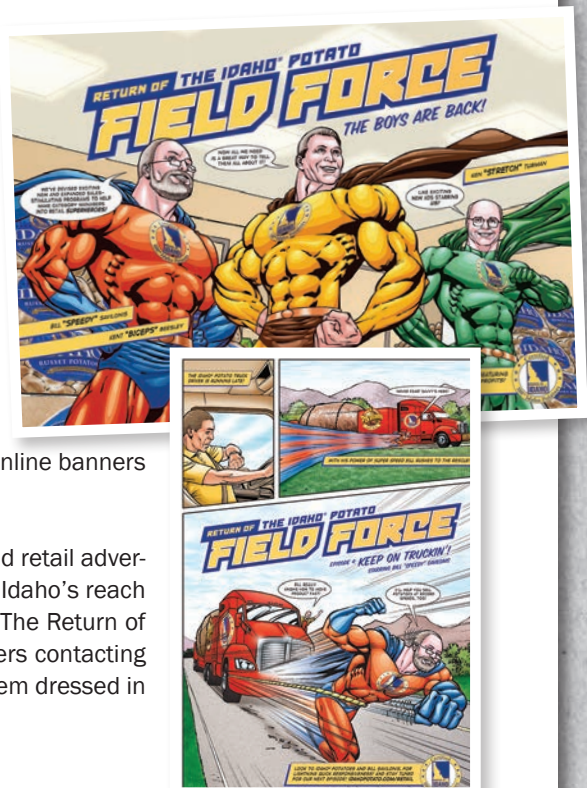
IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

The Return of the Idaho Potato Field Force

OBJECTIVES: The trade initiative aimed to increase retailer support for Idaho potatoes, thus driving volume and growing the potato business throughout the country while reinforcing and expanding the reputation of Idaho potatoes as America's highest quality.

CAMPAIGN: The Return of the Idaho Potato Field Force campaign was launched in October 2015 and ran through June 2016. Humorous Comic Book-themed materials featuring Idaho Potato Promotion Directors in superhero costumes swooping to the rescue of produce retailers builds camaraderie and reminds them that the Promotion Directors are always here to help "save the day" by increasing sales and profits. A double-page spread kicked off the campaign, followed by seven different full page print advertisements that appeared in retail trade publications; plus teaser ads. The ads also were transformed into online banners to generate as much play as possible.

RESULTS: The response from produce managers, senior category managers and retail advertising/marketing managers was positive. The campaign dramatically improved Idaho's reach to the trade through a consistent, integrated approach and a touch of humor. The Return of the Idaho Potato Field Force has been an overwhelming success, with Managers contacting Promotion Directors just to discuss and laugh about the campaign featuring them dressed in superhero tights while ordering Idaho Potatoes for their stores.



LITEHOUSE FOODS

Holidazzle Winter Campaign 2015

OBJECTIVE: Capture consumers' attention for Simply Artisan Reserve Cheeses, Litehouse Dressings and Dips, as well as Cheese & Herbs with holiday-themed promotions featuring easy recipe suggestions.

CAMPAIGN: The company launched a consumer-driven promotion starting in mid-November. Consumers were reached via a full page ad in all major national markets. Press releases were sent and picked up by national publications. Social and digital communications were implemented.

Consumers submitted photos of favorite holiday eats to win a \$1,000 grocery card in the Holidazzle photo sweepstakes. In-store demos, a Pinterest promotion, and blogger coverage were included in the campaign. There was a public relations push via 75 foodie bloggers through iConnect, which resulted in 35 creating original recipes and 40 sharing and promoting recipes.

RESULTS: The Holidazzle timeframe saw positive year-over-year increases for the Litehouse products included in the featured marketing materials. Produce retailers were supported with sell sheets and POS material, which provided recipes listing additional fruits and vegetables necessary for the holiday recipes. More than 128 million coupons were distributed, about 200 store demonstrations were conducted, and there were more than 40 million impressions via the iConnect Blogger Program.



THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL AND CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD

Summer Grilling Promotion

OBJECTIVE: To promote a summer grilling option while increasing produce and veal consumption.

CAMPAIGN: The Mushroom Council partnered with the Cattlemen's Beef Board Beef Checkoff program for a Summer Grilling Promotion featuring a Muenster Stuffed Veal and Blend Mushroom Burger. The burger blend combined veal and mushrooms and was topped with more mushrooms. During the promotion, consumers found the new burger recipe and details about the \$500 grocery sweepstakes located on specially marked veal package labels. The promotion was supported with digital and social media to promote awareness. Contest entries were made online at VealMadeEasy.com.

RESULTS: This was the first year the Mushroom Council introduced The Blend at retail. It was an ideal partnership to increase consumption of veal and awareness and trial of The Blend. The Beef Checkoff generated digital media impressions of 1,356,538. The promotion was so successful in 2015 both the Mushroom Council and the Beef Checkoff are rolling out this promotion in 2016 with a new featured item and additional promotional activity.

About 300,000 packages with on-pack labels were distributed to 19 retailers in more than 2,000 stores. More than 162,000 sweepstakes entries were generated. There was press coverage and broadcast impressions were generated from a TV commercial that ran in both the Philadelphia and Washington D.C. markets. A Facebook sweepstakes was launched. A social media component increased exposure with online video impressions. More than 3,500 e-blasts were sent to the Mushroom Lover's List and 4,600 loyal Pinterest board followers.



NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

Scoring Mangooals for the Win!

OBJECTIVES: To increase mango consumption and strengthen consumer education to break some of the main barriers of mango purchase awareness, selection, cutting and usage.

CAMPAIGN: The National Mango Board (NMB) teamed up with soccer to score big with fans through a strategic combination of sampling events, social media, retail promotions, player appearances, and a spokesperson. Through these approaches, the NMB partnered with the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) to feature mangos as the "Official Superfruit of the NWSL," and following the success of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, mango continues to grow in popularity along with the sport. The NMB also partnered with US Youth Soccer with mangos as the "Official Snack of US Youth Soccer."

Sampling events allowed the NMB to reach consumers on a one-on-one basis with fresh mango samples and educate them on how to choose, cut and use mangos. Social media encourages mango conversations and engagement from followers and it is a powerful medium to inspire and educate consumers. The NMB also coordinated giveaways through key influencers (such as youth soccer), and involved several retail stores to run campaigns during the sampling matches in select markets.

RESULTS: Beyond the 2.6 million digital impressions and media coverage, the acquisition of Julie Johnston was ideal because sharing her love of mangos with soccer fans via social media channels and national media interviews sustained the NMB's marketing efforts. In June, Johnston was part of a Satellite Media Tour (SMT) day in New York City where she showcased how she uses and enjoys mangos to train, snack, and prepare for the upcoming Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



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OCEAN MIST FARMS

Be an Artichoke Adventurer

OBJECTIVE: To generate consumer awareness for Ocean Mist Farms artichokes; engage shoppers, artichoke club members and retailers nationwide; prompt purchase; increase membership in the artichoke club; and drive consumers to the company website.

CAMPAIGN: To generate awareness for the company's fresh artichokes, Ocean Mist Farms implemented numerous activities including display and sales contests with Northern California retailers, radio ads and a nationwide new product launch. The highlight of the season was a Be an Artichoke Adventurer consumer contest targeted at Millennials to help them be bold and adventurous in the kitchen. The company also wanted to celebrate its loyal fans by allowing them to show off their artichoke culinary know-how. Home cooks were invited to upload a picture or video of themselves preparing or eating a fresh artichoke for a chance to win a trip for two to Monterey, CA, including tickets to the Annual Castroville Food & Wine Artichoke Festival.

Entries were judged on creativity of the photo or video, and how well it showcased the cook's adventurous spirit. All entries were asked to use the hashtag #ArtiAdventurer to allow easy tracking of this promotion. The company promoted the sweepstakes with email blasts to its more than 65,000 artichoke club members, in-store signage made available to retail customers, petal inserts affixed to some artichoke petals, and digitally through its website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

RESULTS: The cooking nature of the sweepstakes encouraged fresh artichoke purchases. Retail partners and Ocean Mist Farms benefited from Be an Artichoke Adventurer, and the company gained 985 new members as a result of the contest. The combination of media outreach, in-store point-of sale, online and social media outreach delivered more than 7 million consumer impressions during the sweepstakes period. The sweepstakes winner and other participants shared their content on social media. The Facebook ads helped drive traffic to the company website. Working with influencers to generate content was excellent and helped tell the #ArtiAdventurer story by encouraging people to try cooking artichokes. And the contest winner is now an ambassador for artichokes and the company.



PRODUCE FOR KIDS

Power Your Lunchbox Pledge

OBJECTIVE: Encourage families and classrooms to start the school year off on the right foot through pledging to pack healthier lunches/making healthier choices.

CAMPAIGN: Power Your Lunchbox Pledge is an annual digital program created by Produce for Kids encouraging families to pack healthier lunches for back-to-school. For every pledge taken on poweryourlunchbox.com, partner produce companies make a collective dollar donation to Feeding America's programs that benefit family and children. Age-appropriate lesson plans, achievement awards, support materials and the ability to pledge as a classroom were available to teachers at poweryourlunchbox.com.

The website offered back-to-school meal planning with lunchbox ideas, afterschool snacks, breakfast ideas and dinner recipes for busy weeknights. Blog posts, written by parents, offered tips on meal planning, dinner-conversation starters, ways to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into lunchboxes, and more. After pledging, families and teachers received a series of e-newsletters via email with coupons supplied by produce partners, fun printable lunchbox notes, recipes and the opportunity to enter to win an iPad and iPad mini to help in family meal planning.

RESULTS: More than 10,000 pledges were taken by families and classrooms, which totaled \$10,797 (equaling 107,970 meals donated to Feeding America) and donated to Feeding America programs to help feed families and children. The public relations outreach to national consumer and grocery industry trade media outlets resulted in 173 mm impressions with an estimated media value of \$6.9 million. Twenty-three family food bloggers shared the Power Your Lunchbox Pledge with a combined 7.9 million social media followers.

The program was mentioned on Twitter more than 5,000 times. The Power Your Lunchbox Google+ community was created to allow Google+ users a place to share tips and ideas for packing a healthier lunchbox. The group has 178 members.





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SAKATA SEED AMERICA

Infinite Gold LSL Cantaloupe Launch Campaign

OBJECTIVES: To educate and excite the trade on the benefits of Infinite Gold LSL (long shelf life) cantaloupe while gaining exposure and brand awareness.

CAMPAIGN: Sakata developed Infinite Gold LSL cantaloupe with three significant characteristics: durability, yield and flavor. The coordinated brand unveil and introduction to the trade occurred via the 2015 PMA Foodservice and Fresh Summit trade shows.

The company conveyed brand differentiators and developed messaging to address each segment of the chain, including dealers, growers, shippers, packers, foodservice and retail buyers. Sakata created an Infinite Gold logo, assets and color scheme. The presentation included distribution of third-party sensory analysis information on Infinite Gold vs. Leading Competition.

A series of promotions included: a website for trade education, a video for video postcard promotion, an integrated calendar — especially for retail and foodservice sectors featuring action involving social media, print, website, video, PR/Earned Media and trade shows. Sakata utilized SCS Global Services, a provider of third-party environmental and sustainable certification, auditing, testing, and standards development, to help evaluate Infinite Gold alongside the leading competitor and its own experimental line.

Attributes such as flavor, texture, and sweetness, to name a few, were evaluated by trained panelists in order to see which variety stood out among the rest.

RESULTS: The efforts resulted in increased worldwide brand recognition among trade audiences as well as a 300-plus percent increase in seed sales worldwide. Results have also shown new grower and retail business worldwide.



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SHUMAN PRODUCE

How to Speak Southern

OBJECTIVES: To promote RealSweet onion brand awareness and acquire email addresses to further engage consumers. Also, to increase Shuman Produce social media subscribers across multiple social networks and blend the uniqueness of the Vidalia onion with the distinctiveness of southern culture.

CAMPAIGN: The How to Speak Southern promotion was built on more than just saying things a bit differently; it blended the uniqueness of southern culture with the unique sweet taste of



Vidalia onions. The promotion provided consumers with the opportunity to test their knowledge of southernisms via a seven-question online quiz, titled “Can You Speak Southern?” Each result could then be shared socially across Facebook and Twitter, adding a viral sharing effect to the promotion. Below the quiz result, participants had an option to opt in to receive future communications from Shuman Produce. Those who signed up were entered to win weekly Real-Sweet Prize Packs, which included Real-Sweet Vidalia onions, a How to Speak Southern t-shirt, and other Shuman Produce merchandise. At the end of the campaign, one winner received the grand prize of a Big Green Egg grill.

A dedicated website was created to host the campaign elements. The website was also mobile responsive, which automatically sized the website to the viewing screen. There was a live social media feed that aggregated content related to Vidalia onions in real-time from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The company’s target markets, a significant social advertising campaign was developed to reach consumers with specific interests related to cooking, grilling, recipes and other healthy eating categories. Support materials used in the promotion included POP, ads, posters and TV commercials.

RESULTS: The promotion exceeded the entry goal with a total of 26,419 entries, resulting in 30 percent more than the initial goal of 18,000 entries. New Facebook fans and Twitter followers were acquired. Of nearly 30,000 website visits, 85 percent were unique. Average entries per day: 330. Average quiz score: 80 percent. Unique website visitors: 25,575. Conversion Rate: 94 percent of those reached took the quiz, and 26.4 percent opted-in for the e-newsletters.

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USA PEARS

How Do You Anjou? Instagram Contest



OBJECTIVES: To drive demand for the last pears of the season (Anjou pears), and to increase USA Pears Instagram followers while elevating social engagement with consumers.

CAMPAIGN: Spring marks the end of fresh pear season until fall. The How Do You Anjou? Instagram loop giveaway and photo contest, which ran from May 16 through June 3, challenged Instagram users to learn more about the Anjou variety, its versatility and nutritional properties through inspirational posts. For the inspirational posts, five influencer candidates were identified based on the audiences they reached, creativity and experience in recipe development and photography, and number of followers. USA Pears engaged and tasked each influencer with creating an Anjou recipe to post to its Instagram page. The posts required a photo highlighting the influencer's pear dish, a quick tip or description about the creation, and instructions for the contest. During the campaign, Instagrammers hunted for six #HowDoYouAnjou posts from these various influencers. At the end of the loop, each participant was asked to submit a photo of how they use and enjoy Anjou pears in everyday life.

RESULTS: USA Pears increased its Instagram followers by more than 18 percent — garnering engagement as evidenced by nearly 50 comments on the #HowDoYouAnjou post. Further demonstrating engagement, the contest secured 20 photo entries. USA Pears analyzed and identified key takeaways for future campaigns, including the importance of increasing the number of inspirational influencers who post, to create a larger digital footprint and exponentially grow engagement.

U.S. APPLE ASSOCIATION (USAPPLE)

Apples for Education: Buy an Apple, Help a Student



OBJECTIVE: Launch a social cause campaign resonating with both moms and kids while uniting the education and apple industries to support school programs nationwide.

CAMPAIGN: In fall 2015, during peak harvest season, USApple leveraged the indelible connection between apples and education to create a social-media driven campaign that encouraged individuals across the country to help raise funds for student causes in need by asking fans to share apple snacking photos on Instagram or Apples4Ed.com using the hashtag #Apples4Ed.

Consumers were able to discover and vote for the student causes they supported out of 12 preselected causes found on Apples4Ed.com. School districts large and small from coast to coast were represented — mostly in low-income communities and with projects ranging from robotics programs to playground revitalization to school gardens to classroom iPads.

RESULTS: USApple raised \$20,000 for school donations. By campaign's end, the cause with the most votes received the top-tier donation from USApple, with all other causes receiving a portion of the remaining donations. Weekly drawings for Apple gift cards incentivized participation and winners' selected school causes got another \$100. Strategic apple-pairing partners (Marzetti Caramel, KIND Snacks, Roth Cheese and Johnsonville Sausage) were involved. Partners, schools and supporters were armed with a "toolkit" of social content and other ideas to extend the campaign's reach and inspire participation among friends and followers.

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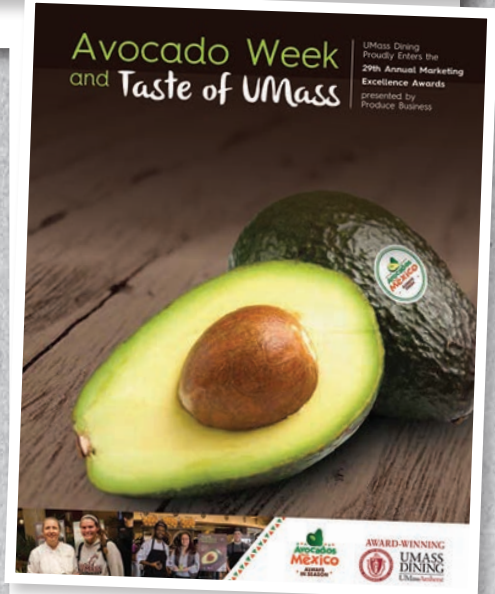
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UMASS DINING/AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO

Avocado Week and Taste of UMass

OBJECTIVE: To increase the use of Avocados from Mexico within all dining locations through innovative menu design, while also promoting the versatility of avocados and their role in healthy eating.

CAMPAIGN: During Avocado Week, UMass Dining partnered with Avocados from Mexico to highlight a variety of delicious and healthy avocado inspired meals. The innovative and flavorful dishes served October 5th through the 9th



demonstrated there are many ways to incorporate avocados into a balanced diet. Students were served expertly prepared avocado dishes in residential venues. Avocados also were readily accessible for customers to purchase at any of the UMass markets. Social media played a huge roll in marketing these special core customers. In order to effectively reach students, UMass Dining heavily promoted the event on more traditional social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, but also on the ever-popular app Snapchat.

RESULTS: Avocado Week and Taste of UMass were huge successes. Students were treated to multiple days of delicious avocado dishes, and were educated on myriad ways to use avocados as a part of a healthy diet. For some students, it was the first time they tried avocados prepared in a less conventional way. UMass Dining has seen a gradual increase in student fruit and vegetable consumption in recent years, as well as plant based proteins. Reports show consumption of beef and red meat has decreased drastically.

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Seasonality comes to life especially in the fall when produce departments across the nation undergo major resets. New crop apples and pears as well as abundant domestic grapes and kiwi move up front. Limited supplies of fresh cranberries, hard squash and pumpkins take center stage in displays. Year-round favorites such as bell peppers, beets and Brussels sprouts take on renewed interest in this season of cooking, eating and holiday meals. Savvy retailers who employ a number of creative merchandising techniques can assure a rise in produce sales in the fall.

“In early September, we set up the produce department in one of our stores with examples of how we want to approach the holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving,” says Randy Bohaty, produce director at B&R Stores, an 18-store chain based in Lincoln, NE, that operates under the Russ’s Markets, Super Saver, Apple Market and Save Best Foods banners.

“This holiday show is a great way to collec-

HEAT UP SALES WITH SAVVY fall merchandising

Play up seasonality and the start of the holidays.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

tively share ideas. Plus, it definitely helps by giving newer managers some thoughts and serves as a good refresh for veteran managers.”

1. APPLES

Apples, as well as pears and grapes, are featured for back-to-school promotions in September at the 70 independent grocers that are part of Northwest Grocers, in Tukwila, WA, and operate under banners such as Thriftway, Payless Foods, Red Apple Markets and IGA Markets.

“Apples are projected to be up in volume around 6 percent this fall,” says Bruce Bolton, category manager at Robinson Fresh, the Eden Prairie, MN-headquartered marketer of Mott’s brand fresh apples and pears.

Stemilt Growers, in Wenatchee, WA, offers a new pop-up display unit that holds one case of its kid-sized bagged Lil Snapper apples. This unit can be displayed on endcaps, high-traffic lanes or in other departments for back-to-school promotions throughout the month of September.

“In October, we hit all the new varieties of apples like Aurora and Opal. Some stores will do an apple fest and others promote apples as part of a fall harvest sale. Either way, we try to promote a different apple each week for a month and a half or two months until the citrus hits,” says Northwest Grocers’ Jason Kazmirski, director produce/floral merchandiser.

Stemilt introduces its new ‘We Have an Apple for That’ merchandising program this fall.



“This bin promotion features one of the newer apple varieties at a time and helps to develop consumers’ palates for these varieties. The program comes with point-of-sale (POS) cards that give more information about the variety. Retailers can use this to create an ‘Apple of the Month’ program in their stores,” says Roger Pepperl, marketing director.

Concord Foods, in Brockton, MA, launches its single-serve Simply Concord Caramel dip this fall, which comes in six

“Retailers can set up fun attention getting Halloween displays with apples and caramel. One idea is to include items like gummy bears, chopped nuts and other ingredients to decorate caramel apples. This encourages impulse and additional buys.”

— Samantha McCaul, Concord Foods

1.8-ounce tubettes to a sleeve. These are ideal for back-to-school promotions, while 24-count shipper displays of 14.2-ounce tubs of this dip are perfect for Halloween. The dip’s selling point is that it’s non-GMO and has no high fructose corn syrup or artificial colors, flavors or preservatives.

“Retailers can set up fun attention-getting Halloween displays with apples and caramel,” says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager. “One idea is to include items like gummy bears, chopped nuts and other ingredients to decorate caramel apples. This encourages impulse and additional buys.”

Shoppers’ thoughts turn to cooking applications for apples in November in the run up to Thanksgiving, says David Williams, vice president of sales and marketing at Fowler Farms, in Wolcott, NY. “We have started working with a company called Farm Stand Living that creates customized recipes. Since tearpads are less popular these days and execu-

tion is difficult, we can deliver these digitally on multiple platforms such as our and our retail customer’s websites as well as social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.”

2. PEARS

“Throughout the fall, we’ll move the more seasonally available varieties of pears in and out of displays or highlight them in an inset display to catch customer’s attention,” says B&R Store’s Bohaty.

Bartlett and Starkrimson pears harvest during August and make good back-to-school promotions, according to Stemilt Grower’s Pepperl. “By late September and early October, Bosc and Concord become available and Anjou’s start. It’s possible by then to have five varieties on ad and in the display. By mid-to late-October, all 10 varieties are available including Bosc, Comice, Concorde, Forelle and Seckel. Apples usually dominate fall ads, but a good rule of thumb is if apples are on

■ FREAKY FRUITS PROMOTIONS

Unique varieties of grapes, melon and tree fruit diminish by the end of September. In this space, retailers can merchandise seasonally available specialty fruits. That’s the thinking behind the Freaky Fruits promotion, the brainchild of Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, and one of the company’s fastest growing promotions.

This is a merchandising opportunity retailers such as Hy-Vee, a 240-store chain headquartered in West Des Moines, IA, have participated in with success. For example, the Freaky Fruit presentation in the Waseca, MN, store last year offered Kiwano melons, rambutans, pomegranates, Buddha’s hand, guavas, dragon fruit, jackfruit, Purple Passion fruit, Pepino melons, Red Cactus pear, strawberry papaya and coconuts. The display was dressed with decorative ghosts, skeletons and tombstones in keeping with the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA’S/WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE

holiday theme. Meanwhile, the supermarket dietitian at the Fairmont, MN, location offered in-store tips about each specialty fruit, its nutrition and usage.

In addition, Tom Crall, Hy-Vee’s produce purchasing specialist, says, “We run the items in an ad to call them out each year. The ad showcases what we have to offer to our customers. They are surprised by what’s available when it is spotlighted in this promotion, especially when they

maybe weren’t aware that we offered these items every day when they are in season.”

Approximately 1,500 supermarkets nationwide participated in the Freaky Fruit promotion last year, according to Robert Schueller, Melissa’s/World Variety Produce’s director of public relations. The company offers retailers themed recipe pads and point-of-sale signage to incorporate into displays.

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ad for three weeks of the month, put pears on ad the fourth.”

The Pear Bureau Northwest, based in Milwaukie, OR, will work with retail customers, regional merchandising managers and other food companies to create customized turn-key “Pear Up” cross-promotions that can be implemented in-store in September and October.

“The fall is a time when people are busy and appreciate simple two-and-three ingredient recipes,” says Kathy Stephenson, marketing communications director at the Pear Bureau Northwest. “Pears are excellent ingredients and pair well with yogurt, cheese, nut butters and salads. For example, we worked with Dole last year and developed a salad using pears.

“The promotion included a recipe and cents off coupon sent through social media channels. For holidays like Thanksgiving, we have a small cardboard wheel that retailers can offer at point-of-sale that shows shoppers what varieties of pears pair best with different wines and cheeses.”

3. GRAPES

The best time to promote grapes is September, according to John Pandol, director



of special projects for Pandol Bros., in Delano, CA. “The summer sets are over, and the fall products like persimmons, pomegranates and pumpkins aren’t ready yet. Grapes out of the San Joaquin Valley are in month three of five of harvest, right in the middle.

“I really like a back-to-school theme,” says

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Pandol. "Other holidays are celebrated and over, but school lasts nine months. Instead of New Year's resolutions, encourage new school year resolutions such as healthier school and after-school snacks like grapes."

Robinson Fresh, which markets its grapes under the Welch's banner, sponsors retail contests that result in creative in-store displays that promote healthy lunch box packing and snacking. To help in building eye-catching displays, the company offers specially designed back-to-school bags for its grapes.

"One customer experienced a nearly 30 percent lift in sales each of the past two years by participating in these contests," says Bolton.

Tailgating at football games is fashionable in October. "This is when we put grapes, as well as avocados, on ad. Both are great snacks and good tonnage items too," says Northwest Grocer's Kazmirski.

Cross-promote holiday-themed display bins of grapes in the cheese or wine department or at the store's front end during peak customer hours, recommends Nick Dulcich, co-owner and president of Sunlight International Sales, in Delano, CA, which promotes its Harvest Hobgoblin grapes in the fall. "These need to be well maintained and kept stocked to enhance sales."

4. KIWI

The autumn kiwifruit forecast is excellent, according to Steve Woodyear-Smith, executive category director of tropicals for The Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Vancouver, Canada. "We'll have supplies of Zespri green and SunGold kiwifruit on hand for promotions through October and possibly longer, with California green and Italian green and gold coming into season in September. Most notably, we'll have about twice the volume of the new, refreshingly-sweet SunGold kiwifruit this year, and despite the increase we remain in a 'demand exceeds' situation."

Kiwifruit merchandise well as a back-to-school snack in September. "Promote 1-pound kiwifruit clamshells for back-to-school. Each package contains five to six pieces of fruit, perfect for adding to a school lunch each day of the week," says Jason Bushong, division manager of the Wenatchee, WA, sales office of the Giumarra Companies, headquartered in Los Angeles.

"Packaged kiwifruit has fuelled impressive growth in the category. It encourages volume consumption while simultaneously offering a convenient grab-and-go option."

Additionally, "we custom-branded pink pifefes (spoon/knife combination) for Octo-

ber's Breast Cancer Awareness Month that we can include as a free value-add for consumers during a demo or in packaging," says Bushong.


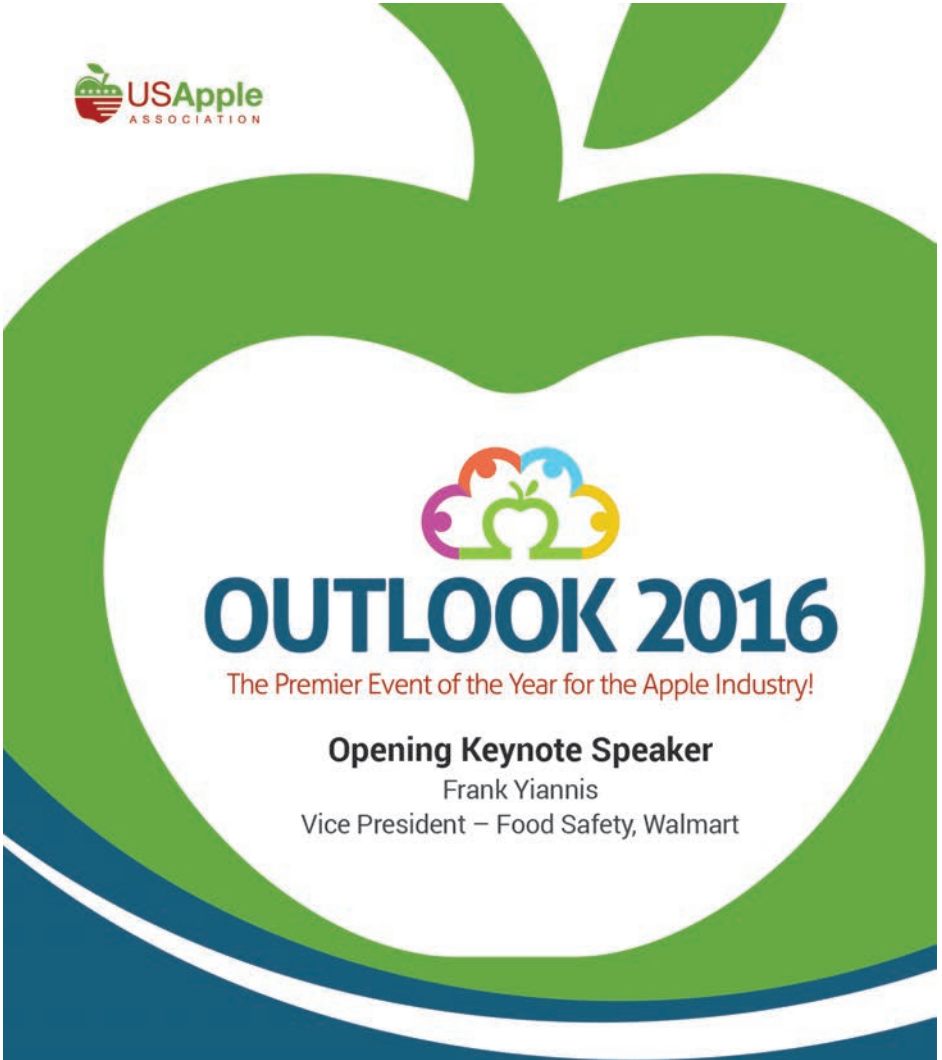

For Halloween, "display a few kiwis carved like mini jack-o-lanterns. Or, place pouch bags or a shipper unit in the candy aisle. Then for Thanksgiving, kiwifruit adds tang to relishes, sauces, salsas, and color to desserts. We suggest cross-merchandising with traditional holiday ingredients and offering a few easy serving suggestions," says Oppenheimer's Wood-

year-Smith.

5. CRANBERRIES

Fresh cranberries are a must-have during October and November in retailers that are part of Northwest Grocers, says Kazmirski.

"We start harvesting cranberries in mid-September," says Bob Wilson, managing director of The Cranberry Network and owner of Cranberry Partners, in Wisconsin Rapids, WI. "Resist the temptation for unrefriger-



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ated freestanding displays since this isn't peak selling time. Start price promotions in early November to build excitement for the major cranberry-buying holiday, Thanksgiving."

The best promotional time for fresh cranberries is the two weeks leading up to Thanksgiving. "More than 70 percent of customers use cranberries for sauce in their holiday meal, so tie-ins and merchandising along with turkey, stuffing, gravy, fresh potatoes and carrots are effective," says Barry Botelho, customer lead of fresh fruit for Ocean Spray Cranberries, headquartered in Lakeville-Middleboro, MA.

"More than 50 percent of consumers use fresh for desserts, so activate adjacencies with holiday dessert items too."

6. SQUASH

"The diversity of hard squash and gourds really augment displays this time of year," says B&R Store's Bohaty.

Butternut is the best-selling hard squash in the fall at Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles. "Acorn, Kabocha and Spaghetti are other popular fall squash," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations. "Due to small family sizes, and especially for the



Pumpkin and squash can serve as colorful in-store displays for the fall and encourage shoppers to try new recipes for the holidays.

holidays, due to flavor and ease of preparation, we're seeing greater interest in smaller squash, the kind that serve one to two people, such as the Gold Nugget, Delicata, Sweet Dumpling and Carnival."

7. PUMPKIN

Pumpkins, in-store or on display, add a

definitive fall feel to the produce department. "We start to ship pumpkins the first week in September and sales in our area are strongest from the second week right through October," says John Carl, sales manager at Dan Schantz Farm & Greenhouses, in Zionsville, PA. "Don't display pumpkins outside while it's still warm, and keep the sun off of them."

The trend now is to use pumpkins as décor with sophisticated rather than whimsical designs, according to Michele Youngquist, president of Bay Baby Produce, Inc./ AMF Farms, in Burlington, WA.

"Vibrant color long-stem ornamentals are elegant and a perfect size for a centerpiece. The silhouettes have black crows, cobwebs and half-moon designs that pop against the orange. Supermarkets with the best sell through set up store displays that show customers how to decorate with pumpkins at home."

8. BELL PEPPERS

Bell peppers are a prevalent backyard garden vegetable in 28 states until a frost hits in the fall. After that, supply is primarily out of California, the southeast U.S., and in greenhouses.

"Red is the No. 1 seller for us. The gap in sales between green and red is narrowing with yellow third and orange fourth," says Mike Aiton, director of marketing for Prime Time International, in Coachella, CA.

"Mini sweet peppers, which are dominated by 1- and 2-pound bags, have really taken on and are well-liked by kids for snacking as well as holiday parties in crudité platters."

Melissa's/World Variety Produce will offer the new red-and-yellow Enjoia bell pepper through October this year. The pepper is sold in 3-pound packs.

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"This pepper, developed in Holland, doesn't have thick veins and is great for adding color to salads and cooked dishes," says Schueller.

9. BEETS

Kale, Rainbow chard, Delicata squash, Chanterelle mushrooms and beets are all part of fall harvest offerings at Northwest Grocer retailers.

"Beets are definitely a growing category," says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive officer of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "We sell baby beets and gold-bunched beets."

Sales of beets are especially good in the fall, because it's a fit with the root vegetable theme, according to Natasha Shapiro, marketing manager for Bala Cynwyd, PA-based Love Beets, makers of several ready-to-eat packaged beet products.

"Recipes are huge," says Shapiro. "We create our own and post one new recipe a week on our website. Examples that tie in well with a Thanksgiving theme are Beet & Sweet Potato Mash with Thyme, Beet & Sweet Potato Galette and Honey Glazed Beets & Brussels Sprouts with Blue Cheese and Walnuts.

"Merchandising ideas include cross-promoting beets with other ingredients in a recipe and doing demos along with handing out our 4-inch by 6-inch recipe cards with a photo of the dish on one side and ingredients and instructions on the back."

10. BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Brussels sprouts are a trending item, says B&R Store's Bohaty. "In the fall, we expand the set and have a nice bulk display as well as bring in value-added items, such as sliced in shaved. In some stores, we'll also bring in stalks during the holidays."

The best promotional time is September to November, according to Diana McClean, director of marketing for Ocean Mist Farms, the Castroville, CA-headquartered grower, shipper and marketer of the microwavable Season & Steam Brussels sprouts line.

Value-added Brussels sprouts are growing faster than bulk. In fact, value-added Brussels sprouts shoppers are more likely to buy other cooking vegetables leading to larger basket sizes per trip — \$97 basket size versus \$78 average cooking vegetable basket size, according to Nielsen Perishables Group's *Fresh Facts Shopper Insights*. A few basket affinity items of the value-added Brussels sprouts shopper are lemons, garlic, boneless chicken breasts and baby broccoli. Cross-merchandise near these items.

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CREATING TAILGATING MOMENTUM

Design displays to capitalize on this lucrative segment.

BY LISA WHITE

The produce departments at Rice Epicurean Markets in Houston, Michael's Fresh Market in Naperville, IL, and Georgetown Natural Foods Market in Indianapolis, are open to the potential for marketing items in a tailgating theme.

"We haven't done it, but wouldn't rule it out," says Lisa Peterson, produce manager at Georgetown Natural Foods.

The Tailgating Industry Association, located in Coral Gables, FL, estimates that \$35 billion is spent on tailgating food and beverages each year.

Further proof of tailgating's growing popularity is the Food Network's four-week series, "Tailgate Warriors" with famed chef Guy Fieri. In this reality series, two teams create two appetizers, one entrée, two sides and one dessert in an hour. These meal creations are judged by a three-person panel and scored on taste, creativity, difficulty and presentation.

Tailgating provides an opportunity for retailers in nearly all departments, including produce. According to the 26th annual "GrillWatch Survey" (conducted by KeyStat Marketing on behalf of grill giant, Weber), it's more important for tailgaters to bring food and a grill to their parking lot party (79 percent and 76 percent respectively), than to actually have tickets to the game (44 percent).

THE LIKELY CULPRITS

There are many factors that play into the



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

choices for tailgating. These include convenience, value, indulgence and healthy options.

"Consumers want something that is going to satisfy their cravings but takes little or no time to prepare," says Tristan Simpson, chief marketing officer of Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA. "And, while they often look for the more affordable option when it comes to food, today's consumers are, in fact, willing to pay for a more premium product offering. Many consumers are also looking for healthier and fresher options, but they want a little indulgence at the same time." Typically, the most popular produce items that

consumers bring to tailgating events tend to be those that require little prep, such as pre-cut carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes and celery.

Those with portable grills also seek produce items that can be quickly cooked, such as eggplant, zucchini, peppers and onions.

"Grilling accentuates the sweetness inherent in fruit and adds a delicious smokiness to vegetables," says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Dole Fresh Vegetables, Monterey, CA. "Consumers are starting to discover the amazing flavors that are only possible from grilling fresh produce."

Companies such as Ready Pac offer single-

serve, portable options, such as salads and snack cups, to help complete a tailgate meal.

“Using Del Monte fresh-cut fruit and vegetables as an appetizer, side dish or grilling item is especially popular during tailgating season,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce, based in Coral Gables, FL. “These products are ready-to-eat, available in convenient packaging, and can serve large crowds.”

Tailgaters also seek products that can easily be carried to the picnic site, and packaging that does not require transferring the product into another container.

Del Monte has fresh-cut grill trays and kabob kits for such events, which can be taken from the package directly to the grill for cooking.

“Corn, avocados and Portobello mushrooms also can be easily grilled on site,” says Samantha McCaul, marketing manager at Concord Foods Inc., located in Brockton, MA.

Other popular tailgating appetizers, sides and ingredient options sourced from the produce department include prepared guacamole and salsa; cole slaw; potato salad; and lettuce wraps.

Targeting tailgaters looking for quick meal and snack options that are affordably priced and convenient, Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing recently introduced a line of snacking trays. Mann’s Snacking Favorites Vegetable Trays product line includes Veggie Ranch, Veggies 4 Kidz, Cheddar Trail, Veggie Hummus, Organic Veggies, Cheddar Pretzel,



and Honey Turkey Cheddar.

These fresh produce items that are easy to transport and others that can be prepared prior to the tailgating event are popular with those looking to eat healthier on the go.

“For those grilling burgers or sandwiches, avocados are an easy way to take a tailgate to the next level,” says Robb Bertels, vice president of marketing at Mission Produce, Inc., headquartered in Oxnard, CA. “And guacamole makes a great appetizer or side, and can also be substituted for sliced avocados on burgers and sandwiches.” Regardless of the venue, one of the biggest influencers of produce purchasing today is whether the product is locally grown. As a result, what is in season locally will have a greater chance of being taken along to a tailgating event.

It’s important to note consumers are getting more creative in terms of grilling. For example, avocados are becoming a more popular choice,

along with typical picnic produce items like corn and potatoes.

“As interest in eating healthier grows, Pinterest boards for tailgating are showing grilled veggie kabobs and lots of fresh salads, along with the ubiquitous pepperoni covered, football-shaped cheese balls,” says Jan DeLyster, vice president marketing at the California Avocado Commission (CAC), located in Irvine, CA. “One fun idea that can be prepared in advance and carried to the site is stadium snacking stations or party trays featuring a guacamole football field in the center, surrounded by veggie and salty snack dippers in the stands.”

TRENDS FOR TAILGATING

The past few decades spurred a full-on revolution in consumers’ approach to food. Mindsets shifted toward a desire for fresh, simple and less processed options. What some skeptics initially claimed was a fad is, in fact, accelerating and growing, with Millennials in particular driving the desire for healthy, fresh and clean.

As a result, consumers are looking beyond the ordinary when it comes to grilling at tailgating events, seeking both fruits and vegetables.

“For example, we’ve seen popularity in grilled pineapple and consumers are also grilling half heads of Romaine lettuce for a little char on their Caesar salad for flavor,” says Simpson of Ready Pac. “They are also experimenting with grilling kale, one of the fastest growing salad ingredients in the Midwest, South and Northeast regions.”

Products such as Del Monte’s fresh-cut kabob mixes, which may include extra sweet pineapple, green, yellow and red peppers, grape tomatoes, and red onions, are cut into pieces that can slide onto a skewer to grill with meats. Its fresh-cut sliced tomatoes and onions also can be added as toppings to burgers and sandwiches.

In addition, while some exotic foods have been widely integrated into everyday American menus, a variety of international cuisines are increasingly popular with the tailgating crowd.

“A very large portion of Americans are familiar with German, Italian, Spanish and Asian cuisine, such as Japanese, Mandarin, Szechwan and Chinese as well as Indian and Mediterranean and Cajun/Creole and Jamaican food from the Caribbean,” says Arias. “The diverse cultures of the United States are the very reason for the popularity of these cuisines, and as the country grows more culturally diverse each year, so too does the cuisine

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION



Jan DeLyster of the California Avocado Commission suggests a stadium-snacking station or party tray section in the produce department featuring guacamole with veggie and salty-snack dippers.



Another benefit to promoting tailgating in the produce department is incorporating fruits and vegetables into the overall retailer's tailgating promotion to increase basket size.



at tailgate events.”

Many younger consumers are also actively seeking healthier variations of traditional dishes at tailgating parties, which include more salads, fresh produce, healthy grains and the addition of zesty foods.

“This important age group played an important role in the rising popularity of various healthy exotic cuisines at tailgate parties, which include fresh ingredients that require little preparation,” says Arias. “This diverse population is now introducing a fusion of cuisines that are served by tailgaters at various sporting events and other cultural activities.”

CONVENIENCE WITHIN THE SEGMENT

With this in mind, this year Dole is launching its Chef's Choice Salad Kits, which combine mini Romaine lettuce with its signature dressing and toppings. This includes step-by-step instructions on the package and is available in Caesar and Tuscan varieties.

“For store and produce managers, Chef's Choice represents an exciting new addition to the produce department, elevating commodity lettuce into a new sub-segment with a higher value that can offer incremental sales potential and expanded consumer usage occasions,” says Arias.

Because consumers are looking for simple meal solutions and to prepare meals that include fewer steps and ingredients, Concord Foods has been developing products with simple instructions and limited ingredients.

Taking garlic from an ingredient to a condiment with added convenience as the goal, Orlando, FL-based Spice World intro-

duced garlic in a squeeze container, which can be positioned around tailgating displays in the produce department. The company also recently introduced ginger in a squeeze container.

“Our value-added garlic and ginger lines provide the means to upscale the tailgating culinary experience,” says Louis Hymel, Spice World's vice president of procurement and operations. “Ginger can be used in many recipes, as a dip or tableside, while garlic on chicken wings is a popular tailgating item.”

Some of the upcoming trends might not necessarily be about developing new products or expanding the variety of products but instead will focus on continuing with current product offerings and diversifying what is available. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, such as creating fusion condiments/toppings for traditional dishes; naturally infused beverages, such as water or soda water with fruits or vegetables; and providing gluten-free options by substituting buns with healthier alternatives.

“For example, fusion condiments/toppings include kimchi-style radish, tajin flavored pickled cucumbers, infused water with pre-blend cucumbers/lemon juice/lime juice, sliders substituting eggplant or lettuce wraps for buns and even using eggplant as a serving plate,” says Sarah Pau, director of marketing at Pure Hothouse Foods Inc., based in Leamington, Ontario, Canada.

Another benefit to promoting tailgating in the produce department is incorporating fruits and vegetables into the overall retailer's tailgating promotion to increase basket size.

“A consumer may still want to include the two for \$5 bags of chips in their tailgating

purchase, but if they have the opportunity to include a \$17.99 fresh-cut produce party platter, it's a win all the way around,” says DeLyser of CAC.

“Merchandising secondary displays of avocados with other guacamole fixings like tomatoes, onions and chiles next to soda or beer displays can lead to incremental purchases. Likewise, POS in the produce department with grilling and tailgating entertaining ideas encourage higher basket rings.”

With snacking considered the fourth meal, and since many tailgaters graze as they party, produce snacks and portable dish ideas make sense. “Some of my favorites include layered salads in clear plastic cups with lids,” says DeLyser.

Snack-size main dishes, such as sliders, continue to be popular, as do foods on sticks.

Pero Family Farms' mini sweet peppers are geared for tailgates, since these items can be grilled, eaten as a side dish or used as a sandwich topper. “The natural sugars and flavors come out on the grill,” says Scott Seddon, brand manager of the Delray Beach, FL-based company. “This line is available in 8-ounce or 1- or 2-pound bags.”

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

Consumers are willing to pay more money for healthier and fresher options, especially if the quality of ingredients is higher.

Organic, vegan and gluten-free options are also top of mind for tailgating consumers looking to eat healthier or those with dietary restrictions.

“Retailers need to understand that today's consumer isn't just looking for the easiest

option to put together a healthy dinner,” says Simpson of Ready Pac. “They want ingredients that satisfy their need for good tasting, healthy and fresh food.”

Along with expanding into healthier fare, ethnic foods are becoming a more common addition to tailgating menus.

Companies such as Ready Pac Foods are incorporating more internationally inspired items that can be included in tailgating displays, such as Jamaican Jerk Style Hemp Caesar, Asian Style Chopped Salad and a Chopped Thai Style Crunch Grilled Chicken Salad Kit.

“Some that are particularly suited for grilling include Mexican and Mediterranean cuisines,” says DeLyser. “Here in the West, grilled Carne Asada and tacos topped with salsa and avocado are very common. Mediterranean kabobs and make-ahead salads with grains are perfect for tailgating and can elevate the experience.”

Retailers can best position these items in-store for optimal sales by incorporating eye-catching point of sale on shelves, in-store demos and by cross-merchandising. Improved labeling information about the product on-pack is also a sales booster.

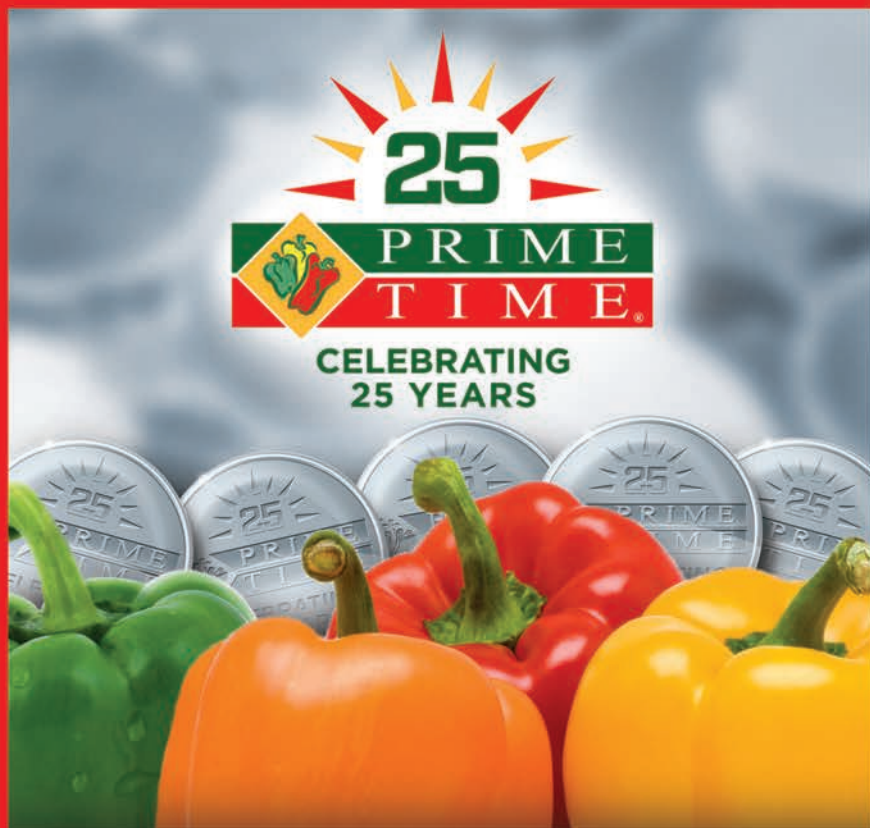
“We also encourage retailers to promote grilling and fresh-cut use on their social media pages during tailgating season,” says Christou of Del Monte. “Our category managers and merchandisers are in constant communication with our retailers and their produce personnel to communicate the best strategies for driving produce sales based on consumer demand.”

An increasing number of stores is expanding the linear footage of produce at the expense of other departments to emphasize healthy eating and respond to the demand for fresh items. These retailers can also increase sales of these items by utilizing sports-themed secondary displays.

“We’re seeing more retailers incorporate summer-themed displays in the produce department, which give consumers ideas for cookouts and tailgating,” says Seddon of Pero Family Farms. “It’s important to support this merchandising with signage and point of sale displays.”

Spice World offers various displays for its squeeze garlic and ginger lines geared for different times of the year. “We also offer displays specifically for tailgating,” says Hymel. “Retailers are the experts in throwing together all that’s needed for these events, whether it’s corn on the cob or vine ripe tomatoes, to increase incremental sales and boost profits.”

With more items in the display, instead of



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Rt 10 Farmers Market: **Hoechang Yang** (Manager), Livingston, NJ

Woodman's Markets: **Reden Dacumos**, Madison, WI

buying one product, customers are encouraged to by two or three to use in a tailgating party.

There are other effective methods to encourage incremental tailgating sales, and it pays to remember the basics.

“During tailgating season, retailers should make sure prominent displays are created in the produce department with popular items like avocados, tomatoes and dip mixes,” says Concord Foods’ McCaul. “Signage is very important and can encourage impulse shoppers.”

Demos visually give consumers a better perspective of what their creation will become, while recipe cards add ideas consumers might not think about.

Cross-promotions also can be beneficial. “For example, pairing our gourmet baby cucumbers near dips or coolers that can be part of a tailgating event is effective,” says Hothouse Foods’ Pau.

Tailgating consumers are looking for memorable experiences, so the key question is what are they going to enjoy making and



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sharing? For some, just being able to pick up a prepared tray is all that’s needed, while others are seeking the traditional grilling experience. Providing ideas and merchandising with usage suggestions can help.

“Of course, creative merchandising and sourcing the best local produce is the best bet for in-store,” says DeLyser of the CAC. “Beyond that, retailers need to be part of consumer conversations, which are increasingly occurring in the digital space. In my opinion, fresh produce fits those conversations better than any other department, because it can be wrapped into conversations about locally grown, freshness, health and nutrition, culinary adventures and more.”

The best way for retailers to help expand the bandwidth for produce is to continue promoting new usage ideas and dayparts where fresh produce can be integrated.

“We work closely with retailers to encourage in-store marketing and merchandising that emphasizes healthy eating and snacking as well as the increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Arias of Dole Fresh Vegetables.

“Also, since shoppers are drawn into a beautiful produce section, our best advice to maximize salad and bulk fruits and vegetable sales is to keep the produce and packaged salad department stocked with a robust display of fresh, colorful produce. This is definitely important during the tailgate season and other key occasions when consumers are looking for fresh produce for quick recipes or healthy snack options.”

pb

Washington Apples Turn Over A New Leaf



PHOTO COURTESY OF CMI

Due to the high maintenance of Honeycrisp, growers are expanding horizons with hybrids for better production, storage and consumer appeal.

BY BOB JOHNSON

As summer begins to wind down in the final days of August, produce retailers around the country have a mouth-watering choice of which fresh fruit from the West to display most prominently.

While these are the final days of the peaches, table grapes and other soft fruit out of California, late August is also the time for the first early season fresh apples from the state of Washington.

The most profitable answer might be to plan ahead well enough to be able to sell both.

“The initial challenge is the soft fruit and grape deal are still going out of California when we start,” says Steve Lutz, vice president of marketing at Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA. “It’s hard to get retailers to reset their space until after Labor Day.”

It might be worth a call to corporate for help lining up the space, signage and other promotional materials to take full advantage of this month when Washington is virtually the only apple game in town.

“We’re always going by late August with Gala, Gold and early Fuji,” says Lutz. “The next apples don’t come until the later part of September.

You work with retailers to plan. Most of the time you have to rely on the retailers for signage, and so much of it is controlled at the corporate level that there’s little flexibility.”

A MORE COMPLEX CATEGORY

While the first apples from out West present a merchandising opportunity late every summer, the new and interesting varieties coming out of Washington promise to change the category all year-round.

Washington apple growers are not only the first to supply the market with domestic apples in a big way every year, trailing only the modest California supply, but they also usually lead in taking new varieties mainstream.

Consumer interest in the new varieties is making the apple category ever more complex, challenging, and, potentially, rewarding.

“It’s like the expansion in the grape category with all the specialty varieties,” says Andy Tudor, director of business development at Rainier Fruit Company, Yakima, WA. “We’re seeing that coming in apples, but it doesn’t happen as quickly.”

For shippers such as Rainier Fruit, with its relatively new proprietary varieties Junami and Lady Alice, the introduction process begins with being able to harvest enough volume.

“It’s incumbent on us to get production up to commercial levels as soon as possible,” says Tudor. “After that it takes a tremendous amount of time and expense. You have to figure out how you can get this apple, or at least a taste of it, into the consumer’s mouth.”

For apple producers growing and harvesting a new improved variety in volume, however, is just the beginning of a long process.

“You have to focus your time and energy to introduce it to the consumer,” says Fred

“There aren’t necessarily new techniques, but a combination of demos, contests, secondary displays, and category planning with retailers to determine when to promote new varieties, and newer packaging that includes pouch bags.”

— Chuck Sinks, Sage Fruit Company

Wescott, president of Honeybear Marketing Co., Elgin, MN. “It’s expensive; it takes everything from demos to media. You can’t just grow it and they will come. It’s a collaborative effort.

Once you have an apple, it’s a three-, four- or five-year journey to do this.”

Retailers must play a major role in giving customers an opportunity to make a decision about new varieties.

“There aren’t necessarily new techniques, but a combination of demos, contests, secondary displays, and category planning is used by retailers to determine when to promote new varieties and packaging, such as pouch bags,” says Chuck Sinks, president, sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Company, Yakima, WA. “If a retailer is carrying a new variety, then call attention to it through signage or secondary displays to give consumers an opportunity to recognize it is something different than the normal offering.”

The bottomline in introducing a new apple variety, assuming it has the right stuff, is getting enough customers to try it. “The trick is to get the fruit in people’s hands as quick as you can,” says Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA. “Promotion will lower the barrier to trial, so ads are very important. We do a lot of demo programs as they also aid in the conversion of consumers. We use social media, bloggers and our own blog as tools to get the word out. Big displays are also important.”

Sampling can help by getting customers to give promising new varieties the taste test. “Consumers need a reason to purchase something new or different,” says Sinks. “If they have a positive experience, there is opportunity for repeat sales. If demos are allowed at stores, we recommend them with new varieties to increase trial. Some retailers are selecting a newer variety and merchandising it for a month at a time.”

Carrying more varieties of apples makes the allocation of shelf space, especially premium shelf space, a difficulty worth some thought.

“There’s a limit to how many varieties a retailer is going to carry,” says Wescott of Honeybear. “Every retailer is different, but any variety has to pay for its shelf space. Shelf space is worth a certain amount of money. The expansion challenges retailers to make



Substantial acreage and markets for organic apples, such as Columbia Marketing International’s Daisy Girl Organics brand, are a significant part of the industry.

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it workable.”

Greater variety in the apple category also complicates the job of educating consumers. “It used to be consumers knew the top six or so varieties,” says Wescott. “There are getting to be far more varieties, and you can’t just put them out there and expect the consumer to know about them. Six, seven or eight varieties dominated throughout the last century. Now the number is at least 20 and not all consumers know about all of them. At six to eight varieties, it was a question of good price. Now some fruit costs more, because it’s hard to grow; but if it’s good, it will still sell.”

This increased complexity, however, brings the advantage of being able to offer not just the first apples, but also the first special apples, sometimes as early as August.

“Being the first domestic apple to market isn’t as hard as it used to be,” says Pepperl. “Now with Aztec Fuji and year-round Gala supplies out of storage, we maintain great apple displays year-round. SweeTango is the first apple to market in the West. We start packing by the third week of August on SweeTango. It isn’t just the first apple; it is fantastic. Then Gala starts several days later. It is important to have sugars and acids prior to picking and to delight

the consumers on the first try.”

A number of industry resources are available to help retailers and consumers sort out this increasingly complex category. “There are many new proprietary varieties — check out our website and see for yourself,” says Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission, Wenatchee, WA.

One of the major Washington shippers also has a resource to help match apple varieties with their uses.

“Stemilt just launched a website that is called, ‘There’s an Apple for That,’” says Pepperl. “This site encourages people to find the best apples for the recipe or use they desire. It is a fun and easy tool to help encourage using apples. This will tie in well with retail promotions and with our social media and food influencers that we work with. This is real exciting.”

NEW VARIETIES WITH A HONEYCRISP THEME

Many of the new varieties on the horizon from Washington are improved versions of Honeycrisp — the popular apple that practically invented mouth appeal. But unfortunately it stores poorly, looks a bit bland on display, and comes with a legion of problems for the

“One new proprietary variety that is just beginning cultivation is Cosmic Crisp. This is a Washington State-only variety with great expectations in the future.”

— Todd Fryhover,
Washington Apple Commission

growers.

One new Washington State University cross between Honeycrisp and Enterprise, named Cosmic Crisp, is already generating buzz throughout the apple industry.

“Honeycrisp is the variety that is growing in both popularity and volume,” says Fryhover. “One new proprietary variety that is just beginning cultivation is Cosmic Crisp. This is a Washington State-only variety with great expectations in the future.”

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Sage Fruit is planting the Breeze apple to add to its portfolio. This variety was originally developed in New Zealand, and the grower-shipper currently has exclusive plantings in North America. Breeze is a sweet apple with a bit of tang that matures just before the Gala.

This new variety is acing the taste test, but only limited quantities are out there. “The Cosmic Crisp trees are still in the production phase,” says Mac Riggan, vice president of marketing at Chelan Fresh Marketing, Chelan, WA. “I think it’s going to be a very good apple. One of the ways I tell is what happens when I bring a box back to the office. It may not be scientific, but the Cosmic Crisp really disappeared.”

While a few samples of this potential new superstar will be available soon, full market penetration is probably around three years down the road. “The Cosmic Crisp is grower-friendly,” says Riggan. “I think it’s being planted pretty aggressively. There aren’t many now, but there may be in the fall of 2019.”

There are, however, other apples also offering a new ripple on the Honeycrisp wave that should be available soon — possibly as soon as this year.

“The things that will be out are the hybrid Honeycrisp, like the Firestorm Honeycrisp,” says Lutz from CMI. “It’s much redder and has better shelf appeal. Growers put in trees three or four years ago, and those trees are just coming into production.”

SweeTango is an earlier Honeycrisp cross that is already familiar to many consumers. “Stemilt continues to produce SweeTango, which is one of the best apples produced in the world,” says Pepperl. “SweeTango is a cross between Honeycrisp and Zestar, and

it was developed by the same breeder at the University of Minnesota that brought us Honeycrisp. You will love this apples’ deep citrus notes of flavor surrounded by a most distinguishing crunch. This is a must try if you like apples as it is crazy good.”

Behind the great interest in developing apples that are similar to Honeycrisp is the aggravating litany of difficulties farmers face in growing this apple that practically invented mouth appeal.

“The grower is looking for something like a Honeycrisp, but not as hard to grow,” says Rainier Fruit’s Tudor. “Honeycrisp tends to grow on spurs, two together, so when you pick one, the other falls to the ground. They get split stem like Gala, bitter pit like Golden, or scald like Fuji.”

Even with its challenges, Honeycrisp continues to offer opportunities for Washington growers. “Honeycrisp continues to roll out more trees and acreage,” says Pepperl. “The newer plantings of recent years will be coming into production each year now, which will bolster numbers. Stemilt has big projects on Honeycrisp going on as we speak. We are planting a sport of the variety that has unbelievable flavor, pressures and acids that will give the consumers a great experience in spring and early summer storage fruit. This is most exciting.”

The reason this difficult fruit is capturing more market share is that consumers have



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“The fantastic thing about the Aztec Fuji is that it colors real well, which allows the fruit for late storage to be picked with good starch reserves for conversion to sugars.

— Roger Pepperl, Stemilt Growers

shown they are willing to pay for the farmers’ troubles. “Honeycrisp has all kinds of problems to grow, but a good Honeycrisp proved consumers would buy them — even if they are more expensive,” says Wescott.

MANY VARIETIES

This is an ever-changing category, because many growers and shippers are enthusiastically in search of the next great apple, and new varieties can become major sellers. “We’re getting good increases with our Ambrosia variety,” says Lutz of CMI. “We have the U.S. rights, and it’s up to the ninth largest variety.”

Other apple shippers are also hoping to strike gold with exclusive rights to new varieties. “Sage Fruit is currently planting the Breeze apple to add to our portfolio of offerings,” says Sinks. “This variety was originally developed in New Zealand, and we will be the only grower-shipper with plantings in North America. This is a sweet apple with a bit of tang that matures just before the Gala.”

Some of the new apples are improvements on varieties that are already familiar to many consumers. “Stemilt transitioned the majority of the Fuji crop to Aztec Fuji,” says Pepperl. “We are going to market this Fuji as a ‘Fuji’ — rather than a trademarked name like some others. Shelf space is tight, and we feel this is the No. 1 Fuji for consumers and for the orchards.

“The fantastic thing about the Aztec Fuji is that it colors real well, which allows the fruit for late storage to be picked with good starch reserves for conversion to sugars. This allows it to be packed in late Spring and Summer and have the crunch and sweetness that Fuji fans crave. The Aztec is going to drive the Fuji variety at Stemilt and, we feel, build consumer demand in the process. Aztec is going to change retailers’ apple category.”

Much of the recently planted Washington acreage is either varieties that have only recently joined the list of top sellers or proprietary club varieties. “Many young high-density orchards are coming into production around Washington,” says Sinks. “The varieties that continue to see the largest growth in production are Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji, and Pink Lady. Club

varieties continue to be planted, but these are being done in a controlled way with carefully managed production by individual shippers

who have rights to specific club varieties.”

Although not a variety, organic apples are a category that continues to show healthy growth.

“We’ll have a surge in organic production this year,” says Lutz.

Some major shippers developed substantial acreage and markets for organic apples as a major part of their operations.

“Organic apples are the other huge category,” says Pepperl. “Stemilt is near 30 percent organic, and we have been doing organic since



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HEALTHY PROMOTIONS

Good nutrition is a special selling point for apples. “The healthy attributes are the corner-

stone of our export messaging,” says Fryhover from the Apple Commission. “Health, nutrition and the associated advantages to eating a diet rich in fiber and vitamins.”

Stemilt is building a promotion for an

organic, kid-sized apple as a highly nutritious snack. “One huge initiative is our Lil’ Snapper program,” says Pepperl. “This award-winning kid-sized apple program is aimed at parents and kids in selling more apples, pears and citrus to families. We will now be adding a complete line of Organic Lil’ Snapper 3# bags to the line-up; 3# bags keep the ring size and volume high on organic customers who buy more produce than traditional shoppers. Why not maximize this customer?”

Merchandising can combine the delicious appeal of the fruit with its place in a healthy diet. “We always reiterate that all produce is healthy for consumers, but what we also want to focus on taste and flavor,” says Sinks.

Apples fit well with the More Matters campaign to encourage consumers to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. “We tie More Matters into our promotions, packaging and customer tie-ins with health,” says Pepperl. “Produce for Better Health is a huge tool in helping us connect with dieticians and information on health and our products. The amount of data available to members is incredible, and we encourage the whole produce industry to get involved and join.” **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA'S

Let Fruit Royalty Reign

Long associated with affluence, pomegranates can generate sales for savvy retailers.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

In both ancient and modern cultures the pomegranate has been a symbol of fertility, abundance, prosperity and wealth. More practically, pomegranates are valued for their versatility, nutritional value and great taste, although many consumers are largely unaware of their existence.

This is something Tom Tjerandsen, manager of the Sonoma, CA-based California Pomegranate Council, can attest to. "When busy consumers are putting together their shopping lists, they don't write pomegranates from California," he says.

Instead, consumers generally purchase the fruit on impulse. "When you have about a fifth of a second to catch a shopper's eye as they go stampeding down the aisles, it's important to have something that's interesting, compelling and relevant."

The pomegranate is all these things, but

according to Tjerandsen, research suggests fewer than 25 percent of shoppers in the United States have experience with pomegranates. "Of those, maybe only 15 percent have ever purchased one, which means 85 percent of the country is still a prime target for purchase."



This is a challenge for the industry from growers and shippers on down to retailers.

CHALLENGES CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

David Anthony, domestic and Canadian sales representative for Ruby Fresh in Firebaugh, CA, recognizes the challenge of pomegranate promotion. "The age-old pushback with pomegranates is, 'How do you open one?' We offer instructions on our store displays as well as more information on our website. Ironically, the challenge of 'deseeding' a pomegranate is a big reason for the increased popularity of our Pomegranate Aril Snack Cups."

Arils are a growing part of pomegranate sales and that's due in part to good messaging. "Now that a lot more information exists regarding pomegranate usage, consumers are eager to experiment with new and exciting combinations and additions," says Rene Mill-

burn, public relations director for King Fresh Produce, headquartered in Dinuba, CA.

“Also helping the consumers ride the pomegranate wave are suppliers who are packaging ready-to-eat arils in the produce department, for ease and convenience.”

As popular as the fruit has become in recent years, there’s plenty of room for improvement at all levels. “Our industry needs to rededicate ourselves to educate our customers on all the good things about pomegranates,” says Levon Ganajian, director of retail relations for Trinity Fruit Sales based in Fresno, CA. He sees a path forward through a combination of trade magazines, cooking shows, produce shows, health and natural food shows; all of which provide opportunities for getting the message out.

“In the past five years we’ve seen tremendous growth for what was once a fruit that was looked upon as messy and troublesome,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa’s/World Variety Produce headquartered in Los Angeles. “At one time, people used to eat around the seeds and spit them out, but then they realized that the pulp and the seed together is entirely edible.”

Year-round demand for pomegranate products has been helped greatly by the rise in popularity of arils. Ganajian sees this as major factor in the future for the fruit. Trinity now has a year-round arils program.

“Arils are the way of the future just because of the convenience,” he says. “We test our arils. We have a minimum 15 brix, it’s all tested before it’s packaged. It’s a more consistent product than a whole pomegranate.”

Dominic Engels, president at POM Wonderful, based in Los Angeles, sees pome-



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

“There’s nothing but upside for the retailer, and that’s how they need to be seeing it. You can bet that if the retailer participates commensurately, they’re going to benefit from all of the investment we made.”

— Dominic Engels, POM Wonderful



granates as a hyper-seasonal product that provides an opportunity to bring something special to the produce department.

“When POM Wonderful variety is in season that really sets the tone,” he says. “The really important part of having a successful marketing program in store is to make sure that you hit the ground running.”

Retailers can take advantage of the continued trend of pomegranates as a healthy fruit through strategic promotions. In all its forms, Engels reports household penetration of POM Wonderful juice and fresh fruit is about 7 percent and 8 percent respectively, and 2 percent for arils.

“There’s nothing but upside for the retailers, and that’s how they need to be seeing it.” Engels says POM Wonderful has invested millions of dollars to promote pomegranates in the past two and a half years with much of that money going to television.

This major marketing effort is something

retailers would be wise to capitalize on. “You can bet that if the retailer participates commensurately, they’re going to benefit from all of the investment we made,” he says.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Consuming pomegranates has been credited with slowing the progress of prostate cancer, reducing carotid artery stenosis and helping prevent heart disease. Many consumers are aware of these benefits.

“We believe consumers in large percentages are very aware of the nutritional benefits of pomegranates,” says Anthony at Ruby Fresh. “They are now easily recognized as a superfood that is high in antioxidants and low in calories.”

Tjerandsen has seen this in his work with the California Pomegranate Council as well. “The researchers continue to concur that shoppers are looking for items that are unique and provide substantial nutrition. Pomegranates certainly fall into that category. They’re very

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“When we reach out to our customers to promote pomegranates, we like to do a cross-demo, and we share the demo with another commodity. Yogurt is a good pairing, but also lettuce companies as well.”

— Levon Ganajian, Trinity Fruit Sales

high in antioxidants and naturally occurring vitamins, so it's something that hits a responsive chord if you can call attention to it," he says.

Millburn at King Fresh says retailers do a good job promoting the health halo, and also thinks the message is being communicated in other ways. "I think information received via the Internet, television, etc., is also imparting to the public at large that pomegranates are a significant source of vitamin C and many other nutrients/antioxidants. More consumers are seeking pomegranates these days for that very reason."

CROSS-MERCHANDISING AND POS

Promoting pomegranates in produce requires educating consumers and to that end POS materials work well.

"I know it's short and sweet and seems simple, but really the best way to do this is to show them the recipes," says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager for S. Katzman Produce, a full-line wholesaler located at the Bronx-based Hunts Point Produce Market.

"The consumer needs to be able to envision the end result and see how easy it is to do, and how delicious it tastes. We had a professional chef create some delicious recipes using our pom seeds and some of our other products too. Then we posted them on our website and made recipe cards to pass out at food shows and in-store demos," she says.

In-store demos can also be employed to cross-promote. "When we reach out to our customers to promote pomegranates, we like to do a cross-demo, and we share the demo with another commodity," says Trinity's Ganajian. "Yogurt is a good pairing, but also lettuce companies as well."

The popularity of pom arils on salads has prompted Trinity to explore other avenues for sales. "We do bulk pomegranate arils for salad bars," says Ganajian. "We're seeing a huge expansion on that part of the business. We see that continuing, and we also see it in foodservice."

"Clear trends of consumers today are convenience and quick meal preparation," says Engels of POM Wonderful. "We found

incredible opportunity with arils co-merchandised with berries, so we suggest a primary or secondary location in the berry cooler."

The company's pomegranate juice is another opportunity to increase sales. "It's been relatively unchanged in terms of packaging — it's only gone from glass to plastic — and it's the No. 1 item in produce juice 14 years later. Trends have come and gone, but for the past 12 months, we set the best records in the sale of our juice at retail," says Engels.

IT PAYS TO DISPLAY

Because it's an impulse purchase, displays play an important role in getting pomegranates into carts and baskets.

"Display bins continue to be the draw for impulse buyers," says Anthony at Ruby Fresh. "We are also seeing good success with our social media campaign, which combines our website along with our Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest updates to drive consumers to our sites for updates, recipes and sharing of ideas."

Ruby Fresh provides high graphic bulk display bins, which draw attention and also offer information for recipes and eating ideas.

"Some retailers buy high graphic bins that are easy to replenish," says Atomic Torosian, managing partner for Crown Jewels Produce headquartered in Fresno, CA. "They hold cases of pomegranates below. The bin program has been very successful for us and other shippers as well."

"Retailers have discovered the tremendous value of the self-standing bins," says Tjerandsen. "Depending on the company, some are shipped as a contiguous unit with the fruit inside. All retailers have to do is move it up to the top. It's incremental profit because the bin stands in a space on the floor that is generally not generating revenue. It's a new profit center."

GRAB-AND-GO

Grab-and-go packaging is also fueling new innovations for pomegranate arils. "A lot of retailers are selling them in the aril packs, and that's a more recent trend," says Jeff Simonian, sales manager for Simonian Fruit Company, based in Fowler, CA. "They'll sell them side by side or they'll have the whole pomegranate



“We have seen 50 percent growth in arils sales over the past two seasons since they were introduced. As a result, we expanded our aril plant this summer season to increase our volume accordingly.”

— Jeff Simonian, Simonian Fruit Company

in the bulk display but they’ll have the arils in the refrigerated.”

This makes sense when taken in context of the shift toward grab-and-go and the

convenience category. Rather than dealing with removing and disposing of a thick rind, consumers can eat the arils quickly and without making a mess.

Anthony has seen expansion in this segment as well. “We have seen 50 percent growth in arils sales over the past two seasons since they were introduced,” says Simonian. “As a result, we expanded our aril plant this summer season to increase our volume accordingly. Our retail customers are continuing to report significant growth in the program.”

In addition to convenience, this growth can also be attributed to the continued health consciousness of consumers. “A cup of arils is a great breakfast or snack option. More people

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are combining them with their favorite yogurt or using as a salad topping. This carries over to dinner when arils are used for favorite recipes and main course dishes," says Anthony.

THE FUTURE OF THE FRUIT

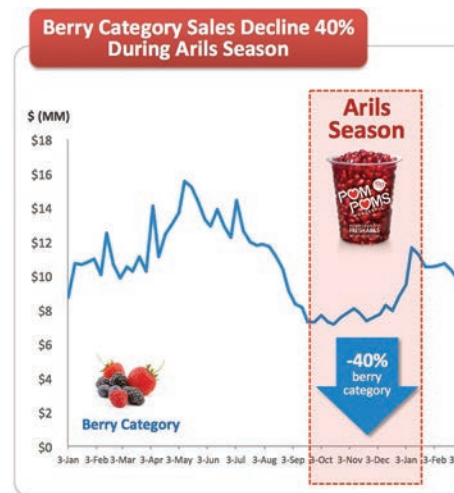
Even as health messaging trails off, at least in consumers' minds, pomegranate sales continue to grow. Key players in the industry are optimistic despite challenges.

"We are finding the market for arils

continues to grow year on year," says Anthony. "While the fall season is a big time for pomegranates, at Ruby Fresh we are focusing on year-round availability."

South American growers in Peru and Argentina make this availability possible. "Next season, the Peruvian market will be open to fresh pomegranates, which will offer increased supplies for the spring/summer season as well," says Anthony. "We are anticipating a significant growth in pomegranates during

CHART COURTESY OF POM WONDERFUL



POM Wonderful finds opportunity with arils co-merchandised with berries, and suggests a primary or secondary location in the berry cooler."



"It's great to finally have an industry specific marketing event! The more, good marketers we have in produce, the better the industry will become."

Karen Caplan, President & CEO, Frieda's, Inc.

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the spring/summer season starting in 2017."

Pomegranates also enjoy healthy sales as an export item, which is a big part of the business for shippers like Crown Jewels in Fresno, CA. "We are probably the second or third largest pomegranate shipper," explains Torosian of Crown Jewels Produce. "It's a good product for us. We export a lot of fruit to Canada and Mexico and a lot domestically. Pomegranates are a big export item to the Pacific Rim countries (Japan, Korea, Australia) and down into Mexico and some of the Central American countries. I've been shipping pomegranates since 1974, but there has really been a rebirth sometime after 2006. It's really taken off again."

Exports are thriving and packaged arils are breathing new life into the category, but it's still the whole fruit that offers a great eating experience to consumers.

"The arils alone, although a time-saving convenience, have not outweighed purchasing a good old fashioned pomegranate, in my opinion," says King Fresh's Millburn. "There's a great deal of gratification that comes from successfully tackling a pomegranate."

While there is a large percentage of the population left to target, educational campaigns and advertising by companies like POM Wonderful have significantly raised the profile of pomegranates.

"Information has really gone out there, so people are less afraid to buy pomegranates," says Schueller of Melissa's/World Variety Produce. "We've gotten past that point where people weren't too familiar with pomegranates. A lot has changed especially in the past five years. Chefs have used the fruit in applications on menus, and make people more aware of how to use and enjoy them in their meals." **pb**



Trade Packaging Can Make Bold Sales Statements

Powerful graphics that enhance displays come to both cardboard boxes and reusable plastic containers.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Walk into the produce section of a Costco anywhere in the country, and it's hard to miss the corrugated boxes, which were used to ship from the field or packing shed, with the top and front pulled back to offer an inviting view of the fruits and vegetables.

Step into the cooler and you see similar shipping boxes displaying the spring mix, clipped spinach and other convenience fresh-cut greens in bags or hard plastic shells.

"If you look at the club stores, we provide the boxes the customers ship in with the

open front or open top," says Doug Rethlake, marketing manager at International Paper, Memphis, TN. "They use it as a display. In the cooler, they use the open front and open top box, so you can get your boxed bags of salad."

International Paper's North American branch makes a variety of products used for shipping produce, including corrugated packaging, containerboard and coated paperboard.

While most grower-shippers and retailers alike still look primarily with a utilitarian eye at the trade packaging used to bring produce to distribution centers and supermarkets, some are also looking at the role a good looking cardboard box or reusable plastic container (RPC) can play in merchandising fruits and vegetables.

"Consumer packs have proliferated because they provide a variety of consumer and retailer benefits such as enhanced merchandising, convenience, protection for the product, and recloseability," says Roman Forowycz, chief

marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging, Inc., Elk Grove Village, IL. "Trade packaging is now designed to nest the individual consumer packs."

Clear Lam makes a wide variety of flexible and semi-rigid packages for food, personal health care and other products.

CARDBOARD OR PLASTIC?

The great debate continues over the comparative benefits of cardboard boxes or reusable plastic containers (RPCs), the two materials used to ship almost all produce to the distribution center and on to the store.

While much attention is focused on the relative economic and environmental virtues of recycled trees or reused petroleum, the makers of both are working to improve the look of their containers when used to display produce at retail.

"IFCO North America recently partnered with Wal-Mart and its growers to design and

launch a new wood grain RPC that has all the benefits of traditional RPCs, but is designed with the look and feel of wood crates and transition easily from transportation and storage to in-store displays that appeal to retail customers,” says Hillary Femal, vice president for global marketing at IFCO, Tampa, FL.

IFCO, the largest RPC maker in North America, announced in June agreements to provide 130 growers with more than a million-and-a-half RPCs with the stylish but retro wood-grain look.

The company received encouraging news from a survey early this year of consumer reaction to its sharp looking plastic produce containers.

“Brandcheck conducted a consumer survey in 11 countries and found consumers prefer IFCO RPCs over cardboard boxes for fresh food packaging by a 55 percent to 25 percent margin,” says Femal. “*The Global Shopper Produce Display Preferences Survey*, conducted in February 2016 by [Mississauga, ON-based] Brandcheck, surveyed 2,200 consumers in 11 countries to determine grocery shopper preferences in relation to the two most prevalent types of produce packaging used for display



Jack Tilley of Inline Plastics says “clear packaging lets the items ‘sell themselves,’ as consumers are attracted to the color palette and can see the contents to be assured of the freshness.”

– IFCO RPCs and cardboard boxes. “IFCO RPCs are the top produce packaging choice of men and women, as well as every age cohort,” says Femal.

Cardboard box makers have also stepped up their graphics game, and offer more striking visuals to attract consumers and promote grower-shipper brands.

“The print quality has improved tremendously,” says Rethlake of International Paper. “The graphics give you the ability to brand your product. If you go from a brown craft box to one that has a lithograph label or pre-print, you get tremendous improvement in print quality.”

Cases ready for retail are becoming far more prevalent as retailers look to manage their in store labor requirements.

“We are seeing a significant movement toward retail-ready cases,” says Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “These shipper merchandisers are designed to be opened easily and placed on the store shelf. The retail-ready cases enhance shelf utilization and reduce store labor.”

In addition to the shelves that are traditionally used to display produce, more retailers are also using upright displays that can hold pouches used to ship fresh fruits and vegetables.

“There are more and more stand-up displays in which the pouches are displayed,” says Hans Christian Schur, chief executive of Schur Star Systems, Oceanside, CA. “Instead of displaying the produce in bulk, there are corrugated stand-up displays of pouches. It’s something that recently became more prominent.”

Schur Star Systems makes a variety of stand-up, peelable, resealable, and resealable bags in various shapes with unique features used to ship and display a wide variety of produce. “We don’t just do standard pouches; we also offer flexible, on-the-shelf packaging with many different convenience options.”

The pouches, which can be visually prominent in the stand-up displays, also benefit from more striking graphics than ever before.

“The graphics can be very strong,” says Schur. “Sometimes we use a double layer to give the graphics even more power. In fact, that’s the process we used for the jar-bag program

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for SunSelect Produce. Making the packaging pop visually on the shelf is important, and many growers are missing out on that element.”

According to Jack Tilley, market research analyst at Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics, for fresh, colorful produce items, “clear packaging lets the items ‘sell themselves,’ as consumers are attracted to the color palette and can see the contents to be assured of the freshness.”

Because of their stackability, clear plastic rigid containers, like Inline’s Safe-T-Fresh line,

are ideal for display merchandising, says Tilley.

“Retailers can build displays of the same, or complementary, produce groups. These displays can be on standard supermarket shelves of free-standing displays,” says Tilley.

A MATTER OF COST

Not all shippers or retailers find it worth the cost to invest in the graphics that turn cardboard boxes, RPCs or pouches into powerful merchandising tools.

Schur Star Systems’ machine portfolio



Schur Star Systems’ jar-bag packaging is used by Aldergrove, British Columbia-based SunSelect Produce.

not only offers convenience packaging for the end-user but for growers as well. “Our SchurStar program enables growers to pack product, with bags we designed for them, and ship it straight to market,” explains Schur. “Surprisingly, printing quality is a low priority for most growers. Price is usually most important. But some growers want their brand to really stand out, and we can help them with that goal.”

With corrugated cardboard, too, many major retailers find it economical to forgo the high-end graphics and just use the box as a way to get fruits and vegetables to the distribution center, and from there to the produce departments.

“The use of shipping boxes for display depends on what grocery store it is,” says Rethlake. “In a Safeway or Kroger, the fruit is clean stacked so it is taken out of the shipping box. If you look at a Meijer, they have boxes the produce was shipped in sitting right on the shelf, and it looks tremendous.”

Use of consumer packs to ship and display produce is reshaping the landscape of trade packaging.

“Consumer packs are commonly packed in a pack-out or specialty-pack facility,” says Raquel Serna, product manager for Orbis, Oconomowoc, WI. “This tightly controlled loop is an ideal opportunity for reusable transport packaging, since the product to be packed is shipped very short distances to these facilities. With these short distances, reusables can be used to ship product into these facilities and returned to the manufacturer on a regular and frequent basis. After they are packed, they are often palletized and shipped on to the distribution center on standard 40 x 48 pallets that can be easily stacked or racked.”

The move toward efficiency is also driving the decisions made by major grower-ship-

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pers as they set up their own package making operations.

“People are looking for machines that serve a variety of purposes,” says Kim Magon, marketing manager at Triangle Package Machinery Company, Chicago. “They want to be able to switch to make more than one style or size of bag. They’re trying to make their plants as efficient as possible.”

Triangle Package sells machinery to large grower-shippers such as Dole or Taylor Farms, that specify their own plastic packaging and want to be able to shift quickly from one sort of bag to another.

“We manufacture vertical form fill seal bagging machines you can use to make stand-up, gusseted or pillow bags,” says Magon. “You might want to make a stand-up bag that shows well on the produce shelf, or a large scale pillow bag for foodservice. These larger grower-shippers want to be able to switch quickly and easily.”

Another cost-saving trend worth following is the European-inspired shift from hard shells to resealable containers.

“European retailers and processors have moved away from traditional plastic clamshell packaging to lidding films sealed to trays,” says Forowycz. “We are starting to see this now in North America with grape and cherry tomatoes, blueberries, apples and other processed fruits and vegetables.”

Packaging is also being evaluated for its ability to extend shelf life, which helps reduce food waste.

“One of the most exciting innovations in printed boxes is the award given to Flexomed of Spain for ‘Best New Packaging’, by Liderpack [which is part of the Hispack conference in Spain],” says Roy Ferguson, chief executive of Chantler Packaging Inc., Mississauga,

Ontario, Canada. “Flexomed worked with Chantler Packaging Inc’s PrimePro technology to laminate PrimePro film to the inside of produce cartons (called PrimePro Core). This provides extended shelf life without the need to add traditional, complex MAP bags to the process. The package has excellent graphics and is retail ready.”

SUSTAINABILITY TAKES THE STAGE

Another issue gaining great traction with many consumers is whether packaging material

can be recycled or reused.

“The materials we utilize in on our flexible packaging machinery would be considered a ‘plastic film,’ and there has been a huge movement in the recycling community to get the word out that these plastics are recyclable,” says Terri Fountain, sales and marketing manager at Matrix Packaging Machinery, Saukville, WI.

Matrix manufactures machines that make packages for a wide number of uses, most of them in the food industry.

“As all the material we utilize on all of our



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machinery can be recyclable, it gives consumers piece of mind that by using sustainable packaging the fresh produce industry is dedicated to sustaining our environment for future generations,” says Fountain. “Because most of a fresh company’s produce is, of course, organic, every one of these companies wants their convenience and retail packaging to reflect that push towards a fully organic and earth friendly theme.”


Some customer bases are particularly concerned with whether packaging is

compatible with a lifestyle that includes organic produce.

“Packaging for organic items continues to evolve. In general the principle of ‘less is more’ is being followed,” says Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “Less material, less graphics, etc.... Recycled plastic or paper is used whenever possible. Packages that could be recycled after consumers are finished with them are in demand. Bio-based plastics that are derived from renewable plant-based raw materials continue to be used in the organic category.”

“As all the material we utilize on all of our machinery can be recyclable, it gives consumers piece of mind that by using sustainable packaging the fresh produce industry is dedicated to sustaining our environment for future generations.”

— Terri Fountain, Matrix Packaging Machinery



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RPCs stake their environmental claim on a more complex calculus that takes into account the long-term use of resources.

“When making decisions about reusable packaging, companies often look at their entire supply chain to find opportunities for cost savings and to justify the investment,” says Serna from Orbis.

“Companies now also want to know about the impact of the reusables on the environment, so now it is also possible to conduct an environmental analysis. This analysis helps companies compare, calculate and evaluate reusables versus single-use packaging, in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, energy used and solid waste.”

But in this utilitarian world, corrugated cardboard and RPCs still compete largely on the grounds of long-term cost.

“Retailers and growers are seeking to reduce costs, boost efficiency and become more sustainable when it comes to fresh food packaging,” says Femal.

“RPCs meet the litmus test in all these categories — they are easier to handle, cost less, protect and cool product better, and are more sustainable than one-way packaging like cardboard.”

This debate is far from over, however, as major retailers disagree on which trade package is most sensible, and some outlets even go back and forth.

“The corrugated share is holding very well,” says Scott Dillon, general manager at International Paper, Memphis, TN.

“Some groceries have gone to RPCs and then back to corrugated. Safeway moved to RPCs, and then moved back after they were acquired by Albertson’s.”

pb

Summer Citrus Bursts With Demand



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT ASSOCIATION

Producers from South Africa, Chile and Uruguay share how they prepare for consumer frenzy in the United States.

BY HOWARD RIELL



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT ASSOCIATION

Thanks to the availability of imported citrus, Americans can enjoy their favorite fruits year-round. The challenge for retailers is to remain current on citrus trends — knowing which varieties sell the most and what imports score highest with consumers — and focusing on merchandising and marketing them effectively.

Consumers' love affair with citrus continues to heat up. As the *New York Times* recently reported, "Thanks to new offerings and deft marketing, Mandarins — popularly known as Tangerines — have become a fixture in the American fruit bowl. The country's consump-

tion of Mandarins has doubled, to 5 pounds a year for every American, while orange sales have declined."

The task for retailers is bringing the best citrus products the world offers to store shelves, and then presenting them to consumers with ideas on how to best enjoy them.

SOUTH AFRICA: GROWING VOLUMES

Suhanra Conradie, chief executive of Summer Citrus from South Africa in Citrusdal, South Africa, says her group works closely with its importer partners, and different importers promote in different ways. "Capespan NA, Seald Sweet, DNE Worldwide and AMC Direct are the four importers actively involved in our promotional efforts. We do plan to establish a unique South African brand identity in collaboration with these importers."

Summer Citrus from South Africa (SCSA) represents a group of 230 South African

citrus growers who consolidate their logistics, marketing and sales efforts to bring the finest citrus fruit to market during the U.S. summer season. Established in 1999 and rebranded for expanded marketing efforts in 2016, the group provides Navels, Midknights, Easy Peelers, Star Ruby grapefruit and Cara Cara oranges across the globe.

One of the group's major goals is increased shelf-space and consumption of product. Conradie notes, "Although we have direct outreach to some of the bigger retailers, once again our importer partners form an imperative part of the success of this program and helping us execute strategy."

Representatives from across the U.S. and Western Cape of South Africa recently attended the 2016 U.S. annual planning meeting hosted by SCSA, formerly the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF).

SCSA grower Gerrit Van Der Merwe confirmed that crop has increased from 2015, and the expectation is that all citrus will continue to increase over the next five years. Navels will continue to lead in volume, accounting for 60 percent of the group's citrus, while Midknights account for 20 percent, followed by Easy Peelers at 14 percent, and Star Ruby Grapefruit and Cara-Cara at 3 percent.

Summer citrus is proven to be a well established, growing category, says Conradie. "We would like to position ourselves as the preferred supplier of summer citrus. The great attribute of summer citrus (oranges, Easy Peelers, and Star Ruby) is that the fruit fits well into the portable snacking trend, and for households on a budget they are a good value on a cost-per-pound basis," she says.

Conradie and her colleagues are continuing to see volumes grow during the summer months. "Easy Peelers continue to enjoy the largest growth. Summer Citrus from South Africa is very competitively priced compared to other summer offerings. We are seeing growth in all of our citrus varieties," she says.

The Oppenheimer Group in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, is bringing Navels from Katlego Sitrus in South Africa to market. The high quality, highly sweet and juicy orange became available in mid-June. The company is also shipping Orri mandarins from Israel in 12-kg cartons (roughly 26-pound cartons) — under the British brand, Jaffa — to North American retailers and wholesalers.

As the company notes, "Due to the great success of our Orri trial last season, we increased our volumes of this easy-peeling Mandarin from Israel."

Australian growers are expected to harvest



more than 100,000 tons of Mandarins throughout the 2016 season. Citrus Australia's chief executive, Judith Damiani, says growers are on track to deliver a full supply of fruit due to favorable growing conditions. The Aussie Mandarin season runs from April through to October with more than 10 varieties available.

"The demand in Australia and around the world for easy-peel, sweet, seedless Mandarins continues to rise and Australian growers are responding with increased production and new varieties," says Damiani.

Growers are trumpeting their fruits' health benefits to consumers, noting that Mandarins "deliver a boost during the colder months from the many vitamins and antioxidants found in them. A single large Mandarin provides adults with their daily intake of vitamin C. They are also easy to peel and, best of all, delicious to eat anytime of the day.

"Free from cholesterol, sodium and fat, low in calories and high in fiber, Mandarins really are the perfect natural healthy snack, particularly for kid's lunch boxes," notes Damiani.

Indeed, education has been a major initiative in Australia. In November, a two-year, nationally accredited citrus-specific Diploma of Production Horticulture was developed to be offered by Sunraysia Institute of TAFE. The goal is to support the next generation of orchard managers to drive the industry forward. The pilot citrus-specific diploma program was rolled out by SuniTAFE, Mildura campus in February 2016, with a longer term goal of delivering the qualification nationally.

According to Citrus Australia's market development manager Andrew Harty, the Australian citrus industry "is entering an exciting growth phase, with massive new marketing opportunities to supply Asian export markets. Free trade agreements, favor-

able currency exchange, and huge demand for 'clean & green' Australian fruit are all helping to drive citrus expansion.

But at the same time, we need to lift our game to ensure we are supplying only the best quality product as efficiently as possible, and to achieve that, our supply chain will need managers with greater knowledge, skills and technical expertise than ever before."

CHILE: DOMINANT PLAYER

Karen Brux, managing director North America, Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), says 2015 was a great year for the Chilean citrus industry, and the category's strength should carry through this summer.

Exports to North America reached record levels, with 165,000 tons (roughly 81 percent of all exports) shipped here. "We're certainly not the only Southern Hemisphere country sending citrus to this market, but Chile is the dominant player in the U.S., and this is where the Chilean Citrus Committee focuses its marketing efforts."

Through the end of the Chilean citrus season in October, Chile had 52 percent Navel market share in the U.S., with South Africa the main competitor. Chile doesn't have as long of a history in this market as South Africa, but more retailers are coming onboard with Chilean Navels every year.

The country is noted for consistently high quality fruit and stellar merchandisers who work hand in hand with retailers to develop highly effective, customized retail marketing programs.

In addition, of all the lemons entering the U.S. from the Southern Hemisphere, Chile had an approximately 95 percent market share last year, shipping nearly 34,000 tons. Chile also exceeded a 55 percent market share last



year on Easy Peelers. While there is growing competition from Peru and Uruguay, both are still relatively small compared to Chile. (Peru had 25 percent market share in 2015, Uruguay 11 percent.)

The U.S. is by far the key export market for Chile, and Easy Peeler volume from Chile should continue to see double-digit growth.

Last year, CFFA estimated that combined Clementine and Mandarin volume would reach 100,000 tons over the next few years, and said the estimate for 2016 is already quite close to that number. The Citrus Committee's official 2016 estimate for Easy Peelers exceeds 96,000 tons.

"Thanks to the strong marketing campaigns for Easy Peelers during the U.S. domestic season, and the work Chile has done to maintain shelf space and consumer demand during the summer and fall, this category continues to soar," says Brux. "Easy Peelers have become a key year-round, must-have item in the produce department."

Total global citrus exports from Chile climbed 30 percent in 2015, with the largest increase of 57 percent attributed to Mandarins.

For this season, the group is projecting another 39 percent increase in Mandarins, 99 percent of which are shipped to North America.

"With strong year-round demand for Mandarins, and with Chile the main source of supply during the summer and fall months, we look forward to supplying the market with more of what it wants," says Brux.

URUGUAY: VERY ENTHUSIASTIC

Uruguay is a newcomer in the summer citrus in the United States market. Marta Bentancur, manager of international relations and market access affairs for The Union of Fruit Growers

and Exporters of Uruguay (UPEFRUY), says she and her colleagues are "very enthusiastic in this respect. Summer citrus supply is a good complement to promote consumption all year-round in a growing market for this category."

Uruguay's importers are also eager to increase participation, she adds, and are working hard to improve quality and their business relationship. "Our quality is very good,

and competes very well with fruit from other origins, such as Chile, Peru and South Africa."

Bentancur says her members are focusing their exports in Mandarins and oranges. "This year, we are introducing more lemons, but figures will be quite low."

She concedes there is a noticeable dip in some varieties during the summer months. "Supply and consumption are still very low in summer compared to winter months with domestic supply. Additionally, in summer, there is competition with other fruits. Nevertheless, citrus' aptitude for health is important to be able to increase the market in this window."

Bentancur's group found consumers prefer seedless, tasty and colorful fruits, "and that is our target. We are working on conversion to new seedless varieties to be able to fulfill consumers' expectations for the medium and long run."

Fulfilling consumers' expectations is what counts. By bringing the finest fruit from growers the world over to American store shelves, marketing its health benefits, highlighting its menu appeal and merchandising and promoting it effectively, retailers can do just that. **pb**

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Look At Onion Merchandising As A New Opportunity



The ever-present staple item sees an increase in consumption because of increased attention to varieties, versatility and creative marketing.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

There are many layers to onion merchandising. Retailers can peel back a few to reveal easy and effective strategies for marketing, promoting, and most importantly, selling this ubiquitous vegetable in all its varieties.

CONTINUED GROWTH

There may be no single contributing factor that explains expanding onion sales, but several different variables are coming together to keep the category healthy. “The overall onion category continues to grow, albeit at a slow and steady rate,” says Matt Curry, president of Curry and Company, based in Brooks, OR. “A lot of the growth has to do with your demographic area also. For example, in regions with

a heavy Hispanic population, you continue to see growth in the sales of white onions, which are popular in countless recipes.”

Yellow onions still keep their top spot with traditional retailers, but sweet onions are experiencing an increase in sales as well. Part of this can be attributed to consumers looking for local and regional product. “We’ve had nice success the past couple of years with our local sweet onions grown in the Willamette Valley of Oregon,” says Curry, “It has been a nice growth item with us with select retailers.”

“The yellow is still the top seller by far,” reports Ron Myruski, owner of Myruski Farms, Inc., based in Goshen, NY, “but because of the ethnic population increasing in certain areas, the demand for white and red onions is increasing.”

“For us, onion varieties have remained fairly consistent,” says Teri Gibson, director of marketing and customer relations for Peri & Sons Farms, based in Yerington, NV. “Yellows are by far the biggest seller — the bulk of the crop we plant — followed by whites, reds and then our Sweetie Sweet. Outside of our overall annual market growth, which is focused on quality retail, we see demand for sweet onions continuing to grow.”

For John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce based in Reidsville, GA, consumer demand for sweet onions is strong. “The 2016 Vidalia sweet onion season has shown excellent consumer demand,” says Shuman. He attributes this to a combination of good pricing and the quality of this year’s crop. “It’s the best growing year in recent history with great volume and sizing,” says Shuman.

“Most of our Vidalia onions have been trending toward jumbo and colossal. We were fortunate to produce a very good RealSweet Vidalia onion crop from our 2,300 acres, with acreage very similar to what we had last year.”

“Vidalia onion sales are growing, and this is due in part to the growth of sweet onions these past few years,” says Susan A. Waters, executive director, Vidalia Onion Committee, based in Vidalia, GA.

Within the onion category, sweet onions now represent the largest category share at 35 percent, followed by yellow onions at 33 percent, according to the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group. When in season, Vidalia onions represent 62 percent of all sweet onion sales nationwide.”

According to Grant Kitamura, onion promotion committee chairman for the Idaho-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CURRY & COMPANY

“Onions are one of the most versatile vegetables available. ... They are also a part of nearly every ethnic cuisine and there is unlimited opportunity for retailers to communicate these things to consumers.”

— Shannon Kyle, Torrey Farms



Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, based in Parma, ID, “Due to the continued interest in home gourmet cooking, onions are still a mainstay for standard favorites and new recipes that include many ethnic cuisines. Yellow onions are still on the top because of their versatility, but reds have become increasingly more popular because of their color and plate appeal.

COMMUNICATING COOKING TRENDS

Foodservice trends provide opportunities to promote all varieties of onions in produce, according to Jeff Rhoden, senior sales manager at Glennville, GA-based Bland Farms. “Signage, point-of-sale materials and recipe

tear-off pads are a great way to communicate ideas for usage of Vidalia onions. We have recipes printed on our consumer bags in order to offer the consumer a meal solution.”

Shannon Kyle with sales at Elba, NY-based Torrey Farms sees the versatility of onions as a major selling point. “Onions are one of the most versatile vegetables available. Onions of all colors can be consumed raw, caramelized, marinated, roasted and they are found in recipes for meals at all times of the day. They are also a part of nearly every ethnic cuisine and there is unlimited opportunity for retailers to communicate these things to consumers.”

For Gibson at Peri & Sons, retailers can

help consumers realize the many eating possibilities for onion varieties other than yellow. “Our bags and tags promote our free recipes, which are easily available on our website, for every variety of onion,” she says. “The average consumer probably doesn’t know that white onions are wonderful for cooking. They generally have the highest sugar content, their texture holds up well, the translucent white color is very attractive, and there’s no bitter aftertaste when cooked.”

Kyle recommends retailers promote onions by tying them into the season. “In the summer barbecuing season, merchandize red onions near peppers, pineapples and cherry or grape

SEEING REDS

Yellow onions continue to rule the category, but reds are giving an old standby a run for its money. They’re becoming increasingly popular in restaurants across the country, which can be used to promote them for home use as well. “Red onions are a staple in the foodservice industry,” says Matt Curry, president of Curry and Company, based in Brooks, OR. “But many consumers aren’t using them for their sandwiches, burgers and salads at home.”

Curry recommends featuring photos of reds in store circulars and promoting them through social media as well as POS materials like recipe cards. “We have done a lot of red onion business with one of the major sub sandwich chains,” he says. “I think it’s something retailers could capitalize on in their stores.”

“As a grower/shipper, we have observed the red variety definitely gaining market

share,” says Shannon Kyle, a 12th generation member of the Torrey Family. Kyle works in sales and food safety for Torrey Farms, based in Elba, NY. “The food bloggers and restaurants seem to be slicing and dicing red onions as a partner or topping to a wide assortment of menu ideas. Yellows are definitely still at the top, but red onions have gained popularity, especially in fast casual dining like on pizzas, sandwiches, wraps and salads.”

For Tanimura & Antle, based in Salinas, CA, sales are at an all-time high. The company is the only year-round supplier of Artisan Sweet Red Onions, and Anthony Mazzuca, director of commodity management, sees this as a growing trend. “In recent years, volatility in industry supply of red onions has translated into steep increases in customer requests for contracts and long-term pricing.”

Mazzuca contends that the retail

demand for high quality red onions has driven the growth of their program. He attributes this demand to the versatility of the red variety, which sets them apart from yellows and whites. “An Artisan Sweet Red Onion is as delicious raw as it is cooked. They bring a burst of color into any dish chefs/consumers are preparing and can easily substitute for whites or yellow in most any recipes.”

“Retailers that wish to increase their red onion sales can make a big impact by just listing their various uses,” according to Grant Kitamura, onion promotion committee chairman for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, based in Parma, ID. “Red onions are great for pizzas, fresh salsas, salads and sandwiches. Pickled red onions are gaining huge interest for today’s cuisine. Merchandising vinegar and other pickling ingredients along with red onions is a wise choice.”

pb

tomatoes to show the consumer how they can easily slide them onto a skewer as a vegetarian option or grill them with meat. Also, in warm weather, consumers tend to prepare more salads, fresh salsas, and lightly cooked or grilled dishes. These types of meals work well with sliced and diced fresh red onions.”

Kyle also believes retailers will have success cross-promoting reds in the deli department as toppings for sandwiches and ingredients in wraps.

Curry has seen the way cooking shows

and food blogs influence consumer interest and suggests retailers pay attention to popular trends. “The continued growth and interest in cooking shows and blogs have been a great boon to retailers,” says Curry. “If a recipe is seen on one of the popular food shows, for example, it is common for shoppers to come in that following week looking for those ingredients.”

“When it comes to cooking, Vidalia onions are extremely versatile, adding flavor to soups, salads, salsas, dips, dressings and even desserts,” says Waters at the Vidalia Onion Committee.



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What many consumers may be unaware of is how taste is affected by the season. John Vlahandreas, onion program director for Idaho Falls, ID-based Wada Farms, explains, “A lot of people don’t know what they want, and they just grab an onion. What they miss is that the onion this time of year is the mildest onion you’ll ever get for grilling and cooking. These short-day onions don’t get all the light that the other ones do; they should retain a bit of their water, becoming a little bit milder, and they’re not as bitter as when you pull them out of storage in January and February.”

MERCHANDISING PARTNERS

Onions have many natural merchandising partners, and retailers should bring them together to cross-merchandise in produce as well as other retail departments. “Onions pair well with lots of other produce items like pre-packaged salads, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers,” says Kyle. “Colorful, multi-item displays can be focused around the specific season, holiday or event that is coming up.”

Peri’s Gibson sees grilling and sports events as opportunities for retailers to promote onions. “Americans love pairing food with almost any type of sporting event or outdoor activity. You don’t need to replace every calorie-intense snack food at your gathering — that may cause a meltdown — but consumers can



“I always like to see onions promoted like an apple or an orange,” says Wada’s Vlahandreas. “Get it out there on the shelf and stack it nice and neat and promote it with what’s going on at the time. If you’ve got barbecues going out there, you put it close to the corn and the tomatoes. If you have some by the meat department, that never hurts.”

“Cross promotions with other departments can be successful,” says Anthony Mazzuca, director of commodity management at Salinas, CA-based Tanimura & Antle. “Onions are not

typically displayed in refrigerated units at the store level, which opens up the possibility of displaying them in conjunction with promotions in other departments.”

THE POWER IN DISPLAYS

Onion displays are effective tools for retailers who keep three key factors in mind, as Myruski at Myruski Farms advises: “Make sure they have good ventilation, are kept at room temperature and keep them dry.” To achieve these conditions for proper onion displays,



Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee suggests colorful POS and recipe suggestions in store to encourage onion sales.

start replacing half of them with healthier produce-based snacks. The produce aisle needs to become the place to start when planning those munchie menus.”

Shuman has research to back up the power onions have to drive sales of other commodities. “Research we’ve conducted with Nielsen Perishables Group indicates sweet onions drive sales of a variety of items. Consumers with sweet onions in their carts are more likely to purchase produce such as peppers, celery, tomatoes, mushrooms and bagged salad as well as fresh meats, such as beef and chicken.”

Over the summer, Shuman Produce partnered with different brands both inside and outside of the produce department. Packaged salads, refrigerated salad dressings, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and meats are all a part of their on-pack coupon program. “We ship bags of our RealSweet Vidalia onions to participating retailers with a coupon booklet already attached to the front of each bag. Along with offers from each of the partner products, each retailer-specific coupon booklet features a recipe including all of the items. The consumer gets the added value of a meal solution along with discounted ingredients, while the retailer has a built-in cross merchandising tool that results in a larger basket at check-out.

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retail produce executives are advised to rely on a little help from their friends at the National Onion Association.

Kyle at Torrey Farms suggests retailers turn to the organization's website for storage, handling and merchandising tips. Kyle also notes, "With increasing interest from consumers in value-added fresh-cut products like diced onions, it is important to make sure you are letting customers know where they can find these items in your store."

Gibson at Peri & Sons Farms has some advice about displays as well. "Consumers buy with the eye, so clean, neat stacks of packaged product — especially bright, colorful packages — will get noticed and sell better."

For Rhoden at Bland Farms, signage is key. "Proper signage identifying the onions as Vidalias is crucial. We recommend large displays of bulk along with a complementary display of consumer bags. We also recommend a secondary display somewhere throughout the produce section or even near the meat case."

"An onion is an onion is an onion," according to Curry at Curry and Company, and this can make consumers somewhat immune to displays. His suggestion is to mix things up a bit. "Try to merchandise it a little differently so your consumer looks at the stand in a new way," he suggests. "Are onions always to the side? Try putting them front and center for a

week. Place them next to your tomatoes and avocados. I've seen one major chain with a great and simple 'make your own guacamole' sign above a display like this. If you treat onions as just a staple item, you will get those steady staple sales. If you give them a little love and attention, I think you'll see a nice boost in sales."

"As our retail partners know, displays drive sales," says Shuman. "That's why we provide bags, bins and boxes that work to complement each other and feature the product with bright and colorful imagery to draw consumers' eyes and attention."

Shuman recommends looking beyond the produce department for merchandising partners to help create displays that suggest easy meal solutions. This method draws consumers in and increases sales. "We suggest placing Vidalia onions in the center of the produce department and allocating shelf space specific to sweet onions for maximum effect. For example, a display including Vidalia onions, avocados, tomatoes and refrigerated dressings could be used to create a flavorful salad promotion."

"Onions are a beautiful vegetable," says Kitamura of the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee. "Colorful photos displaying a variety of onion colors and slices are great for impulse buying and increasing the variety types consumers choose." Kitamura also advises displaying both bulk and bags to give consumers options.

Waters at the Vidalia Onion Committee has developed a training guide on best practices for merchandising Vidalia onions. Retailers can download a copy from the organization's website. "Based on national consumer and sales data research, we've developed a step-by-step training guide on the best practices for merchandising Vidalia onions. This is a great resource for produce managers and merchandisers, providing them with key information on maximizing Vidalia onion sales."

TARGETING DEMOGRAPHICS

Changing demographics can affect produce sales, and retailers should adapt to these changes when promoting different products. "Research is showing that the U.S. melting pot concept is not as established as previously thought," notes Gibson at Peri & Sons. "People are reconnecting with and embracing their cultures, so now almost every neighborhood is a complex multicultural mix."

Gibson sees this as a challenge for retailers, but for those who do the work, it's an opportunity. "Stores that pay attention to their

PACKAGING TRENDS

"I think advances in packaging are giving shippers and retailers new ways to market onions," says Shannon Kyle with sales at Elba, NY-based Torrey Farms. "Convenient pack sizes made from environmentally-friendly packaging and the 'less is more' approach are appealing to many consumers."

Kyle also thinks loose onions in bulk displays are appealing to consumers who prefer to hand select their produce. She also believes graphic floor display bins are great ways to drive traffic to the onion category by allowing for multiple merchandising positions.

"Each retailer has its own preference

for bulk and loose and the percent mix they go with," says Matt Curry, president of Curry and Company, based in Brooks, OR. "During the start of the month, bags often do well as people store up on their onions for the month." Curry sees sweet onions as an opportunity for seasonal marketing and recognizes the impact of food shows and magazines in driving consumers to particular products. Produce executives should capitalize on this free asset. "When one of the foodie magazines features an onion recipe on the cover, consider putting that issue on display next to onions. I bet it drives some sales."

Susan A. Waters, executive director for

Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee, has some numbers on how consumers are purchasing packaged onions. "Our research indicates 48 percent of consumers surveyed have purchased Vidalia onions in five-pound bags or less. The high-graphic D-pack bag has really added to the growth of Vidalia sales and provides a great platform to educate consumers with nutritional information and recipes."

While there are many layers to onion merchandising, they are a relatively easy sell if promoted correctly. Retail produce managers who use the available tools and tips effectively will increase sales of all varieties year-round. **pb**

local shoppers and are given some freedom to address their needs, even if they are outside the corporate template, will be seen and rewarded for being more authentic and connected."


"Since onions are so versatile and used in such a wide variety of ethnic dishes, they are one of the easiest vegetables to promote to a variety of demographics," says Kitamura.

"The easiest way to achieve this is to identify the demographics the retailer is promoting to and find appropriate recipes to display along with onions."

Shuman sees ethnic dishes as an opportunity for onion sales and for the home cook in general. "Sweet onion shoppers are likely to be fresh-and-health-oriented premium


shoppers who prefer home cooked meals, purchase specialty items and are more likely to buy products that suggest an ethnic skew, like Mexican and Italian meals."

Shuman's year-round sweet onion program provides a consistent supply of sweet onions for retailers to take advantage of and increase their register rings all year long. **pb**



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Challenges & Opportunities For Mushrooms



PHOTO ON LEFT COURTESY OF OAKSHIRE MUSHROOM FARM; ABOVE PHOTO COURTESY OF TO-JO MUSHROOMS

Retailers and marketers share advice on successful marketing and merchandising tips for the category.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

With more varieties moving into the mainstream, home cooks developed a greater interest in mushrooms. Creative restaurant chefs and affordable year-long availability are driving strong mushroom sales in produce departments across the U.S. In fact, total U.S. dollar sales of this flavorful fungi grew 6.3 percent during the 52-weeks ending May 15, 2016 (or 1.4 points ahead of the total produce growth trend) according to information supplied by the Mushroom Council headquartered in San Jose, CA. The best way to keep sales “mushrooming” is to address common challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

1. THE RIGHT ASSORTMENT

Shoppers enjoy a large selection of mushrooms at Martin’s Super Markets, a 22-store chain based in South Bend, IN. “We have a

full line, everything from whites to Portobello and Oysters,” says Ed Osowski, director of the produce and floral departments. “The most popular are sliced whites, and we’ll cross-merchandise these with steaks. Brown mushrooms, such as Portobellos and Creminis, gained so much in popularity that they aren’t considered specialty items anymore.”

Challenge. Ensuring the right assortment of mushrooms can be a difficult task.

“I have many examples of chain stores with good intentions of expanding the variety of mushrooms they offer to their customers,” says Joe Salvo, president of Ponderosa Mushrooms & Specialty Foods, in Port Coquitlam, BC. “Invariably, it fails at the store level, where over pricing, poor rotation of stock and subsequent poor turnover and high shrink squashes any continued support and eventually leads to a scaling back of the program.”

Opportunity. White mushrooms continue to be the basis of selection as the most popular variety. In fact, white mushrooms contributed more than half, or 58.7 percent, of category dollars during the 52-weeks ending May 28, 2016, according to data provided by the Chicago-headquartered Nielsen Perishables Group. Brown mushrooms come in second at 34.6 percent, specialty varieties at 2.5 percent, combo blends at 1.3 percent and dried

at 0.5 percent.

“Following the recommended space allocation based on sales can translate into increased dollars and volume,” says Bill Litvin, senior vice president of sales and national account manager at Giorgio Fresh in Temple, PA. “We work with customers on planograms to determine the optimal number of facings for each of our mushroom varieties in a retail display.”

However, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to assortment. What determines this is a retailer’s regionality, shopper demographics and overall demand trends.

“You can’t just take an assortment profile that works on the East Coast and duplicate it for a West Coast retailer,” says Brian Kiniry, president and chief operating officer for the Oakshire Mushroom Farm in Kennett Square, PA, which operates under the Dole label. “It’s important to understand the market and measure performance velocity of each SKU in order to determine the optimal mix.”

Focusing on the specific tastes of ethnic groups in a community can be effective as well, according to Ponderosa’s Salvo. “Generally speaking, Asians and Europeans are much more accustomed to having fresh mushrooms in their daily diet.”

Kevin Donovan, national sales manager for Phillips Mushroom Farm in Kennett Square,

PA, agrees. "If you have European clientele, you'll want to offer wild mushrooms, such as Morels and Chanterelles."

Shoppers are looking for bolder flavors. "We're seeing a trend in the flavor scale of mushrooms," says Kevin Delaney, vice president of sales and marketing for To-Jo Mushrooms in Avondale, PA. "First, there was a dominance of mild-flavored white mushrooms. Then meatier brown mushrooms began to grow in popularity. Now, we're seeing consumers gravitating toward the next level of flavor and varieties that have moved into the mainstream, such as Shiitake, Enoki and Oyster mushrooms, both whole and sliced."

"Beyond this," says Giorgio's Litvin, "organic and value-added mushrooms are the biggest growth categories for us."

2. DISPLAY SPACE

Challenge: "It's always a challenge to get more refrigerated shelf space for our mushrooms," says Ponderosa's Salvo. "But as a rule, the larger the display, the bigger the sales."

Opportunity: Space allocation depends on a number of factors, such as the size of the store, according to Jane Rhyno, director of sales and marketing for Highline Mushrooms in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. "However, in general, a minimum of 4 to 6 feet should be dedicated to mushrooms. We have seen many of our customers moving to 8- and 12-foot mushrooms sections with a full offering of both conventional and organic mushrooms."

3. SHRINK

Challenge: "Some stores experience very high levels of shrink. One reason is overpricing to cover historical shrink and to help cover the anticipated shrink of product removed from the shelf. These high-priced products, combined with older product being held longer than should be, reduce sales and customer satisfaction is minimized; thereby reducing future sales even further. It's a vicious cycle," says Ponderosa's Salvo.

Opportunity: It is extremely important for retailers to display mushrooms at the proper temperature and to remove any expired products in order to help maintain mushroom sales, according to Giorgio's Litvin. "Ensuring the product looks its best will help maintain positive sales figures."

Specifically, Litvin recommends four key shrink prevention points: First, cool the product to 34 degrees Fahrenheit for maximum shelf life; second, avoid spray misters and over stacking past three tills high; third, rotate the product to keep the display case fresh; and

fourth, entice customers by keeping the product attractive.

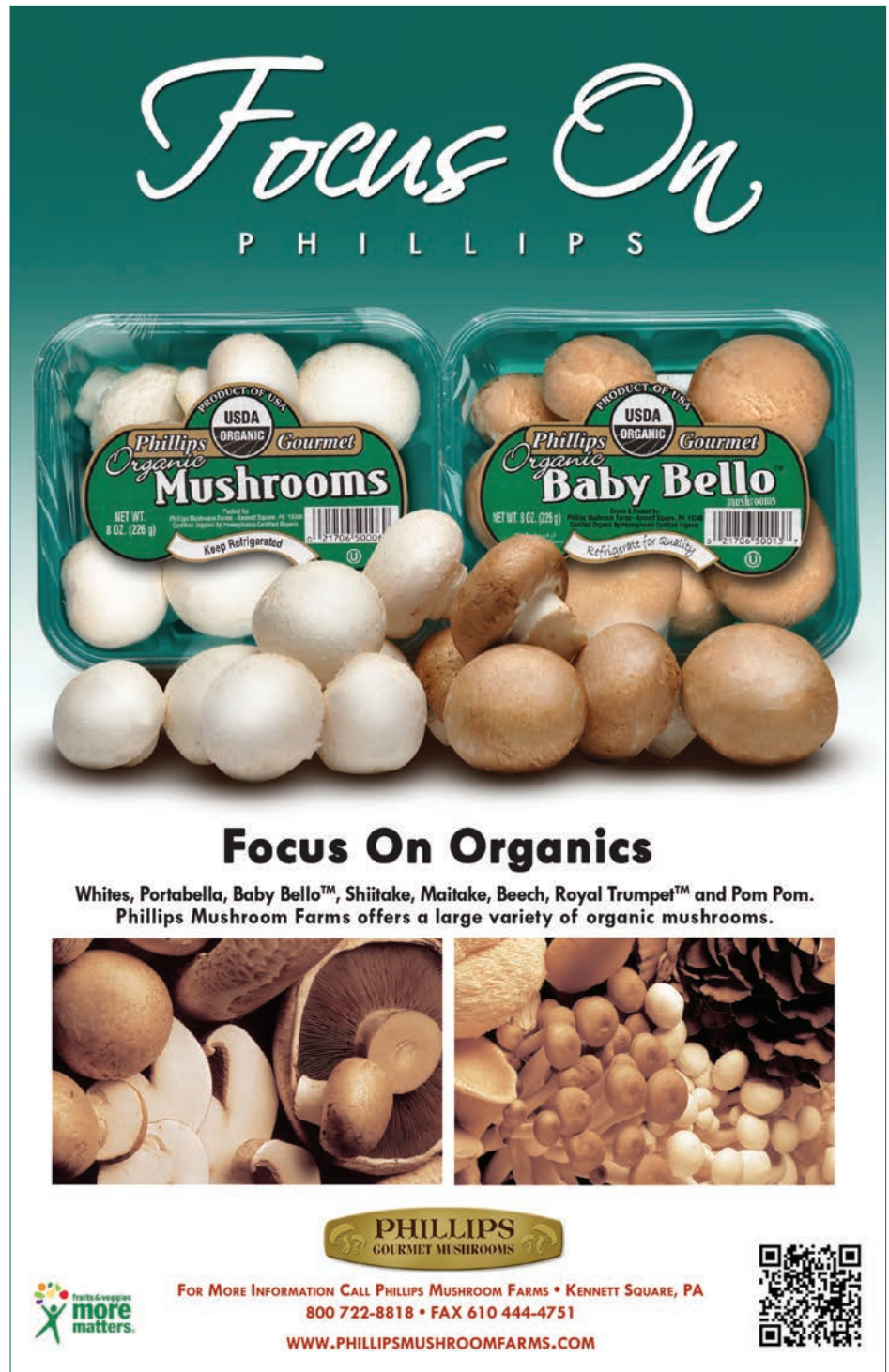
Martin's Super Markets keeps shrink to a minimum with closed glass door cases that maintain the correct temperature for mushrooms, according to Osowski.

"Shrink on bulk mushrooms tends to be significantly higher than packaged and can range from 25 to 45 percent with whites and Creminis. It can be significantly higher on slower-moving specialty items. Packaging helps keep mushrooms from getting damaged

and drying out. Keep an eye on the proportion of bulk versus packaged so that overall category shrink does not get too high," recommends Highline's Rhyno.

Even when the cold chain is maintained, it's important to keep inventory to a minimum at the distribution center and in the store.

"Great produce departments order based on their scan data and keep mushrooms as fresh as possible by turning displays often," says Mike O'Brien, vice president of sales and marketing for Monterey Mushrooms based in



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merchandising review ► mushrooms

Watsonville, CA.

One innovative idea to reduce shrink is to use mushrooms about to be culled in other areas of the store.

“Those stores with in-house delis and HMR kitchens and preparation areas could utilize these mushrooms in many different food items to sell to their existing customers, whether it be soups, pizzas, sandwiches and sauces or marinated and grilled. This, in turn, could give customers a better idea of how to utilize mushrooms in their own home cooking and ultimately boost sales of the fresh mushrooms,” says O’Brien.

4. EDUCATION

Challenge: These days, most retailers resist having outside companies’ point-of-sale materials in their stores,” says Ponderosa’s Salvo. “Yet, they do very little themselves to help promote and educate the consumer. This is a point that we all need to pay more attention to.”

Opportunity: Education is important for retail staff and shoppers. “We can provide sales materials to help educate new associates,” says Giorgio’s Litvin. “Knowing about the health benefits of mushrooms and being familiar with their versatility (the Mushroom Council’s



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTEREY MUSHROOMS

‘blendability’ concept) helps stores stand out from the competition. Consumers want solutions, ideas and knowledgeable sales associates.”

Shoppers at Martin’s Super Markets are provided with recipe sheets when, for example, mushrooms and ground beef are both featured together in an ad. Mushrooms are so versatile that they can easily be incorporated into nearly every cuisine.

“There is an incredible opportunity to sell more mushrooms by sharing the nutritional benefits and providing easy ways to incorporate mushrooms into a healthy meal. Retailers used fliers to help educate and inspire consumers,

but now their digital presence is a great and effective way to reach consumers. Many retailers not only have great websites, but they also have their own apps. These apps include recipes and nutritional information that’s available right at the shopper’s fingertips,” says Highline’s Rhyno.

Demos are another great educational tool. “We recently tested sample mushroom salsa at the produce department entrance of a nearby retailer. The recipe choice was meant to demonstrate the versatility of fresh mushrooms,” says Justin Reyes, sales and marketing manager for Gourmet Mushrooms in Sebastopol, CA.

5. PROMOTION

Challenge: Retailers often fall into a rut of predictable mushroom promotions.

Opportunity: “Instead, we believe it is important to offer a variety of promotional opportunities,” says Giorgio’s Litvin.

To that end, Martin’s Super Markets advertises mushrooms twice monthly year-round to inspire seasonal cooking.

“We change up the types in our ads. For example, it’s white mushrooms for stuffing and Portobello for grilling in the summer. In the fall, the varieties change. For example, the Creminis will be advertised for soups and stews,” says Osowski.

Promotional strategy depends entirely on sales goals, according to Highline’s Rhyno. “If you want to move tonnage, then lower the price on white whole mushrooms. If you want customers to try brown mushrooms, then put white and brown on sale together and offer two for the price of one. If the goal is to appeal to the convenience or varieties mushroom shopper, then advertise products like a sliced medley as a reminder rather than at a deep discount.”

Advertised or not, peak mushroom sales historically happen in the fall, says Fred Recchiuti, general manager at Basciani Foods in Avondale, PA. “Thanksgiving and Christmas are the two biggest mushroom holidays.” **pb**

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Cleveland Is On A Roll

A DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT BOOM KEEPS PRODUCE PROS ON THEIR TOES.

By Doug Trattner

While nobody was paying attention, this Midwestern city on a Great Lake transformed itself from luckless underdog to the toast of the nation. Though the residents of Ohio's second-largest city have long known how livable and loveable this perch is, the rest of the world seems to be discovering it lately.

Recent events, such as LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers bringing home an NBA Championship, and the Republican National Convention rolling into town, brought heightened attention to a city not all that accustomed to it. What those outsiders found when they landed is a sparkling city with a vibrant arts, culture and dining scene that is enjoyed by one of the most diverse and welcoming populaces around.

The Cleveland Orchestra, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and Cleveland Museum of Art all reside here, as does one of the most robust tourist and hospitality industries in the region. A veritable hotel boom has doubled the number of downtown hotel rooms in just three years, and Cleveland's restaurant, bar and brewery scene is exploding right along with it thanks to award-winning chefs and the foodies who adore them.

According to Destination Cleveland (Cuyahoga County's convention and visitors bureau) while the official number of Cleveland residents hovers in the 400,000 range, the five-county Greater Cleveland metropolis contains more than 2 million, most of whom make frequent visits into town to work, eat and play. What's more, Cleveland's urban core is enjoying an unprecedented population growth, seeing a 70-percent increase over the past 15 years. This influx of new residents, many of them Millennials lured by a low cost of living and high quality of life, pushed downtown apartment occupancies to 98 percent.



THE MARKET ECONOMY

"It used to be absolutely crazy-busy down here at four in the morning," says Tony Anselmo, a guy who knows a thing or two about the Northern Ohio Food Terminal. "When I was a kid, my father got his jaw busted over a parking space."

Anselmo, chief marketing officer and one of four equal partners of Premier ProduceOne, grew up at the terminal market. His father operated a fruit and vegetable stand at the venerable West Side Market, and he worked by his side "since I was a sprout," he says. The wholesale market on the edge of downtown

Cleveland used to supply every grocer, restaurant and foodservice distributor in town with its fresh produce, creating a competition for prime parking spaces of epic proportions.

These days, there appears to be more seagulls than semi-trailers occupying this massive swath of land just east of town. Most of the parking spots and truck bays that caused so many fisticuffs back in the day now sit open and wanting.

"Cleveland used to have all these independent grocery stores — the Stop-n-Shops, Rini's, Russo's, Mario Fazio's — which would all have buyers come down and shop at the



Jim Calabrese of Cavalier-Gulling-Wilson Co.



Tony Anselmo of Premier ProduceOne and Joe Cavalier of Cavalier-Gulling-Wilson Co.



Tony Anselmo of Premier ProduceOne and Andrew Weingart of Forest City Weingart Produce Company



Pat Kelley of Cavalier-Gulling-Wilson Co.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUG TRATTNER

terminal because we had to," recalls Anselmo. "When supermarkets like Giant Eagle came to town, everything changed."

But it's not all gloom and doom, he stresses. "The market is not dead, it's gone on a diet," says Anselmo. "The strong ones are doing well."

The Northern Ohio Food Terminal went from a peak of about 15 to 20 different produce commission houses down to roughly six, with wholesalers/distributors such as Sanson, Cavalier-Gulling-Wilson, Global, and Forest City Weingart Produce still staying strong. They continue to survive, and thrive, because they all learned to adapt with the times.

"All of the produce houses down here complement each other. It's like a shopping mall for produce buyers where you're able to walk around and look at all the options."

— Andrew Weingart, Forest City Weingart

"When this terminal opened up in 1929, about 20 different lines of trains went right through our backyard from everywhere in the country," says Andrew Weingart, fourth-generation president of Forest City Weingart

Produce Company. These days, though the terminal is leaner, it still provides an unparalleled level of variety, quality, value and service.

"All of the produce houses down here complement each other," says Weingart. "It's



Andrew Weingart of Forest City Weingart Produce Company



Frank Penavic II of Global Distributors of Produce

like a shopping mall for produce buyers where you're able to walk around and look at all the options. You can find six different honeydews with six different prices, because they're coming from six different places."

What's more, adds Weingart, shopping trends appear to be shifting yet again. The last great upheaval in the wholesale produce market occurred when the large supermarket chains swept into town. Nowadays, shoppers seem to be pining for the good old days.

"Recently, more mom-and-pop stores are

coming back," Weingart observes. "I think that while the Giant Eagles and the like provide a one-stop shopping experience, these independents are stepping in to fill the void of customer service and personal relationships."

Though local produce is the catchphrase of the day, Joe Cavalier, president of Cavalier-Gulling-Wilson, often cautions his buyers against simply going with the flow.

"This time of year, many of our smaller customers flock to the Amish auctions, because the price is so good," he says, referring to the

large produce sales that take place throughout Ohio's Amish communities. "But the No. 1 priority to anybody in the food business should be food safety and traceability. Some of these farms feel like they are 200 years back in time."

Cavalier, who worked at the terminal his entire life, says independent grocers such as Heinen's and Miles Farmers Market work with him, because he has the necessary safety certifications in place.

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ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUG TRATTNER. TOP TWO PHOTOS: MODERN FOOD PROCESSORS; BOTTOM PHOTO: SANSON CO.

distributor The Sanson Co. looks nothing like its aged neighbors. The 225,000-square-foot facility is bright, modern and massive, with forklifts zipping through automated doors that open on approach.

This long-running commission house got to this point because it embraced changes early on that allowed it to keep pace with an ever-changing market.

Matthew Fritz, the head of Sanson's organic division, says his grandfather, Anthony Sanson (who was COO), and his uncle, Jeff Sanson (current chief executive), always reinvested money back into the business. "You always have to be adapting, from hiring the right staff, carrying the right product and investing in technology. It all helped us grow into a regional player," says Fritz.

While some of Sanson's competitors are griping about market consolidation, Sanson is benefitting from it. This 190-employee company brings in and sends out 25 to 30 tractor-trailers full of product every day of the week. A full two-thirds of it goes to mega-retailers such as Giant Eagle, Kroger, Wal-Mart, Target and Costco.

In addition to boasting the latest safety

and traceability technologies, Sanson was way ahead of the curve with respect to organics, a program launched two decades ago. Today, Sanson is one of the largest buyers and sellers of organic produce east of Chicago.

Premier ProduceOne's Anselmo and one of his four partners, Anthony Rossi, took a slightly different tack to produce prosperity. Around the same time Cleveland was being invaded by national grocery chains and broadliners such as Sysco and US Foods, a chef-driven restaurant renaissance was beginning to take root.

Notable names like Michael Symon, Karen Small, Paul Minnillo and Doug Katz were opening progressive farm-to-table bistros around town, and they began demanding products not found at the terminal.

In 1998, Anselmo and Rossi launched Premier ProduceOne, a niche produce delivery service that has since grown into a multi-million-dollar foodservice supplier.

"We deliver to every hotel, college, country club, restaurant and sports venue in town, all the way down to small caterers and customers that sell packaged sandwiches," says Anselmo, adding that his company is a proud member of Pro*Act. Thanks to facilities in Cleveland,

Columbus and Dayton, Premier ProduceOne's trucks reach every county in the state.

Compared to a typical grocer's 100 to 300 produce SKUs, or individual items, Premier's catalog logs around 1,200, precisely the kind of variety that chefs adore. In place of his early-morning food terminal visits, Anselmo now deals directly with farms in California, Florida, New York and everywhere in between.

Entire refrigerated trucks filled with produce from multiple farms travel non-stop to Cleveland, while other products are shipped via air to Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

Anselmo likes to joke that he's a mortician dealing with products that have been dead since the farmer plucked them days earlier and many miles away from the ground, bush or tree.

"We're up against the clock," he says. "The whole finesse of a good produce house is being able to mix quick turnover with longevity and storage.

"We have one guy who does nothing else but manage avocados. It's an art form, and our customers pay us to do it. I always tell my customers, 'Save your money on toilet paper or dish soap, not your produce. We're the flavor. Without us your meat just tastes like meat.'" **pb**

Fireworks

AT FIRE FOOD & DRINK, PRODUCE ISN'T PUSHED TO THE PERIMETER OF THE PLATE.

By Doug Trattner

For years Cleveland's independent restaurant scene managed to make some noise in a very crowded national market. It helps to have celebrity chefs such as Michael Symon singing the praises of his hometown, but the truth is, there are dozens more like him. In urban neighborhoods like Ohio City, Tremont and Detroit Shoreway, gutsy chefs have been leading the charge of redevelopment for decades by opening progressive bistros that persuade others to follow along the same path.

Cleveland, you might have heard, is a meat-and-potatoes town. Folks on the "North Coast" love their mile-high corned beef sandwiches, sausage-based Polish Boys, and sauce-slathered spare ribs. But even in this Midwestern metropolis, menus have been going on a diet. That isn't at all surprising to chef Douglas Katz, whose 15-year-old Fire Food & Drink is an icon of Cleveland's fine-dining scene.

"For the longest time, protein has been the main story, but there really isn't that much new in the world of protein left to experience," explains the Culinary Institute of America grad. "Whereas with produce, the possibilities seem endless. Even when you're preparing a protein dish, you're always thinking about what the sides will be."

Katz says the uptick in produce-based recipes at his East Side bistro, as well as others across town, isn't driven solely by vegans and vegetarians, two rising demographics in Northeast Ohio, but by all of his customers.

"Meat-eaters are looking for healthier options too, with less protein on a plate and more veggies," he says.

Inspiration for new ideas is everywhere, Katz notes, in cookbooks, on television, and during culinary travel expeditions, which he leads on a regular basis. But given that his hometown has welcomed wave after wave of immigrant population, Katz needn't even leave his block to find veggie stimulation.



Heirloom Tomato Salad



Spinach Chickpea Fritters



FIRE FOOD & DRINK
13220 Shaker Square
Cleveland, OH 44120
Tel: 216.921.3473
firefoodanddrink.com
Tues. – Thur.
5 p.m. – 10 p.m.
Fri. – Sat.
5 p.m. – 11 p.m.
Sat. – Sun.
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
5 p.m. – 10 p.m.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FIRE FOOD & DRINK

"As we become more of a melting pot, our ethnic diversity introduces those cultures that historically have focused on vegetables for economic or even religious reasons," he says. "Cuisines like Indian, Moroccan, and Middle Eastern that are becoming more popular with diners traditionally don't have a lot of meats."

A quick glance at Katz' summer menu highlights its global diversity. An appetizer of crispy chickpea fritters is topped with wood-grilled snow peas, pickled radishes, micro basil and Middle Eastern Amba sauce, a puree of pickled mangos. A vegan main dish features lentil croquettes with roasted beets, toasted almonds, sumac and aromatic Za'atar spice blend.

Katz is a leader in the local farm-to-table movement, a measure supported and sustained by the 20-year-old North Union Farmers Market system. In season, Katz makes every effort to support the many small family farms in and around the fertile Cuyahoga Valley. In doing so, he adjusts his menu in accordance with the seasons.

"It's always so exciting to see the first ramps of spring, the first sweet corn of summer," he says.

But the chef also supplements those market

purchases with items from specialty stores and local foodservice suppliers such as Premier ProduceOne and Huron, OH-based Chef's Garden.

"We're so lucky to have the Chef's Garden here, which has introduced a lot of unique fruits and veggies and has had huge impact," Katz says of the specialty grower that sells to gourmet chefs across the globe. "He [Farmer Lee Jones] was the first to offer Squash blossoms to chefs."

For Katz, the joy of cooking lies not only with pleasing his clientele, which he does at an impossibly high level, but with keeping things fresh and exciting in the kitchen. While beef, pork and chicken are not leaving his menu any time soon, it's the veggies that continue to pique his curiosity.

"Lately I've been exploring a lot of unique eggplants — white, purple and baby varieties," he reports. "It's a great option for a meat-less protein." In one preparation, the chef peels and slices eggplant before slowly poaching it in olive oil. He then breads and pan-fries the slices until they resemble a schnitzel. "It has amazing texture, and it goes so well with grains and other veggies."

pb

Miles Farmers Market

A POPULAR GOURMET GROCERY SPROUTS FROM ROADSIDE FARM STAND.

By Doug Trattner

Visit Miles Farmers Market and it's apparent that this is a house that produce built. For starters, there's the store name, a designation that conjures images of summer-ripe fruit at the peak of freshness. Step inside, and the generously proportioned fresh foods section is a veritable feast for the senses, with bin upon bin of fruits and vegetables bursting with color, variety, and height-of-season vitality. Instead of being tucked away in some neglected corner of the building, the produce department commands a full two-thirds of the retail space, despite accounting for only 35 percent of the independent grocer's sales.

When Giant Eagle, Wal-Mart and Heinen's, a popular independent local grocery chain, gobble up more than half the produce dollars in the region, smaller retailers need to find a way to stand out. For Miles Farmers Market, a gourmet grocery located in a suburb just outside of Cleveland, produce has always been the secret weapon.

"Produce is our bread and butter," explains owner Frank Cangemi, who started Miles Farmers Market in 1971.

Back then, the market was precisely that: a seasonal, open-air market on the outskirts of town selling fresh fruits and vegetables. But in the 1970s, when more urban residents became suburban residents, Miles was more than happy to make new customers of them all.

The store has matured considerably since those early days, subsequently adding both physical square footage as well as new departments. Miles now boasts top-quality meat and seafood counters, and the bustling catering business has taken on a life of its own. Over the years, the complex has ballooned in size from 2,000 to 20,000 square feet, but throughout all the expansions, the produce department never has gotten short shrift.

"Our produce section is definitely bigger than any grocery store in the region," says store manager Joe DeGaetano. "Produce is who we are and how we started."

Like pretty much every other produce



MILES FARMERS MARKET
28560 Miles Rd,
Solon, OH 44139
Tel: 440.248.5222
milesfarmersmarket.com
Monday - Friday
9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Saturday - Sunday
9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

peddler in town old enough to remember "the good old days," owner Cangemi used to begin every day at the Northern Ohio Food Terminal, where he competed with countless independent retailers for the day's best deals. But times change, and these days those terminal market purchases are being supplemented by more deliveries, direct shipments and, in season, local auctions buys. While every effort is made to support both the wholesalers at the central terminal and area growers, that has never been the main objective.

"Our consumers here want the best, and they're willing to pay for it," says DeGaetano of his affluent suburban shoppers. "We don't sacrifice quality for price. If you ask our customers why they shop here, they'll tell you it's the produce."

You likely can add shopping experience to those motivations as well. Not unlike a bona fide farmers market in a bucolic setting, Miles displays its fruits and veggies in big wooden orchard bins and baskets at various heights, inclines and angles. Wide aisles and smooth concrete floors make progress a breeze. The entire department feels natural, organic and welcoming.

"Obviously, we're going after that open-air, farmers-market look, because that's how we started," explains DeGaetano. "Throughout all the remodels we've done over the years, it was

important to keep the integrity of that look and never change it."

In summer, shoppers have the pick of the litter when it comes to stone fruits such as cherries, peaches, plums, nectarines and apricots, as well as every berry and melon under the sun. A rainbow of ripe tomatoes is joined by corn, broccoli, squashes, cauliflower, cabbage, apples and asparagus.

"Exotic" items such as tamarind pods, lychee berries, dragon fruit, star fruit and rambutan sit feet from conventional items like avocados, celery, cucumbers, bell peppers, chili peppers, citrus and pineapples. All of it, down to the last dewy grape, looks impeccable and unblemished.

As much as customers can bank on finding the best quality produce at Miles, they also can count on change, a constant since the early 1970s. Yet again, the East Side institution that has been nourishing the local community is growing right along with them.

"As we accumulate some money, it all goes right back in the business," says Cangemi. This time it's a major kitchen expansion, an improvement geared both to staff and shoppers. "We built it to handle only so much business, but because we were doing more than we ever anticipated, it's getting harder."

Sounds like what you would call a good problem to have.

pb

Des Moines Bounces Back

IOWA'S CAPITAL CITY AND ITS THRIVING PRODUCE INDUSTRY BENEFIT FROM A GROWING POPULATION SEEKING TO EAT HEALTHIER.

By Lisa White

Those who haven't been to Des Moines — which is Iowa's most populated city, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau — are missing the resurgence of a gem in the Midwest.

Its population of 569,633, which experienced growth in four out of five counties between 2002 and 2015, gives it an urban feel with a small town atmosphere.

Although the city is known for insurance, government, manufacturing, trade, and health care services in terms of its businesses, the major agricultural crop here is corn.

“Des Moines does not have a terminal market, which is common in the larger cities on the coasts,” says Brendan Comito, chief operations officer at Capital City Fruit. “All of the produce companies in the Des Moines area operate out of their own, stand-alone facilities.”

Produce is a key component in this city, as is evident by its popular Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market. Opened in 1976, the market spans nine city blocks in Des Moines' downtown and includes approximately 300 vendors that rotate in and out throughout the season, according to Kelly Foss, director of the farmer's market.

Open Saturdays from the beginning of May until the end of October, Foss says the market is attended by 25,000 visitors each week. Fifty-eight of the state's 59 counties are represented here. There also is a small percentage of resellers who are marketing locally grown fruits and vegetables, as well as fruit and vegetables that are not grown in the state.

“Any Saturday will find more than 200 farmers, cheesemakers, flower growers, vineyards and other food producers from around the state displaying their goods at the market,”



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GREATER DES MOINES PARTNERSHIP

says Foss. It's not just consumers that are buying these fruits and vegetables. “We have area chefs who shop at the market, connect with specific vendors and come early to fill wagons and carts with produce for their restaurants.”

“Our residents value a good farm-to-table experience, like most people today, who like to know where their food is coming from,” says Foss. “People value farm fresh food, and more questions are being asked about origin and growing areas.”

The city has benefitted from its rising status in the financial world, as well. The economy of Des Moines is consistently rated in the Top 5 in the U.S. and has been No. 1 on many rankings out of every U.S. city. This is due to a highly educated population with disposable income.

“This demographic wants the freshest produce possible and is open to trying new things thanks to a thriving independent restaurant scene with creative chefs pushing

the boundaries,” says Comito. “It is no longer a meat and potatoes community.”

Another major change in the past 30 years has been the arrival of immigrants and refugees from other countries.

“This diversity is reflected in the food choices, as immigrants seek fresh fruits and vegetables they were accustomed to eating in their hometowns overseas,” says Comito. “Many started their own restaurants and others are natural entrepreneurs, as they are not afraid of risk. Some of those entrepreneurs are now customers of ours, buying a diverse array of fresh produce.”

A WHOLESALE PERSPECTIVE

Produce wholesalers have a long history of doing business in Des Moines, and in more recent years, like in the rest of the country, they benefitted from consumers' increasing interest in eating fresh fruits and vegetables.



CAPITAL CITY FRUIT

Capital City Fruit is a third-generation family business based in the Des Moines suburb of Norwalk. The company was founded in 1949 by Joseph T. Comito and began as a fruit market. It began produce brokerage operations in the 1960s and started repacking and distributing in the late 1970s, when Joseph T.'s son, Joseph M., took over the business. In the mid-2000s, Brendan, Kieran and Christian Comito assumed ownership of Capital City.

Currently, the company employs 150 team members and operates out of an 83,000-square-foot facility constructed in 2012. The company focuses on supply chain management for its retail and foodservice customers and delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois.

"The economy in Des Moines is consistently rated by national publications among the very best in the entire United States," says Comito. "Since we don't have mountains and oceans, the biking and running communities are very active, and those recreational events attract thousands of participants, who are fueled by fresh produce."

One of the biggest challenges businesses are experiencing is that the thriving city is a victim of its own success.

"Because the economy is so strong, businesses are struggling to find the employees they need to grow," says Comito. "Every business owner I speak to says their No. 1 issue is finding qualified employees."

This factor has driven up labor costs and put companies like Capital Fruit at a competitive disadvantage. To compensate, the wholesaler has had to focus on execution.

Another challenge is population. The Des Moines area is only 500,000, and the state of Iowa has only 3 million people.

"As a result, we have to be much more on

"Since we don't have mountains and oceans, the biking and running communities are very active, and those recreational events attract thousands of participants, who are fueled by fresh produce."

— Brendan Comito, Capital City Fruit

our game than produce companies located in highly populated areas," says Comito. "In some ways, that makes us more innovative and better at serving the customer than produce companies in bigger cities that can rely on huge populations for their sales and are not challenged on a consistent basis."

Capital City Fruit has been working with local farmers for decades, but has benefited the most in the past five to 10 years. This includes qualifying growers, planning their planting schedules to meet volumes and handling the logistics of getting product from the farms to customers.

"The demand for locally grown produce is growing by double digits each year, and we work with more than 30 growers in our seven-state delivery area to meet that demand," says Comito. "The local produce starts in May, but really does not hit heavy volume until mid-June and it continues right up until the first hard freeze."

LOFFREDO FRESH PRODUCE

Another thriving wholesaler in the city is Loffredo Fresh Produce, which built a new fresh-cut facility, Produce Innovations, 4 miles

from its main warehouse in November 2014.

"This [venture] impacted us greatly, as we've been able to stretch out and not only do our own local business, but open our doors to co-packers and expand our reach into c-stores like Kwik Trip and Casey's General Stores," says Gene Loffredo, president and chief executive of Loffredo Fresh Produce. "Our business has grown in Des Moines as the city is growing and picking up population."

The city's accolades haven't hurt, with West Des Moines named the fifth most desirable place to retire in a recent report by Bankrate.com. Not only is the cost of living affordable, but the city has a concentrated number of insurance companies, medical facilities and banks to support retirees.

But not many have the history of Loffredo Fresh Produce in the city, which has been in business for 125 years.

"Being located in the middle of the country, we do business within 500 miles of our warehouses," says Loffredo. "Our business continues to grow, and we're working harder, particularly in the Madison, WI, and Kansas City markets, with business up about 5 percent this year."

Its offshoot, Produce Innovations, also is growing. The firm just hired more than 100 employees, and at press time, was expecting a strong summer business.

Adam Babcock, director of operations for Produce Innovations says being centrally located with a demographic of largely young, urban professionals and people looking to eat healthier has kept business booming.

"Our biggest challenges have been procuring fruits and vegetables from California, Texas and Mexico, since it's quite a ride up here," he says. "Although we're centrally located, there are logistical challenges getting produce here that is reasonably priced and in good shape."

The company's selling region covers the majority of the Midwest states, from Madison,



WI, to St. Louis, MO, to Dallas, TX, to western Kansas and Lincoln, NE.

CHANDLER METELMAN, INC.

Repacker/processor Chandler Metelman, Inc., which also has operated Summertime Potato since the early 1970s, is seeing more interest in local or Midwestern produce, especially with potatoes in the foodservice industry.

“Restaurants in the Northeast are buying potatoes from the middle of the country rather than Idaho to keep it more local,” says Ron Peterson, Chandler Metelman’s president.

What many are not aware of is that potatoes

are the second most popular produce item grown in Iowa.

Chandler Metelman benefits from doing business with two major retail chains that are located within 45 minutes of its facility, which covers about a dozen states.

“The biggest disadvantage we face is that we’re not yet a produce mega-house like the East or West Coast, where there’s a lot of produce being grown,” says Peterson.

What Iowa has going for it is the potential for more greenhouses, which many predict will be the next aspect of growth for the region’s produce supply.

In the meantime, Chandler Metelman continues ramping up its marketing and relationships, building its onion business and looking into sweet potatoes for future growth.

“One of the values we bring to customers is we pack to order, so we don’t pack anything until we have the order,” says Peterson. “It’s nothing for us to get an order in on Tuesday afternoon for Wednesday, and we grade everything twice.”

DES MOINES TRUCK BROKERS

Like other businesses in the city, Des Moines Truck Brokers is experiencing growth. The 47-year-old company is in the hiring process to accommodate this growth spurt.

The traditional truck broker was founded by James DeMatteis Sr., to handle Capital City Fruit’s shipping needs and has operated within the same building as the wholesaler, even as its business and client base have expanded.

“We’ve taken our services to other places, and now Capital City is a fraction of our business,” says James DeMatteis Jr., Des Moines Truck Brokers’ president and chief executive. “Although produce is still king with us, we hang our hat on perishable goods and moving refrigerated products.”

The company has benefited from Iowa’s central location and major corridors of I80 and I35, which stretch from Texas through Minnesota. “With these two thoroughfares, we can touch a lot of major markets both in shipping and on the user side,” says DeMatteis. “Yet, Des Moines is a small enough market that we know all the major players and tend to work well together to improve the industry.”

As a produce transporter, Des Moines Truck Brokers’ biggest challenge is educating the buyers/shippers of these products about the newest regulations that impact business. Because the motor-carrier industry is heavily burdened with regulations in safety, it led to changes that impact timing. **pb**

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A Foodservice City



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CENTRO RESTAURANT

Iowa's restaurant industry continues to outpace predictions on both employment and revenue growth. Although both the National and Iowa Restaurant Associations projected Iowa's foodservice industry would add 1,230 jobs in 2015, the state quadrupled that projection, posting a net increase of 5,200 industry positions last year.

Iowa restaurant revenues also exceeded expectations last year, according to the Iowa Restaurant Association. Entering 2015, revenues had been projected to land just over \$3.6 billion, however Iowa's restaurant industry posted more than \$4 billion in sales in 2015. This year's restaurant sales are expected to exceed \$4.2 billion.

The hundreds of local Des Moines eateries run the gamut from upscale fine dining to casual cafes.

"There have been many new restaurants opening up in the city, with a little bit of everything," says Vince Barkhoff, produce category marketing manager at Martin Brothers,

a foodservice and supplies distributor. "We're seeing a strong interest in kale and any type of specialty tomato."

In April of 2015, the Des Moines City Council approved a pilot program for food trucks in the city. It was a six-month pilot program and required vendors to license trucks in order to operate. Four specific areas were designated where the trucks could park and sell food. The city council decided to expand the pilot program last March, which allows the trucks to operate at six parks within Des Moines, including Greenwood, Ashworth, Union, Grandview, Ewing and MacRae Parks.

"As far as foodservice, we continue to see development, and West Des Moines in particular is going into a growth explosion with new restaurants opening up every day," says Gene Loffredo, president/chief executive of Loffredo Fresh Produce. "There also is a strong national presence with restaurant chains."

Like the growing number of restaurants across the country, Des Moines foodservice

operators are increasingly focused on the use of local produce. As a result, many are incorporating seasonal dishes to take advantage of the availability of fruits and vegetables from the region.

"On the foodservice side, the upper scale restaurants with high-end chefs tend to promote local produce items," says Peterson at Chandler Metelman.

According to the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau, there is a number of city staples in its dining scene. These include Flying Mango's 24-hour smoked beef brisket; Machine Shed's giant cinnamon rolls; 801 Chophouse's USDA prime steaks; Fong's Pizza's Crab Rangoon pie; and Tursi's Latin King's Chicken Spiedini, with chicken breast skewered and marinated, then rolled in Italian breadcrumbs and charbroiled.

"Many Des Moines chefs have specialty produce items, such as jicama sticks," says Adam Babcock, director of operations for fresh-cut processor Produce Innovations. **pb**

Centro Restaurant



CENTRO
 1007 Locust Street
 Des Moines, IA 50309
 515.248.1780
 centrodesmoines.com
HOURS:
 Monday – Thursday: 11 a.m. – 10 p.m.
 Friday – Saturday: 11 a.m. – 11 p.m.
 Sunday: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CENTRO RESTAURANT

AN ITALIAN/AMERICAN
 THEME WITH TIES TO
 THE OLD WORLD CULTURE.

By Lisa White

Known as having the only coal-fired oven in the state, Centro Restaurant opened in 2002 and benefitted from the culinary creations of Derek Eidson, executive chef for the past five years.

“We were one of the bigger, more upscale restaurants in downtown Des Moines, before being revitalized into a more casual Italian/American theme with ties to Old World

Italian,” says Eidson. “We get our influence by the owner, George Formaro, who is an Italian immigrant.”

Eidson is a big proponent in buying local produce, which has a big presence on Centro’s menu. “I feel it’s our duty to buy local from farmers to support the community and give guests the best produce we can,” he says.

Much of the fruits and vegetables used in Centro’s dishes come from the downtown

farmer’s market. Many of these items are seasonal, including asparagus, arugula, Italian broccoli, sweet corn in summer and lettuce from the region. Dishes also have increasingly used more root vegetables, such as beats, as well as berries.

“I won’t put produce on the menu that’s not available locally,” says Eidson. “When it’s available, we use as much as possible, and when it’s done, it’s done.”

pb

Retail Climate



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GATEWAY MARKET

There are approximately 550 full-service conventional grocery stores in Iowa, according to the Iowa Department of Public Health. This equals one grocery store for every 5,636 Iowans. In the Des Moines metro area, which includes the counties of Polk, Warren, Madison, Dallas and Guthrie, there are a total of 98 supermarkets.

Years ago, the major players in the retail arena included Hy-Vee, Fareway, Wal-Mart, Target and Price Chopper, formerly Dahl's Foods, according to the local newspaper, *The Des Moines Register*.

This has recently changed, with a number of national upscale supermarkets entering the region. In 2015, *The Fresh Market* opened its doors in West Des Moines for a brief period, and this year *Fresh Thyme Farmers Market* also opened in West Des Moines.

Large independent, Dahl's, went bankrupt in 2015, allowing AWG to enter the Des

Moines market.

"Des Moines is dominated by large, regional retailers, such as Hy-Vee and Fareway, and national retailers, such as Wal-Mart, Costco and Whole Foods," says Brendan Comito, chief operations officer at Capital City Fruit. "There is only a handful of very small independent retailers."

This has been challenging for a number of produce brokers, including Chandler Metelman, Inc., which did a big business with Hy-Vee until March of 2015.

"Now, Hy-Vee has taken the business we used to do in-house," says Ron Peterson, Chandler Metelman's president. "This impacted many people, since our company doesn't do nearly what we did years ago."

The independent market climate may be shifting. *The Des Moines Register* revealed that Natural Grocers, a Denver-based company, plans to build a store in Clive, a Des Moines suburb. These newcomers join

upscale retailers Whole Foods, which opened an outlet in West Des Moines in 2012, and Trader Joe's, which entered the city in 2010. There also are a few ethnic markets in the area, mainly Asian and Hispanic, serving the city's increasingly diverse population.

To compete with these gourmet outlets, Hy-Vee reportedly expanded its Health-Market line, which includes natural, organic and gluten-free products.

Much of the retail growth for the area's produce business has been in the convenience store channel. For example, distributor, Loffredo Fresh Produce, does a strong business with Kwik Trip and Casey's General Store.

"On the retail side, most of our growth has been in convenience stores and quick marts, like Kum & Go," says Adam Babcock, director of operations for fresh-cut processor, Produce Innovations, which is a division of Loffredo. "More Iowans are eating smartly at lunch and stopping into these stores." **pb**

Brick Street Market



EXPANDING THE RETAIL-FOODSERVICE HYBRID CONCEPT IN PRODUCE.

By Lisa White

Brick Street Market is a single location supermarket that also includes a restaurant. The approximately 20,000-square-foot business opened just outside the city in Altoona back in April 2014.

“We operate a café or meeting place for people to have coffee or ice cream, but we also have a full menu,” says Reenie Hogan, general manager. The high-volume café seats about 60.

The Iowa Pork Producers Association rated the restaurant’s tenderloin sandwich the second best in the state in 2014.

About three quarters of the operation is devoted to the supermarket, with produce comprising 30 percent of its retail space. Unlike Gateway Market, Brick Street has traditional



BRICK STREET MARKET
 114 Brick Street SE
 Bondurant, IA 50035
 515.967.2220
 thebrickstreetmarket.com
 Monday - Thursday:
 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.
 Friday - Saturday:
 6 a.m. - 10 p.m.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRICK STREET MARKET

produce displays.

“Our main focus is salads, which are a big hit, and we have a strong to-go business with our fruit cups,” says Hogan. “What’s nice about having a restaurant in-house is that it’s easy to reuse things, like selling produce in the salad bar to keep items turning and make it as fresh as possible.”

The salad bar, located to the left of both the entrance and produce department, is definitely a focus of this market. It is 8 feet long and includes two soups of the day, three types of lettuce and 20 to 30 toppings.

Produce also is used as an ingredient in the café for a variety of dishes, such as lettuce and tomatoes on burgers and fruit on pizza.

The operation also includes a full-service

bakery and local growers selling produce in the parking lot during the warmer months.

“When we first opened, we tried to have a huge variety in the produce department with ethnic items, but these products didn’t sell,” says Hogan. “Our customers are not looking for specialty items, but if they ask for something we don’t carry, we’ll try to bring it in.”

During the holidays, the store has a decent fruit basket business. It also runs a floral shop in a separate, but attached, building that is leased by another owner.

With the wait continuing to grow at its restaurant, Brick Street may expand its foodservice operations in the future. “This may also include the produce department,” says Hogan.

pb

Organic Supply Looks Downright Conventional



The once-pioneering sector has segmented into corporate and local.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Forty years ago, organic produce was grown largely by a handful of small farmers scattered throughout the Monterey Bay, Oregon and New England. Distribution of their fruits and vegetables was hit-and-miss, as these pioneers had no established supply chain to rely on and, generally intent on getting back to nature, little inclination to develop their own business skills.

“More and more growers, particularly in California, were farming organically, and supplies were ready to meet the demands of an ever-growing population ready to explore a diet that featured organic foods,” recalls Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing at Albert’s Organics, Asheville, NC. “Natural food stores were popping up out west, as well as in college towns and in larger metropolitan areas. And yet, there was still a slight hurdle that needed to be overcome. If the growers were responsible for delivering their harvest to the

stores as well as growing the food, as it was back then, this would cut back considerably on their production time.”

Albert’s Organics began as a distributor in the early 1980s and has grown with the movement into a major enterprise shipping more than 300 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables from seven distribution centers around the country.

As the acreage, consumer demand and variety of organic fruits and vegetables have exploded over the years, so too has a distribution system that now brings produce to mainstream supermarkets in every corner of the country.

While larger commercial operations have developed mature parallel supply lines serving corporate retailers, the small farmers serving local customers who started organics still thrive through natural food stores and farmers markets.

THE ORGANIC DIFFERENCES

Barely more than 40 years after California Certified Organic Farmers first formed to verify whose fruits and vegetables were truly organic, those pioneer farmers have multiplied beyond all expectations and have even been joined by fledgling divisions of the largest produce operations in the country.

Nationwide the organic sector has gained a major share of all fruits and vegetables, including in the largest mainstream markets.

“Most retailers carry less organic than conventional – overall, about 13 percent of produce sales nationwide are organic, according to the Organic Trade Association’s 2016 Organic Industry Survey,” says Samantha Cabaluna, managing director of brand communications for Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA. “Overall in organic food — all categories, not just produce — the largest chunk, about 35 percent, is sold in mainstream retail grocery, with club and warehouse stores being the fastest growing channel.”

Drew and Myra Goodman started Earthbound Farm on a two-and-half acre piece of ground in the Carmel Valley in 1984, and built their company into a nearly 50,000-acre operation that was the pioneer in taking organic produce into conventional supermarkets.

“At this point, there are more similarities than differences between organic and conventional distribution,” says Cabaluna.

The increased demand for organic began with staples like salad mixes, berries and bananas, but is steadily reaching beyond to also include other mainstream produce items.

“There’s an ever-growing demand for organic in general,” says Bob Borda, vice pres-

ident of organic sales at Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. “Iceberg lettuce and potatoes are two of the items we’re seeing more demand for organic.”

Grimmway grows and ships dozens of organic vegetable and melon crops under the Cal-Organic brand.

Supply of organic produce, and the distribution chain that brings it to retailers, has grown to become almost indistinguishable from the conventional, but there are still questions unique to the organic that have no right answers.

The first question is whether to have a special staff source the organic fruits and vegetables, or simply make that one of the tasks assigned to category managers who also source conventional produce.

“There are advantages in the form of expertise and focus with a specialization approach,” says Greg Corsaro, president of Indianapolis Fruit Company, Inc., Indianapolis. “There are also advantages to have buyers purchase both organic and conventional produce without having parallel staffs. Oftentimes, both the organic and conventional items of the same product or commodity are purchased from the same grower/shipper, the loading of both conventional and organic items is in the same area, or knowledge of a particular item or commodity is such that the person with that knowledge should purchase both.”

Indianapolis Fruit supplies organic and conventional produce to retailers in 14 Midwestern states.

Corsaro believes it wise to have at least some degree of specialization in sourcing the organic produce.

“We feel the best model is for a distribution center, either an independent wholesaler or chain-owned distribution center, to purchase all of the organic items needed by retailers and distribute them to the stores in the amounts and at the times desired.”

— Greg Corsaro, Indianapolis Fruit Company

“We feel the best model is for a distribution center, either an independent wholesaler or chain-owned distribution center, to purchase all of the organic items needed by retailers and distribute them to the stores in the amounts and at the times desired,” he says. “Produce is delivered direct to individual stores in small amounts through regional wholesalers and through larger chains’ own distribution systems and distribution centers.”

Once the produce has reached the distribution center, there are still special requirements to ensure that the organic is properly inventoried and handled.

“There are some different warehousing requirements for the organic certification,” says Corsaro. “The biggest challenge is the slot

segregation and the separation of product at delivery to ensure organic produce is received, picked, loaded, and delivered accurately.”

After the organic produce reaches the store, there are yet more decisions on whether to display it next to the conventional counterpart, in a special organic section, or as the only option.

“At store level, all stores determine whether to use an integration, a segregation, or a combination approach to the merchandising of their produce,” says Corsaro.

In the case of some crops like the spring mix, clipped spinach, and other short-season salad products that are mechanically harvested and shipped bagged or in hard plastic containers, organic is so strong there is frequently no reason to carry a conventional alternative.

“If you’re a salad producer, why bother to have both conventional and organic,” asks Andy Martin, president of A&A Organic Farms, Watsonville, CA. “The whole trick is everything is mechanical.”

A&A Organic Farms ships fruits and vegetables for a network of small to medium growers. Its salad products have such economies of scale in everything from harvesting to trucking that they can be sold at extremely small premiums and are frequently only offered as organic.

“With the increase in the demand for organic produce, the volumes are not always small,” says Corsaro. “That being said, transportation costs need to be spread over as many packages as possible to maximize the economic benefits. Therefore, the smaller the order or load size, the more expensive it is to distribute.”

The distribution of these high volume



“The demand for organic is definitely increasing; the demand is huge. The number of growers who are devoting significant acreage to organics, particularly large scale growers, is also increasing.”

— Karen Salinger, Veritable Vegetable

organic salad products to the largest retailers has reached a level of efficiency unthinkable among the pioneers of the 1970s.

“Occasionally a retailer or two could actually pick the product up at the farm, but that option was available only to a very limited few,” recalls Albert’s Weinstein. “What was needed was an entity that would step in and cover the transportation and delivery needs that would connect the growers with the retailers and provide communities with their organic food supplies.”

RELIABILITY OF SUPPLY

In the early days, both the volume and quality of available organic produce were unpredictable but, driven by increased consumer demand that seems to have no end, organic farming has reached the point that even the largest retailers can generally count on a regular supply.

“The demand for organic is definitely increasing; the demand is huge,” says Karen Salinger, sales director and co-owner of Veritable Vegetable, San Francisco, CA. “The number of growers who are devoting significant acreage to organics, particularly large scale growers, is also increasing.”

Veritable Vegetable began in the 1970s as part of the People’s Food System in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, and has grown to become a leading distributor of organic fruits and vegetables throughout Northern California with a continuing strong community orientation.

“The supply has been strong, and we’re not seeing unusual supply gaps,” says Salinger. “We only see the gaps caused by the weather. Supply has been very strong for a long time.”

Not only is the supply reliable, but the variety available in organic produce is also pretty much indistinguishable from conven-

tional.

“The varieties are the same as for conventional,” says Martin of A&A Organic Farms. “After eating rutabagas in the winter, customers are ready for strawberries or melons. It’s the same as what the conventional growers are doing. Organic in general is increasing in demand and popularity.”

The strong base in local natural food stores and farmers markets remains an important retail outlet for organic produce.

“When we first opened our doors, our

customers were mom-and-pop natural foods stores, co-ops and buying clubs,” Weinstein recalls. “And even to this day, these groups still represent the majority of our business. We have delighted in watching them grow and flourish, and, of course, we have the opportunity to provide their customers with organic fresh produce.”

While organic produce remains basic fare at the local natural food stores and co-ops, the category has also earned a permanent place at the largest national produce retailers.

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"I sell to natural food stores, but I have seen conventional stores increase their organics," says Salinger. "When I walk into a Safeway or Costco, they have organic bananas and apples; that's for sure. They're all going to have organic grapes, peaches and nectarines."

THE LOGIC OF OVERPRODUCTION

Organic supply has even reached the point that, like conventional production, it can be subject to the extreme price fluctuations that come from oversupply.

"We're seeing big conventional companies get into organic who had never done it before," says A&A's Martin. "They're growing broccoli, celery, and celery hearts. From a farmgate perspective, if they get seven dollars for a case of conventional broccoli, they figure nine dollars is great for organic, even if the market has been \$16. I call them market-busters."

For old timers in the sector, like Martin, this has not always been a particularly salutary development.

"I used to grow organic spring mix and put it on the plane for New York at \$30 a box, and couldn't send enough," says Martin. "Now it's seven to nine dollars."

He wonders out loud if overproduction and declining prices will lead to a shakedown in the organic farming business.

"It's hard to predict the logic of overproduction," says Martin. "We're getting so many organic tomatoes out of Mexico and Canada, you wonder how long these guys can go at these prices. You wonder if the big guys are trying to drive the little guys out, and then raise the prices. The chains are loving it because they are seeing record low prices."

But the strong trend over the past decade toward locally grown produce, which is partic-

ularly strong among organic consumers, may provide breathing room for the relatively small producers.

"Perhaps one of the more significant changes is the focus on locally grown that has emerged over the past 10 years. Even as we have seven distribution centers around the country, we still maintain a strong focus on local and regional procurement," says Weinstein. "Albert's has a recruitment program for local organic growers, where we help them gain certification, etc., in order to help these growers become organic and find a home for their product."

We may be headed toward segmentation that leaves us with both a highly efficient, well-capitalized supply chain of organic produce headed toward national chain retailers, and a still vibrant collection of natural food stores, co-ops and farmers markets served by smaller local organic growers.

"Larger producers of organic produce distribute in the same ways as conventional producers: both are sold direct to retailers, who then distribute through their own warehouses, and also to wholesalers/distributors," says Earthbound's Cabaluna. "Smaller growers may work directly with individual stores locally."

As the largest organic producers have gone corporate in their sales, the small-scale operations that started the movement remain as viable as ever.

"Even as the industry has changed, the basic model of distribution remains the same . . . we work directly with growers and then provide our retail customers with product that they sell to their shoppers," says Weinstein. "In the end, distribution is all about connecting the growers with the consumers — it really is a farm-to-table event."

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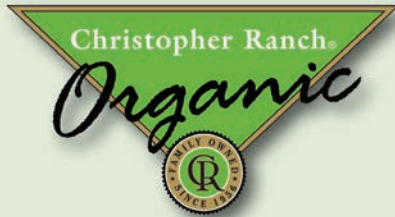
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Sourcing Local For Far-From-The-Farm Restaurants



PHOTO COURTESY OF BALDOR SPECIALTY FOODS

Growers and distributors team up to bring produce to the back-of-the-house.

BY JOHN LEHNDORFF

Where the asparagus originates is becoming as important as how the asparagus is grown to chefs and patrons at restaurants from coast to coast. “Local,” like “organic,” is no fad, but what “local” actually means depends on who you ask.

With consumer interest in transparency and sustainability driving the demand, distributors, growers and restaurants are developing innovative programs to make locally grown fruits and vegetables accessible to restaurants and a wide array of foodservice operations.

For chefs in big cities, it is like they have a farm down the street. For growers, the trend increased market access and changed the crops they traditionally grew.

New York City-based Baldor Specialty Foods created its Pledge Local initiative to make life easier in hectic restaurant kitchens.

“Chefs want to cook local, but we were asking too much of them as foodservice customers. Most don’t want to deal with choosing from 100 kinds of heirloom tomatoes and where they came from,” says Benjamin Walker, director of marketing for the food distributor. About 75 percent of Baldor’s business consists of foodservice clientele in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states.

While the local trend is growing, it has its limits because of supply and cost. “Our local orders are up 50 to 100 percent in the past four years, but there’s only so big it will get,” says Walker. “There’s no citrus or tropical and

winter is challenging. In the summer we are only getting to about 15 percent local produce, but this allows us to get a part of our supply from small farms,” says Baldor’s Walker.

‘LOCAL’ FOR A NATIONAL CHAIN

Putting the word “local” in front of every vegetable or fruit on a restaurant menu is easy. Sourcing local produce for a single café can be a problem on many levels including food safety. The logistical challenges only get multiplied for a multi-unit national dining chain.

“Our menu states ‘Fresh Ingredients; Locally Sourced,’ but it is a challenge with

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDWEST FOODS



The Veloccity local produce program for Chicago-based Midwest Foods was created when the distributor received a large supply order stipulating that 25 percent of the produce had to be sourced locally.



Ted's Montana Grill strives to include "fresh ingredients" and "locally sourced" options in all its 46 units nationally.

produce from a purchasing and execution standpoint to make that happen with 46 units nationally," says Jessica Smith, senior director of marketing at Georgia-based Ted's Montana Grill. The chain is famous for sourcing most of its bison from the ranches of owners Ted Turner and George McKerron Jr.

Collaboration with food distributors and farmers is helping make sourcing local produce much easier, says Jim Ebersold, purchasing manager for Ted's Montana Grill. "Pro*Act's Greener Fields Together program really helped us to identify local farmers who can supply various locations with produce that meets our specific needs. We deal with 16 different produce houses nationally through Pro*Act, but we basically have one-stop shopping. I get an advance calendar about what's going to be available in each market," he says. Marketing materials about the farms are conveyed to Ted's managers and servers to share with diners.

"The program allows us to adjust the produce we're featuring seasonally," says Ebersold. Ted's seasonal local vegetable side dish has varied from Southwestern corn to a tomato and Blue Cheese salad with balsamic vinaigrette.

"Local" is rising in the popularity polls. "The percentage of local produce Ted's uses has been growing steadily 2 to 3 percent a year. In 2015 local grew to 16 percent of the total,

and it should grow to 20 percent this year," asserts Ebersold.

Houston, TX-based FreshPoint is a fresh produce distributor and a subsidiary of Sysco. With its strong commitment to helping local markets grow, FreshPoint plays an active role in connecting farmers with its food-service customers in hospitals, retail, restaura-

rants, schools and universities. Customers are demanding more local and sustainably produced foods, requiring FreshPoint to work through its distribution network to bring farm-fresh produce to the plate in both commercial and non-commercial settings.

The distributor sees two local trends converging, waste reduction and root-to-flower. Its "unusual but usable" (UBU) fruits and vegetables program merges value with quality and food safety.

"UBU is a program that we started in January 2016 to raise awareness of food waste," says Britni Webster, director of business development and marketing at FreshPoint. "We sell items like scarred, misshapen produce that is going to be chopped up for salsa, or a mixed-size case of apples for our universities to put in baskets in the dining hall. The demand for perfectly shaped produce has changed because the consumer understands quality doesn't equal appearance."

HOW LOCAL IS 'LOCAL'?

The Greener Fields Together (GFT) initiative has been a win-win for growers and foodservice companies, says John Alpers, vice president of sales for Atlanta-based Royal Food Service.

"GFT makes certain these smaller farmers have the right agricultural practices in place before we make purchases for our customers. We work with the growers, so they don't have to foot the entire cost of certification," says Alpers.

"Each customer decides what local means to them. Our working definition of local is anything within a day's drive — 500 miles

TAKING THE PLEDGE

Baldor's Pledge Local initiative removes the "local" equation from the decision-making process. "Restaurants authorize Baldor buyers to automatically substitute local produce alternatives that are the same or no more than 10 percent more expensive," explains Benjamin Walker, director of marketing for the New York City-based food distributor. "Commit to buying local, so I can commit to buying from the farmers," he says, adding that Baldor now has 223 Pledge Local customers.

Upscale restaurants are not the only ones requesting local sourcing. "A lot of companies see it as part of their mission to support local growers and sustainability. Corporate cafeterias and higher education

foodservice lead in this area. Yale University, Amtrak or Yankee Stadium, everybody's trying to use local ingredients," he says.

Baldor's system works, because most of the company's deliveries are early in the morning. "Everybody wants it at 7 a.m. and it's in a concentrated delivery area. It leaves the truck empty by midday, so we send them to backhaul from the farms to the warehouse. Basically, it's farm-to-restaurant in about 24 hours," says Walker.

Restaurants use an online ordering tool to show them how far they are from the source. "We have almost 500 local farms supplying us from Maine to Jersey. Fifty farms offer a real time shop-by-farm feature," he says. **pb**



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The Chicken & Rhubarb Waffle entree with sweet tea brined grilled chicken, maple syrup, bacon jam and seasonal vegetables is a patron favorite at Twain's Brewpub & Billiards in Decatur, GA.

or eight hours, or that it's from a bordering state," says Alpers.

One fan of Royal's local program is chef Chris Hall, co-owner of three Georgia eateries: Common Quarter, Local Three and Muss & Turner. "It has really helped put the farmers in touch with the restaurants in a streamlined way. I have a consistent supply of local corn this year. Instead of one type of tomato, I choose from varieties like Cherokee Purple and Cherokee Rose," he says.

Over time, one farm's crop can become a local benchmark. "There are certain farms that are a brand. Pearson peaches is one of those where you want to put the name on the menu," says Hall.

FOOD SAFETY FOCUS

It's not hard to deliver "local" produce once you know what it is. "How do you define 'local'? Is it within 10 miles or 100 miles or within the state? It's up to the customer," contends Lloyd Ligier, vice president for business development of Monterey, CA-based Pro*Act, which has grown to 38 member distributors.

"We help farmers get certified to supply our distributors. We offer farmers grants for infrastructure improvements, marketing, buying machinery, further education, to go organic or to build an effective website to help tell their story," says Kathleen Weaver, Pro*Act's supply chain sustainability manager. She works with farms to implement GFT.

"These are long-term relationships. Local family farms don't necessarily have the volume

"It's always cool to me when we go out to eat, and the server says that so-and-so farms grew the tomatoes, and I know it's one of ours."

— Marcus Agresta, Piazza Produce

to immediately supply distributors. We help them gradually build their capacity," says Weaver.

Marcus Agresta, marketing director of Indianapolis-based Piazza Produce, says he knows customers are using the marketing materials about the farms that arrive with his locally sourced produce.

"It's always cool to me when we go out to eat, and the server says that so-and-so farms grew the tomatoes, and I know it's one of ours," says Agresta.

Decatur, GA-based Twain's Brewpub & Billiards was one of the first restaurants to sign up for GFT.

"I don't have time to shop for vegetables. I tell them: 'If it's local, then send it to me.' That way I don't have to think about it," says Savannah Haseler, executive chef at the restaurant and at the newly-opened Comet Pub and Lanes in Atlanta

"GTF gives me the right produce I can use



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“We always believed in local, but we had to look at ways to increase the availability of local produce. The farms need to get a third-party audit for certification to supply us.”

— Mary Ann Fitzgerald, Midwest Foods

in this setting — a brewpub not fine dining. If you can buy local, and it’s only a little more expensive, it’s worth it for the quality,” she says.

Diverse and sometimes unexpected produce also arrives from the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) share that Twain’s has from a local farm. “One week we got a whole case of different radishes. We ended up making these great radish preserves,” says Haseler.

It’s hard to avoid locally grown vegetables at Peach & the Porkchop. The restaurant is near a farm that grows some crops for the restaurant.

“In summer I define ‘local’ as being grown within the zip code. When I talk to customers I can tell them exactly where everything on their plate comes from,” says Charles Staley, co-owner of the Roswell, GA-based restaurant. That focus on transparency includes a 23-item kid’s menu.

Year-round Staley sources through Atlanta-based Royal Food Service to ensure a dependable supply. “In the winter, it gets tougher, and we start to reach into Florida to source. Produce that is local and organic is very expensive. I may pay \$4 a pound for heirlooms, but I bet they are the best damn tomatoes you ever tasted. Our Caprese salad blows me away,” says Staley.

GEARING UP FOR DEMAND

The Veloccity local produce program for Chicago-based Midwest Foods was created when the distributor received a large new supply order stipulating that 25 percent of the produce had to be sourced locally.

“We always believed in local, but we had to look at ways to increase the availability of local produce. The farms need to get a third-party audit for certification to supply us,” explains Mary Ann Fitzgerald, director of the Veloccity program for Midwest Foods.

“One thing we did was talk to the farmers about planting less cabbage and growing

Tuscan kale, toybox peppers and other crops we know we can sell for a premium,” says Fitzgerald.

“We started with about 10 farms and bought \$1 million of local produce in 2010. We have 50 farms now and expect to purchase \$14.5 million this year,” she says.

Midwest Foods defines “local” as being grown within 150 miles of the customer’s location. “We have farms in Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois. If a customer is in

Wisconsin, then we source from a Wisconsin farm,” she says.

When eateries sign onto the program, they receive produce marked “Local Certified.” The box contains information about who grew the produce.

“We found it helps restaurants talk more about their local sourcing on social media. Some of the restaurants partner with the program and commit to buying ‘X’ amount of a crop from a particular farm,” she says.

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“I thought it was another fad. I honestly believe it’s here to stay now. Mileage matters when you’re talking about produce.”

— Zachary Unruh, StoneCreeks Hydroponics

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENER FIELDS TOGETHER WEBSITE



Pro*Act’s Greener Fields Together program helps identify local farmers who can supply various locations with produce that meets specific needs.

Midwest Foods’ local committee of chefs, buyers and growers meet quarterly to extend the reach of the farms including the IDP (Imperfectly Delicious Produce) program offering farms’ No. 2 items.

“We buy it for a discount and pass it along. We use a lot of it ourselves in our Edible Cuts processing facility,” says Fitzgerald.

Hartwell, GA-based StoneCreek Hydroponics grows Bibb lettuce, green leaf lettuce, watercress and frisee primarily for restaurants and foodservice. When owner Zachary Unruh wanted to expand his business four years ago, he approached Royal Food Service.

“True story: I just packed up a box of mixed lettuces and brought it to them,” he says. Unruh got his first order within a week.

“This year, we’ll do about \$1.2 million in sales. At this point, we are pushing out 17,000 pounds of greens a week,” says Unruh.

When the local trend began, Unruh was admittedly doubtful. “I thought it was another fad. I honestly believe it’s here to stay now. Mileage matters when you’re talking about produce,” he says.

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Healthy Snacking Trend Boosts Raisins' Popularity



Produce departments have increasing opportunities to promote raisins year-round.

BY BARRY SPARKS

Increased focus on health and wellness, as well as more frequent snacking, has boosted the popularity of raisins.

“Raisins are one of the healthiest foods in the store, and they are a great snack,” says Joe Tamble of Sun-Maid Growers, a Kingsburg, CA-based company. “Sun-Maid has always touted healthy eating. Our goal is to keep educating consumers about how healthy and nutritious raisins are.”

Tamble stresses that raisins have no additives or fillers. “There’s only one ingredient in a raisin, and we’re proud of it,” he says.

Raisins’ simplicity appeals to health-conscious consumers. Two-thirds of consumers say they want to be able to recognize all ingredients, and 40 percent said simplicity is key, according to a Datamonitor Consumer survey, “Snack Attack: Emerging Trends in Snacking and Snack Foods.”

Raisins present an incredible choice for those who are looking for healthier snacks and alternatives to candy.

THE SNACKING HABIT

Research shows up to 70 percent of raisins are used for snacking, according to Tamble.

Interestingly, more consumers view snacking as one way to improve healthy eating habits, according to the NPD Group, a market research company.

Consumers with the healthiest diets consume 36 percent more snack meals a year than the average consumer, according to Port Washington, NY-based NPD’s *Snacking in America* report, which examines long-term attitudes and behaviors about snacking, as well as snack selection drivers.

The report also found that those following a “most healthy” diet eat a wider variety of healthy snacks, such as fruit, dried fruit, yogurt and nutrition bars. According to London-based Mintel, a market intelligence agency, 91 percent of consumers consider dried fruit, such as raisins, as either very healthy or somewhat healthy.

“Raisins clearly benefit from the health and wellness trend,” says Chad Hartman of Truly

Good Foods, a dried fruit and nut company based in Charlotte, NC. “Raisins rate high as a healthy snack.”

Stephanie Harralson of Sunsweet Growers, located in Yuba City, CA, says: “Produce departments have a great opportunity to promote raisins. Parents are looking for snacking alternatives for themselves, as well as their children.”

Both the snacking trend and the health and wellness trend are expected to continue far into the future, which is good news for raisins.

The global snack market has grown for 10 consecutive years and is projected to grow 4.2 percent in 2016 and 2017, according to Datamonitor Consumer information. More consumers are paying attention to the USDA’s daily recommendation of five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables daily and the health benefits of raisins.

The health benefits of raisins include relief from constipation, hypertension, acidosis and anemia. Raisins also have been known to help in attempts to gain weight in a healthy way, as well as their positive impact on eye health, dental care and bone quality, according to various research from institutions such as Louisville Metabolic and Atherosclerotic



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PROMOTIONAL ACE

“Raisins are easy to promote,” says Tamble. “They have no added sugar and no cholesterol. They provide fiber, are high in potassium and low in sodium.”

Raisins also appeal to consumers, because they are portable, don't require refrigeration, and can be eaten anytime. Retailers appreciate that there is little or no shrink with raisins, and profit margins are comparable with other dried fruits and fresh fruits. Because consumers are universally familiar with raisins, retailers generally don't have to spend time or money educating them about the product. Raisins also come in a variety of serving sizes and kinds, have a multitude of uses and are easy to merchandise.

According to the California Raisin *Grape Objective Measurement Report* conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based National Agricultural Statistics Service, production estimates for the 2015-16 year for California-raisin type variety grapes are 2 million tons, which would reflect a 13 percent increase from the previous year.

Jane Asmar of National Raisin Company, located in Fowler, CA, says research has shown raisins sell better when they are placed in the produce department rather in the center of the store. “There are fewer items in the produce department to compete for the consumers' attention,” points out Asmar. “Customers like it when raisins are placed next to grapes, and when dried fruits are together.”

Tamble says: “Dried fruit sells up to 30 percent better if it's displayed in the produce department rather than the center of the store. Raisins complement fresh fruits and vegetables, so they lend themselves to the produce department.”

According to the Turkish-based dried fruit exporter, Ideal Limited, dark raisins, made from sun-dried Thompson seedless grapes, are the most popular in the United States. They constitute 95 percent of the California raisin crop. Other popular varieties include currants, which are made from small black Corinth grapes. Currants, about one-fourth the size of other raisins, are seedless and very dark in color. Golden raisins are also Thompson seedless grapes, but are oven-dried to avoid the darkening effect of sunlight. They also are treated with sulfur dioxide to preserve the light color.

Dark raisins are most popular for cooking, baking, salads and desserts. Currants are used



“Research has shown that raisins are an impulse buy item. That means stores have a great opportunity to promote them.”

— Jane Asmar, National Raisin Company

for baking hot-cross buns and cooking, while golden raisins are typically used in fruitcakes and confections.

Organic raisins are in high demand, but short supply, according to Tamble. “The organic segment continues to grow, and our challenge is to meet the needs of retailers,” he says. “The demand is there, but we can't keep up with it.”

Tamble says Sun-Maid is working with growers to increase acreage devoted to organic raisins, but it's not an overnight process. It takes three to four years to convert farms to organic processes, he says.

THE IMPULSE BUY

“Research has shown that raisins are an impulse buy item,” says Asmar of the National Raisin Company. “That means stores have a great opportunity to promote them. Displays are the key to increasing sales. Raisins will sell when they are displayed, regardless of the season.”

“When raisins are displayed, consumers see and they buy,” offers Tamble, who suggests pallet displays with eight, 12 or 20 cases of 20-ounce canisters of raisins. “The visual impact reminds healthy-conscious consumers about how wonderful raisins are.”

The highest sales of raisins occur in the third and fourth quarters, mainly from August through December, when the weather is cooler and there is typically a smaller selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, according to Hartman of Truly Good Foods. Family occasions, where

trail mix and party mix are served, tend to drive growth.

Back-to-school, Halloween and January are three ideal occasions to promote raisins. Six packs of 1-ounce raisins are popular during back-to-school time, according to Tamble. Sun-Maid also offers a bag of 10 small orange and black boxes of yogurt-covered raisins for Halloween. At Easter, the company offers a bag of yogurt-covered raisins in 10 small boxes of different colors.

“Retailers, as well as consumers, are looking for ‘better-for-you’ items,” points out Tamble. “Consumers want healthier alternatives to candy for Halloween and Easter. That's one of the reasons why our raisins and yogurt-covered raisins are so popular.”

As the health and wellness trend makes a bigger impact, retailers are more open to new products, according to Tamble.

To maximize sales of raisins, marketers suggest retailers promote them year-round, particularly since they are always in season.

“Retailers should be cashing in on raisins in the first and second quarters,” comments Asmar of the National Raisin Company. “Retailers who excel in dried fruit sales tend to promote consistently throughout the year.”

CROSS-MERCHANDISING POSSIBILITIES

Cross-merchandising can be very effective. Harralson of Sunsweet suggests placing raisins with salad toppings, or next to lettuce and packaged salads. Hartman recommends creating a display with raisins and oatmeal, or raisins and baking ingredients needed to make oatmeal raisin cookies, or raisins and nuts and other items needed to make trail mix.

The holiday season features a marked increased people baking cookies and breads at home. Harralson advocates promoting raisins during the holidays by distributing recipe cards.

In January, when more customers are thinking about eating healthier for the New Year, they tend to spend more time in the produce department. During this time, Hartman says raisins should be highly visible and touted for their health and nutritional benefits.

Temporary price reductions can also drive sales. Asmar favors multiple promotions that feature 2/\$3 or 2/\$4, because it increases incremental sales. She says raisin promotions are not as advertisement driven as prunes, which appeal to a more price conscious consumer.

“There has never been a better time for retailers to promote raisins,” says Hartman. “Raisins have a lot going for them.” **pb**



Driving Dog-Days-Of-Summer Sales

BY DON HARRIS

As summer draws to a close, during the Monday morning retail meetings, Management seems resigned to the fact that the balance of the summer will result in slow sales — especially in the produce department. When produce associates point out there is still attractive volume product available for sales generation at the peak of flavor, Management will often counter with the retort, “Everyone is shopping for back-to-school supplies and not food.” As we have seen many times before, Management “just doesn’t get it!”

Produce executives fall into the trap of believing what Management tells them about the lack of potential produce sales during the last few weeks of summer. There are many ways to combat this situation, and two of the better tactics are simple.

The first solution involves utilization of the “local” products available as a “Last Chance” sale. This relates a sense of urgency to the customer as this would be the last time to take advantage of the high-quality, local produce available at very attractive prices until next season/year. This approach has proven to be very successful and has an unusually strong draw to customers who are concerned about where their product comes from and how fresh the produce is in their store.

Drawing attention to the ending of the local produce season is a way to rekindle customers’ interests in local products that represent good value, freshness, and good flavor. Essentially, it is closing the book on that year’s local season by employing the same initial appeal of locally grown product to the customer.

By utilizing the appeal of “End of the Season” and or “Last Chance” sales with your customers, you stimulate and drive sales during the time when conventional thought believes it can’t be done. This marketing approach also offers the customer an additional choice of the freshest produce, at value prices and represented by local produce.

The second technique requires more planning and additional thought to be effective. It involves designing promotional activity that takes advantage of the best values in summer produce and offers the customer “more for their money.” This strategy requires the searching out and negotiating the best possible cost, so you can reflect extremely attractive retail prices for your promotional activity.

Shippers and growers welcome this kind of promotion as they are in their later season varieties and have volume to offer on the declining market. It is in their best interest to offer attractive prices to move

this high-quality product at its peak of freshness and flavor rather than sit on inventory as it ages. The successful retailers utilizing this strategy offer the best prices of the entire summer season during this period to stimulate additional sales and to keep overall momentum.

The planning comes in when you need to look at your overall product and price mix to ensure balance to the offerings so these attractive sale prices do not adversely affect your profit targets. Proper preparation will help ease Management’s concern over the “hot” prices and potential for overall profit decline.

In this area, you can borrow from one of Walmart pioneer Sam Walton’s retail philosophies, which was to provide the lifeblood of your organization by driving sales and passing along deals to the customer.

While this may be a paraphrasing of Mr. Walton’s quote, the meaning is the same. What you will have done is offer the customer a recognizable value for these late-season sales and enhance your stores’ image as offering the best possible values on quality produce at all times.

As with many things that we do in retail merchandising of fresh produce, these proposals are not rocket science. They are tried-and-true techniques utilized by progressive and aggressive retailers to continue the strong sales momentum developed during the first two months of the summer season.

The key takeaway is retailers — instead of giving up and conceding the sales to the “back-to-school” category — do something positive to encourage and prolong sales momentum. Not only does such

activity improve sales and ultimately the bottomline, it also helps the growers and shippers that provided all this bountiful produce all summer finish their season on a positive note. It’s a rare chance to provide a win/win situation for both sides of the retail equation to combat the challenge and complete the utilization of all the benefits available during the summer selling season.

pb

The key takeaway is retailers — instead of giving up and conceding the sales to the “back-to-school” category — do something positive to encourage and prolong sales momentum.

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.



A Little White Lie In Produce

BY ALAN SIGER

Last month, my column addressed the value and importance of integrity in the produce business. In a fast paced industry that trades highly perishable products often worth more than \$100,000 per load, it's critical that buyers and sellers' relationships are based on trust. Of course, there are rules of the road provided by the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) and arbitration services available to buyers and sellers. But when you think about the billions of dollars that are traded in produce each year, it's amazing that almost all disputes, aside from failure to pay due to bankruptcy or insolvency, are resolved outside of the civil court system.

Once again, I made the case and truly believe that the vast majority of folks in the produce industry are honorable and trustworthy. However, that does not mean that we are all saints, and not above stretching the truth a bit to complete a sale. When one is marketing a perishable commodity that gradually deteriorates from the time it's harvested, rotating inventory is necessary to succeed. Every customer wants fresh product, and every shipper or wholesaler carrying product in a cooler for a day or two has to move that produce before it becomes unsalable.

When I was a young man on the Pittsburgh Market, there was a merchant who was a key player in the onion and potato business — two commodities not thought of as highly perishable. The owner was well liked by his customers, and he considered most customers his friends. He was such a nice guy that as soon as a fresh load of onions was backed in, he would sell his customers the fresh lot and send the product remaining from the previous load up the elevator to the top floor of his building. As time went on, the forgotten onions sprouted into what one customer described as a "botanical garden"; this merchant struggled to attain profitability, and eventually closed his doors.

One key to success in this business is knowing your customers, their requirements, and how tough they are at the receiving dock. Just because something isn't fresh or perfect, it still must be sold. Some customers are much more quality-conscious than others. It's important for the seller to understand that product that may be good enough for some customers may be rejected by others.

In the early 1980s, the gentleman who ran our potato division, Golden Triangle Packing Company, suddenly passed away from a massive coronary. At the time, I didn't know much about the potato business, but I stepped in to run the division for several months until a replacement could be trained. It was mid-July, and the Michigan

round white potato deal had just started; local chain stores always wanted to be the first to offer the new crop Michigan potatoes with big feature ads on 10-pound bags.

I had two different chain stores on ad with potatoes from the same grower-shipper. In order to keep each retailer happy, I had the shipper pack the same identical potatoes in a different brand for each customer. One Friday morning following the day the ad broke, I received a call from retailer "A" that he was rejecting the load of potatoes because of immature skin. About an hour later, I received almost an identical call from retailer "B". Both retailers were desperate

for potatoes, and with so many folks on ad around the Midwest, supplies were tight.

I brought both rejected loads back to my warehouse to look at the potatoes and determined they were not all that bad. I gave each driver a new set of bills and sent Retailer "A's" rejection to retailer "B," and retailer "B's" rejection to retailer "A". Both loads were welcomed with open arms; I had two satisfied customers and one very happy shipper. Was I completely honest by sending rejected loads to my customers without letting them know what was going on? No, but looking at the results, I'm very proud of the decision I made.

Consider this: it's Monday morning, and you're on the phone with a customer who asks if the product he or she is interested in is a fresh arrival. Do you tell them the truth and let them know that the product came in last Friday, or say that it was

just unloaded? Do you risk losing the sale by being perfectly honest?

When the customer asks if a load is fresh, what they really want to know is if the quality is up to their standards. Knowing your customers and understanding their expectations will enable you to make the tough decisions that keep your customers happy and your bottomline healthy.

Knowing your customers and understanding their expectations will enable you to make the tough decisions that keep your customers happy and your bottomline healthy.

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.



Social Responsibility Moves Momentum For Fresh Produce

BY NELLI HAJDU

At the bio-market at Rue de Tanneur in Brussels, Belgium, around noon on a Saturday, there is a long line in front of the building. People of all ages, social ranks and origins are gathering together to gain access to the world of bio-vegetables, farmers' goods and products exclusively produced with organic ingredients. The reason behind the crowd is very simple: the market hall is not big enough anymore to serve people's demand for authentic grown fruit and vegetables.

But that's not the only reason. They are also feeling good about their decision to buy the products — knowing they support the local economy and that the products are in line with their environmental and social concerns in addition to the promise sold with it. The visual appearance of unpacked products, the mind-set of waste-avoidance by bringing your own jute bag (or canvas tote), the usage of refillable glass jars and the transparency of where the product is coming from. All of this sells a feeling of authenticity and trust.

Consumer Fragmentation And Purchasing Behaviour

If you look into relevant studies on global consumer trends, one can observe a growing fragmentation among consumers. Several outward changes, such as the digital revolution, substantially influence our shopping behaviour.

First, more choice, less time is influencing customers' decisions on where, when and how to buy. The opportunities of purchasing locations seem endless. From online-delivery, convenience shops to bio-markets and mobile shopping.

Second, consumer groups have no streamlined profile anymore. In particular, so-called "silver agers" (those consumers typically defined as people older than 50) do not act as society expects them to. They are active, wealthy, and open-minded with an affinity to new technology. Traditional family models are cross-generationally disrupted. Singles do earn and spend more, and according to various Global Consumer Trend studies for 2016, the borders of gender are becoming increasingly blurred.

Third, there is an emerging search to counter the fast-paced, technology-shaped daily life we are currently experiencing. The happy and easy consumption-oriented 90s and early 2000s are replaced by an orientation toward meaningfulness of action. Activism is becoming a fashion, and news from the Internet is involved. This trend comes in the form of the sharing-economy, the rise of civil engagement on all societal matters, awakening interest for relationships between our

way of living and our environment, which includes climate change.

The food shelf is the most direct and democratic power a customer could attain. What unites all of those trends is that with the increasing availability of information, people are developing a new sense of awareness for themselves and their actions. People want to make a change. Food is one of the most direct, convenient and effective ways of doing this.

They can decide where they buy their product, and whether or not the place of purchase fits into their set of values. They can decide what they buy — a more far-reaching decision than it has been before. Consumers consider whether the product is healthy and delivers added value with regard to the ecological footprint and the production conditions. With growing availability of information about health, social and local conditions, producers cannot dazzle the client anymore with only packaging. Fun and entertainment must be replaced with authenticity and honesty.

Producers cannot dazzle the client anymore with only packaging. Fun and entertainment must be replaced with authenticity and honesty.

The 'More' Factor

This might be the momentum needed for the European fruit and vegetable industry as well as imports into Europe, which have all suffered by a decline of consumption by more than 10 percent during the past 10 years. There is no better answer

to consumers' wish than the consumption of fruit and vegetables. It is the product that delivers the most additional value to the consumers. Doing something good to yourself and others could not be easier.

What can the sector learn from the long line in front of the bio-market in Brussels? What can it learn from the more than 40 million Google entries about mindfulness? And what can we learn from the growing rate of zero-waste-blogs popping up online? The fruit and vegetable industry has now the chance to empower its consumers; to make them simultaneously feel responsible and aware about the multiple assets of fruit and vegetable with regard to health, societal and environmental benefits.

The industry has a story worth telling — but it must be honest and authentic. It is not the time for fancy promotion claims anymore. It is the moment to rethink the way of selling and toward a paradigm shift in the marketing toward the "more": more value, more communication, and more mindfulness.

pb

Freshfel Europe is the European fruit and vegetable association and represents more than 200 European and global members from the whole supply chain. Nelli Hajdu is responsible for international trade policy and plant health, but also for the communicational work at Freshfel.



The Challenges And Future Of Locally Grown

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

I worked for The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) for seven years planning and hosting conferences and leadership retreats for culinary and volume foodservice professionals. During that time (2007-2014) the only topic that seemed to get more attention than local sourcing was Millennials. And now the industry is forgetting Millennials and focusing on their younger siblings, Gen Y (or Centennials).

Including a session on local sourcing on a program usually made guest chefs very happy but upset certain sponsors — typically produce companies or commodity boards with specific growing regions. “Local” seemed to be a threat to their business. It was a sentiment I could appreciate, but I could see how chefs and marketers were embracing “local” as a way to capture the attention of diners eager to support local economies and local growers.

One of the first challenges for “local” sourcing is defining what you mean by “local.” I recall a representative from McDonald’s stating at a CIA conference in 2008 “...for a global company like ours, local sourcing for our U.S. restaurants is domestic sourcing.” Many in the audience smiled when they heard this, assured that a major customer like McDonald’s was being realistic about defining local.

But not all chefs and foodservice operators are always in favor of local sourcing. Celebrity chef and restaurateur Michael Chiarello, who was born and raised in California’s Central Valley, stated during a panel discussion about local sourcing at the CIA in 2010: “I don’t care where a tomato comes from as long as it’s flavorful. I’ll use San Marzano tomatoes from Italy if that’s the only tomato that gives me the flavor I want for a specific dish.”

Each fall the National Restaurant Association surveys members of the American Culinary Federation to develop the next year’s “What’s Hot?” Culinary Forecast. In 2016, they asked respondents “Which current culinary trend has grown the most over the past 10 years?” Local sourcing was the top response (44%) followed by gluten-free cuisine (21%) and environmental sustainability (13%). They also asked respondents “Which current culinary trend will be the hottest menu trend 10 years from now?” Local sourcing ranked second (21%) to environmental sustainability (41%). Combining local sourcing and environmental sustainability seems to be the biggest trend to watch in our farming and food system.

I was invited to moderate a panel discussion at the 2016 Aspen

Ideas Festival on “The Next Food Revolution.” Panelists included David Rosenberg, chief executive and co-founder of AeroFarms; Bryn Banuelos, marketing director at the Albertsons Companies, Inc.; and Mike Frank, chief commercial officer for Monsanto Company. The focus of our discussion was on innovation and technology in the food system.

AeroFarms is an indoor farming operation growing organic leafy greens in a warehouse in New Jersey without any soil, or sunlight, or disruptions in growing conditions due to climate change. Ultraviolet lighting and nutrient-enhanced water provide everything the plants need to grow. Their mission is to build indoor farms in densely populated urban areas to provide access to nutrient-rich, local food.

The aeroponic vertical farming technology developed by AeroFarms is being watched closely by food system leaders as well as venture capitalists. AeroFarms accepted \$20 million on venture capital funding in late 2015, funding for expansion in the U.S. and around the world. After moving into a new 70,000 square foot space in Newark, their next site will likely be Shanghai, one of the most populous cities in the world with more than 24 million residents today.

From a flavor standpoint, one of the big upsides of indoor vertical farming is the ability to combine plant genetics with agricultural inputs to deliver a specific flavor profile. Rosenberg captured the attention of everyone in the audience during our panel discussion in Aspen when he talked about

the flavor and texture of their baby kale. “This kale is so tender and sweet, it will make everyone love kale.” As a known kale hater, I’m a bit leery of this claim. But I’m planning on visiting Rosenberg and his Newark facility prior to the New York Produce Show in December. I’ll let you know how that taste test goes.

So, will technology be the solution moving forward to expand local sourcing and environmental sustainability? It’s not the only solution, but it’s one we should all pay attention to if we want to grow more food on less land with less environmental impact. And if we want to capture the attention of more chefs, we’ll also focus on flavor! **pb**

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer’s daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, Inc. Learn more about her business at www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com. Follow her insights on food and flavor issues on Twitter @AmyMyrdalMiller.

From a flavor standpoint, one of the big upsides of indoor vertical farming is the ability to combine plant genetics with agriculture inputs to deliver a specific flavor profile.



Blueberries: Upping Promotional Game Can Reap Big Rewards In Retail

BY MARK VILLATA

One hundred years ago, the first commercial crop of highbush blueberries was sold at a farmstand in Whitesbog, NJ. The exponential growth the blueberry industry has seen since has raised production across five continents to 1 billion pounds and has sent blueberry demand soaring. In the past five years, North American per capita blueberry consumption has increased by nearly 50 percent¹, with blueberry consumers trending younger and more diverse².

In 2015, fresh blueberry consumption amounted to \$1.5 billion in retail sales. Consumer perception of the blueberry is also on the rise – 84 percent of consumers cite awareness of blueberry health benefits,³ and women ages 25 to 44 – an audience with roughly \$2 trillion in purchasing power – see blueberries as enhancing their everyday lives⁴.

With North American blueberries in peak season, now is the time for retailers to up their promotional game to drive summer blueberry sales. Little changes in blueberry merchandising strategy can go a long way in encouraging purchases among primary shoppers. Here are some suggestions.

Increase Exposure By Expanding Display Space

The Millennial generation's spending power is on the rise. With 38 percent of Millennials saying they're influenced by in-store displays and signage⁵, retailers should make use of these tools to remind shoppers of blueberries' role in a healthy lifestyle.

The trend among those looking to capture additional sales has been adding refrigerated displays both inside the produce department and in other sections of the store to take advantage of cross-merchandising opportunities. In recent years, many big box stores, supermarkets and smaller retailers added rolling refrigerated cases as secondary displays for berries, increasing space allocation.

Capture Consumer Interest By Tying To Lifestyle Trends And Timely Topics

Millennial shoppers are also very interested in the origins of their food. Cater to this interest by highlighting the blueberry's 100th birthday and sharing fun facts about how and where blueberries are grown.

Present consumers with a one-stop area for various summer supplies, pairing blueberries with other summer activity staples. Blueberries can be cross-merchandised with:

- Snack-sized plastic ware for on-the-go snacking at summer sporting events
- Mason jars for making jam and chutney
- Popsicle molds for homemade fruit pops
- Grilling and outdoor dining supplies to inspire summer cooking

Blueberries' versatility makes it an ideal ingredient to promote for a variety of snacks, meals and potluck recipes for summer

celebrations and gatherings, including:

- Memorial Day ● Father's Day
- Fourth of July/ National Blueberry Month (July)
- Summer Olympics ● Labor Day

Encourage Trial With In-Store Demos

According to a recent report from Franklin, MA-based Interactions (a company specializing in customer care solutions, across voice, web, mobile and text channels), 96 percent of shoppers prefer to spend their money at retailers offering in-store product demos over stores that don't have demos, and 81 percent of shoppers purchased an item on impulse after experiencing a product demo⁶. The amazing versatility and appeal of blueberries makes them an ideal product to feature in demos.

As consumers ride the smoothie craze, retailers such as Whole Foods Market have begun showcasing fresh and frozen blueberries in smoothie recipes. Other interesting, simple-to-demonstrate dishes include: blueberry salmon flatbreads served with avocado and jalapeno; blueberry turkey burgers served with blueberry ketchup; or blueberry s'mores made with peanut butter, banana and graham crackers.

With 59 percent of shoppers using their mobile devices while grocery shopping⁷, well-appointed demos can also spur social media sharing and the positive word of mouth that drives 20 to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions⁸.

Key Takeaway

As the availability of and demand for blueberries continues to grow, little changes in blueberry merchandising can go a long way in tipping sales in the retailer's favor. By strategizing and expanding display space, cross-merchandising to tie in relevant lifestyle trends and encouraging interaction via in-store demos, retailers can further increase consumer exposure to and ultimately drive sales of these little blue dynamos. **pb**

¹ North American Blueberry Council; ² Hebert Research 2013 U&A Study for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council; ³ IRI: Freshlook, Total U.S. MULO, DE 12/27/2015 Food & Drug, Grocery, Mass, Walmart, Club, Dollar and Military DECA Stores; ⁴ 2015 Jensen Omnibus Research; ⁵ Ad Age; ⁶ Interactions; ⁷ NinthDecimal 2014; ⁸ McKinsey

For the past 20 years, Mark Villata has been the executive director of the North American Blueberry Council, the Folsom, CA-based association representing highbush blueberry growers from throughout the United States and British Columbia. He also served as executive director of the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council since its establishment in 2000. Villata has had a range of experience in agribusiness, having held positions with Sun Diamond Growers, the California Raisin Advisory Board and the Walnut Marketing Board prior to joining the blueberry industry.

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(L - R): Tony Ray, Diana Ray,
Mike G Ray (in front of Diana) and Joe Ray

SETTING UP SHOP

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

If you wanted fresh produce, or just about any food available in the early 1900s in Indianapolis, you went to City Market. The city built the brick facade market in 1886 on the six lots bordering Market and Wabash streets that were set aside by the city fathers back in 1821 for a public market.

The advent of refrigeration in the early 1900s enabled produce sellers to move beyond what farmers could haul by horse and wagon overnight to fruits and vegetables delivered from all over the country by freight train. This factor, combined with the more spacious stalls of the newer City Market, led produce suppliers to seek imports to not only fill their shelves, but to do so for more months of the year. Thus, bananas joined the ranks of locally grown items like tomatoes on seller's display tables.

By 1914, City Market had amassed such a great variety and volume of vendors that the interior was divided into three sections: produce, meats and grocery goods. One of the couples that set up shop in the produce section was Joe and Diana Re (later changed to Ray).

"My great-grandparents, Joe and Diana, immigrated to the U.S. from Sicily in 1905," says Mike A. Ray, vice president of Ray & Mascari, a third-generation tomato repacker with offices located two blocks from the old City Market site. "Knowing how to handle fresh produce properly is a skill they learned in Italy, and it gave them a leg up in business when they came here."

In this photo taken in 1919 at the Joe Ray stall in Indianapolis'

City Market, Diana had likely just set up their stall, taking care to arrange the bananas, citrus, tomatoes and more in neat eye-catching order on planks supported by wooden crates. There's a metal hanging scale to one side to weigh produce and a cast-metal cash register to the left to record sales. Overhead, amidst a great network of wrought iron columns and trusses that supported the roof above the stalls, there is a tall wooden pole with the family's booth number, 471, with Joe Ray painted underneath. Diana and husband, Joe, look ready to start selling. So did their son Mike G. Ray and Mike's older cousin, Tony Ray.

The City Market was only open three to four days a week in the early 20th century. On their days off, Joe and Diana went out to develop delivery routes. This built both a customer base and distribution network that provided the groundwork for the couple's son, Mike, and his uncles, Gus, Tony and Frank Mascari, to establish Ray & Mascari in 1938.

The company's headquarters is still located at 324 South New Jersey Street, two blocks from the former City Market location. In the 1960s, the company transitioned from a multi-item distributor to one dedicated solely to tomatoes.

Today, Ray & Mascari is a third-generation owned and operated, year-round repacker of tomatoes grown year-round all over the U.S. and Mexico. The company has two facilities, one in Indianapolis and the second in Lakeland, FL — enabling distribution to retailers and foodservice operators east of the Mississippi. **pb**

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