

inside... *The Pundit Looks At Tesco, Polar Bears & Social Irresponsibility* • Super Bowl Produce • SOUTH AMERICAN IMPORTS
Florida Strawberry Report • Texas Produce • **APPLEWOOD ORCHARDS** • Mexican Produce • *Red River Valley Potatoes*
Regional Profile: Boston • **Florida Citrus** • Cucumbers And Sweet Peppers • Almonds • FLORAL PRESERVATIVES

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TOP 10

- ★ Food Safety
- ★ Social Responsibility
- ★ Packaging
- ★ Labor Woes
- ★ Freshness
- ★ Health And Wellness
- ★ Taste And The Quest For 'Something New'
- ★ Locally Grown
- ★ Perimeter Departments
- ★ From Ingredient To Full Meal

Issues and Trends Facing The Fresh Produce Industry In 2008

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PRODUCE QUIZ



THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Michael Greene
Produce Merchandiser
Lowes Foods Stores, Inc.
Winston Salem, NC

For Michael Greene, merchandising director for Lowes Foods Stores, Inc., Winston Salem, NC, making sure the unique supermarket chain consistently offers its customers the freshest products for the best value is his biggest priority.

With 12 years experience in the produce industry, Michael's primary role as merchandising director involves overseeing the produce and floral departments in each store in his district.

"I spend most of my time in the field," says Michael, who has worked for Lowes since June 2007. "I enjoy interacting with customers both internally and externally. My job is ever-changing and completely different all the time."

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader for about two years, Michael most enjoys reading about new products and keeping up to speed on the different commodities making an impact in the industry.

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, Michael wins an 11-piece set of graphite golf clubs.



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WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

SUBMITTED BY DR. LORELEI DISOGRA, EDD, RD • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION



Fresh Produce Snack Programs

As debate on the U.S. Farm Bill continues in Washington, DC, one program winning widespread Congressional support is the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable School Snack Program. While not yet assured, the Senate is considering expanding the program to provide a free fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day to more than 4.5 million elementary school children across all 50 states. But our success in the United States is not an isolated event. School fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs have become a global public health strategy to increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption and reduce their risk of obesity.

Many countries, including England, New Zealand, Ireland, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Canada and the United States, have established programs that are delivering significant benefits to children's health and to the produce industry. Global collaboration is helping build political support for additional funding to expand fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs within these countries and to additional countries.

Although each country implements its fresh fruit and vegetable school snack program in a unique way, all have a common goal — to provide students with a free fresh fruit or vegetable snack at school, thus increasing consumption and promoting good health. America's children, like children in Europe, Canada, New Zealand and many other countries, eat less than half of the fruits and vegetables recommended for good health each day.

Expanding on traditional nutrition education efforts, today's fruit and vegetable snack programs focus on increasing the availability and accessibility of quality fresh produce as the strongest determinants of children's fruit and vegetable intake. From the very beginning, the results were clear: Fruit and vegetable snack programs increased children's fruit and vegetable consumption.

Public health leaders, school officials and parents are also finding the benefits of school fresh fruit and vegetable snack pro-

grams are far-reaching and go beyond the direct consumption of the snack itself each day. A significant benefit seen in several countries is that students choose less candy, chips and other high-calorie snack foods from vending machines and actually choose more fruits and vegetables in school lunch lines. The programs introduce children to a much wider variety of fruits and vegetables

Kids eating more fruits and vegetables is truly a win-win for everyone.

than they would ordinarily experience, and parents report the kids begin to positively influence their families' eating habits with new tastes and demands for more fruits and vegetables to be served at home.

The worldwide interest in expanding school fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs can be traced to policy recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), global collaboration and networking and, of course, the programs' effectiveness once implemented. From an initial meeting in Berlin, Germany, in January 2003, I've been a part of a group of 30 international leaders working to share experiences, best practices, model programs and evaluation results. Collaboration at international meetings at the WHO in 2003, in New Zealand in 2004, Canada in 2006 and Belgium in 2007 has moved this initiative forward as a policy priority. Positive evaluation results found in one country are quickly shared around the world and used to build political support.

While much of our focus is on the U.S. Farm Bill, an equally exciting major policy initiative is underway in Europe to signifi-

cantly expand funding for school fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs. Efforts to build broad political support among agriculture and public health governmental authorities at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union were initiated in April 2007. A landmark briefing on *Promoting Fruit and Vegetable School Programs in Europe* was held for senior European governmental decision makers in Belgium. The European Commission is now considering investing \$100 million Euros each year in matching funds to expand School Fruit Schemes throughout Europe. Since April, follow-up meetings have been held in several European cities to continue work on this potential new European policy. At the European Commission, the director general for agriculture and senior agriculture staff are leading this effort and working closely with European produce trade associations, cancer societies and heart associations.

That type of coalition, bringing together public health organizations, nutrition advocates and the produce industry, is critical to expanding snack programs worldwide. During this year's U.S. Farm Bill debate, more than 60 public health and nutrition organizations joined together to urge Congress to support expanding the fruit and vegetable snack program and better align agricultural policy with public health policy. This coalition, focused on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among America's children, will have a lasting impact on our industry.

As the urgency to promote healthful eating and combat obesity among children grows in all countries, expansion of school fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs is expected to continue to gain political support in 2008. Expanding these programs to reach more children in more countries will increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption, give them a head start on a lifetime of healthful eating and create new growth opportunities for the fruit and vegetable industry. Kids eating more fruits and vegetables is truly a win-win for everyone.



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Marketplace Perception vs. Reality (Part 1): Food Safety

"I'd describe this as B.S. and A.S. — 'Before Spinach' and 'After Spinach.' B.S. — only a handful of customers wanted to know where and how their produce was grown, and taste and quality were more important. A.S. — there's no stopping customer distrust of produce or any product for that matter."

— Interviewed retailer

Successful product marketing, regardless of product, is driven by the ability to predict and respond to consumer preferences, which can quickly shift in response to current events. No subject facing the produce industry is in more flux than food safety.

Earlier this year, Produce Marketing Association (PMA) teamed with Cornell University to study consumers' attitudes about food safety and how well retailers know their customers on this topic. Led by my longtime friend and collaborator, Professor Ed McLaughlin, the researchers' goal was to identify opportunities to better communicate with and satisfy our customers at the most visible point of the produce supply chain. Study results were first shared at PMA's 2007 Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition in Houston.

This past summer, the Cornell team surveyed 544 produce shoppers in stores in four U.S. markets. They then asked 40 produce executives representing 81 percent of U.S. supermarket sales to predict their customers' responses. Some were interviewed to get their interpretations of survey results. The research also covered attitudes about organics, which I hope to examine in a later column.

We found retailers often didn't know their customers' minds regarding food safety very well — and, as a result, there are many opportunities to have more meaningful conversations with our customers at the store level.

Consumers are more worried about food safety than their retailers think. Barely half of surveyed shoppers report they are confident about the safety of produce growing condi-

tions, while a nearly equal amount lack confidence or are neutral at best. Contrast this to the 90 percent of retailers who think their customers believe produce is being grown safely.

Retailers also misjudged the concerns that ranked highest with their customers; 73 percent of all shoppers report they are "somewhat" to "very concerned" about pesticide residues, while 50 percent report they are similarly concerned about "germs."

But who pays for extra safety measures? Almost three-quarters of shoppers indicate they are willing, at least theoretically, to pay more for produce certified as grown under safe farming practices. Only one-third of retailers predicted their consumers would pay extra.

As the Cornell researchers commented at Fresh Summit, retailers tend to base their opinions of consumer attitudes on the actual purchasing behavior of shoppers — what shows up on the sales receipt — while survey respondents tend to say what they believe, which may or may not be reflected in sales. Bear in mind, though, that retailers were asked by the researchers to predict how their customers would respond to the survey, not how their purchases would be impacted.

The Cornell research echoes other recent PMA research findings that consumers are increasingly interested in locally grown produce — apparently because of recent food-safety scares. Two-thirds of consumers agree or strongly agree that locally grown foods are safer than produce transported long distances. Meanwhile, 73 percent of shoppers report they are somewhat to very concerned about the safety of imported produce. Here it came as no surprise to retailers that "local" equates

Consumers are more worried about food safety than their retailers think.

to "safe" in consumers' minds.

Many surveyed consumers feel safer when they can put a "face" on their fruits and vegetables, by buying local. Just over half of the surveyed consumers agree "somewhat" to "strongly" that they prefer to buy fresh fruits and vegetables if they can identify the farm from which they came.

The Cornell/PMA research confirms consumers are shaken by recent food-safety problems and their shopping interests are shifting as a result. For food safety — as with last month's topic of country-of-origin labeling — the rules of consumer engagement are changing, and so must we. Consumers are becoming more demanding about where and from whom their produce is procured. As a result, we should also reshape our marketing strategies to address their needs.

I believe what consumers really want is the reassurance that comes with transparency of information and a feeling of personal connection. While our industry is being aggressive on food safety, word of our efforts has reached retailers but not consumers. So now, we must consider how to do more at point-of-purchase to convey safety information in a responsible and reassuring way.

We must look for ways to put a trustworthy "face" back on produce, whether its producer hails from down the street, across the country or around the world. As the retailer quoted at the beginning of this article told our researchers, there can't be any more B.S. We aren't producing widgets; we're supplying life-impacting food. We must listen to our customers and we must respond.



Actions Speak Louder Than Words

That we must respond to our consumers is beyond doubt — but to which consumer shall we respond? The hypothetical consumer answering survey questions? Or the actual consumer purchasing in our stores?

If you listened to the retailers who spoke at the Fresh Summit workshop president Bryan Silbermann refers to — Don Harris from Wild Oats/Whole Foods, Mike O'Brien from Schnucks Markets and Michael Agostini from Wal-Mart — you constantly got the sense they felt they knew their customers better than the customers knew themselves.

In a sense, they probably do; they have decades of experience judging behavior, and behavior informs us in a way words do not.

What are we to make of 73 percent of consumers saying they are “very concerned” about pesticide residues? How are we to understand 50 percent are “very concerned” about “germs” on the produce?

To a retailer, the key question is how to interpret “very concerned.” If 73 percent of consumers are “very concerned” about pesticides but “very concerned” does not translate into skipping the produce department or reducing produce purchases, maybe it is not something to be too worried about.

Retailers and producers make a mistake if they dismiss self-reported consumer concerns discordant with past behavior. Sometimes consumer expressions can signal a shift from past concerns that will be reflected in future behavior. Sometimes self-reported consumer sentiments can reveal a marketing opportunity just waiting for someone to seize.

Interpreting consumer research requires important attention to the meaning of words. If consumers report “locally grown” foods are safer than produce transported long distances, what are they saying? That transportation makes produce unsafe? That growers, who know their product needs to be transported, do things that make it less safe? Or is it “us vs. them,” where “local” growers are somehow “like” the consumers whereas distant growers are not and thus distrusted?

We certainly should not assume consumer

perceptions correspond to trade practices. Locally grown is an excellent example. Many chains have rules that local is based on mileage. For example, on its Web site, Whole Foods gives its criteria for local: Only produce that has traveled less than a day (seven or fewer hours by car or truck) from the farm to our facility can be labeled “locally grown.”

Seven hours at 65 miles per hour is 455 miles. Also this is the distance to a Whole Foods “facility,” not the store. If the facility is three hours from the store, produce grown 650 miles from the store could still be classified as local. That is almost the distance between Baltimore, MD, and Jacksonville, FL.

If consumers report they love local and we judge the veracity of this statement by putting produce from several states away in front of them, their behavior won't correspond to their statements because they likely meant something entirely different by “local.”

In its own research on this topic, PRODUCE BUSINESS is finding issues such as nationalism can wildly affect consumer attitudes. In the United Kingdom, for example, residents of London, who might wax poetic over local in a focus group, are horrified if the moderator tries to explain they might like more produce imported from northern France. Although it is 840 miles from Land's End in Cornwall to John O'Groats in Caithness, this voyage is considered local while a mere 22-mile boat trip across the English Channel is not.

Countless U.S. studies have confirmed the same point: rarely do consumers consider out-of-state produce locally grown.

Sometimes, retailers know that, in a practical sense, something consumers may value never happens in their markets. So consumers, who really want to know where their food comes from, may be out of reach for a supermarket as those consumers may turn to alternative sources, such as farmer's markets or the various subscription box initiatives.

Supermarkets may put up signs or a Web site with farmer info, but those are just names and pictures, and not all consumers trust the information. It is a very different experience from meeting John the farmer

We certainly should not assume consumer perceptions correspond to trade practices.

every Saturday at a local farmer's market or driving to the country to pick up a box of produce on the farm where it was grown.

It is very difficult to do a controlled experiment on consumer attitudes, so we always need be cautious in assuming we know why consumers feel as they do.

Perhaps food safety drives their thoughts or perhaps they picked up a shifting zeitgeist in which reducing food miles is thought to be virtuous and reduce global warming.

We discussed the study PRODUCE BUSINESS is doing — with the generous support of a grant from Stemilt Growers — last month in my *Fruits of Thought* column titled *Locale Not Local*. That piece is in great harmony with Bryan's thoughts that what consumers really want may not be local as much as it a series of factual things — including perhaps food safety — that they associate with local.

If true, this points the way to a marketing strategy for national marketers to emphasize the authenticity of their production locales and the experience and integrity of the farmers who grow the produce.

Ed McLaughlin of Cornell University, who this writer also counts as a friend and long-time collaborator, might be smiling ever so slightly at this controversy. The good professor is certainly the first to recognize good research almost always suggests more questions than it provides answers.

This keeps life interesting and ensures there is always research to be done and columns to be written.



Localizing Our National Products

The great marketing dilemma for the produce industry is how to be a large, national and international industry gaining economies of scale while also maintaining the public good will that comes from being authentically tied to the land.

Retailers have wrestled with this over the years, and it is why most of the better stores restrict the amount of non-produce items in the department. To these retailers, there is a cost to carrying these goods even if they are negotiated on guaranteed sale. The cost is that consumers will see the department as less fresh, less authentically tied to the farmer and the earth.

Although locally grown programs are nothing new, they are on a roll now, with polar opposites marketing them: Wal-Mart promotes "Heritage Agriculture" to encourage local production; Wegmans fills its Web site with photos and descriptions of local farms it works with.

These programs are problematic at best. Most survive only because retailers routinely waive food-safety requirements, and most locally grown efforts cover only short seasons. Much research has shown state-based promotion programs are effective, but typically within only the state whose product is being promoted.

The industry needs national shippers able to supply year-round and with the economy of scale necessary to keep food prices low while generating a profit for the producer. Yet if consumers want locally grown, how are national shippers to compete?

We don't know to what degree consumers really care about locally grown. Although many retailers report excellent sales for locally grown product, in many cases it is an unfair comparison. If there is a life-size cutout of local farmer on the floor, you have to compare sales to what happens when there is a life-size cutout of a national farmer on the floor. Otherwise, a retailer may be seeing in its sales statistics the appeal of promotion, not the appeal of locally grown.

Two basic things have to happen if we are to successfully market our national product in an age where consumers are looking for more than good product:

1. Branding our locales

Some regions scream out with authenticity and beauty. Other than as a novelty, nobody in Alabama wants Alabama wine. People want wine from a place such as the Napa Valley, beautiful and romantic, home to vintners and oenophiles. The industry challenge is to brand our production regions in the way Napa Valley is branded.

In some cases that may take a promotional effort; in others it may take a name change. Perhaps the Salinas Valley, with an image tied to a not particularly beautiful city and a public perception seared by food-safety issues, should change its name. Why can't we

grow our vegetables in the beautiful "Monterey Valley?"

After Valujet had a crash years ago, it merged with much smaller Airtran and abandoned the Valujet name. Perhaps the Monterey Valley, with images of sea mist hitting the rocky shore and whales cavorting off the coast, could expunge the memory of the spinach crisis. One can almost hear Mayor Dennis Donahue of Salinas screaming. However, a name change can be a crucial marketing tool.

2. Pulling our small farmers to the frontline

The industry has learned farmers have a high degree of credibility. So if media interviews are to be done, we often dress our industry leaders in jeans and emphasize their farming background.

The real key, though, is that very few of our marketers grow all their own product; most depend on independent farmers. These individual farmers were pushed into the background as marketers wanted to promote their own brands and names.

The current atmosphere suggests this may no longer be an optimum strategy. One can imagine an ad and in-store marketing campaign themed around the slogan: "I'm Farmer Jones and I grow for Dole... and for you." It shows tours of the farm, historical photos of Great Grandpa settling the land, maybe Junior studying at UC Davis, and ends with the farmer eating his own crop and feeding it to his family.

Only an infinitesimal percentage of consumers in, say, Brooklyn, NY, will ever visit a farm outside, say, Buffalo, NY, so the only sense in which those consumers will "know

where their food comes from" is what they can surmise from ads, Web sites and in-store marketing. Farmers from Salinas are every bit as authentic as local growers — the problem is we have obscured their identity. It is time to bring them into the sunlight.

Lately, Wal-Mart has been on a kick promoting Heritage Agriculture in hopes to revive the production of items such as the Arkansas peach and Arkansas pickling cucumber — both long-since abandoned on a commercial scale. It is hard to know what to make of these initiatives.

The problem is all these industries died for real reasons, such as short seasons and ill-suited climates. To revive them isn't authentic. It would be like *Jurassic Park*, creating a theme park of agriculture. Efforts such as these are what happen when marketing takes over procurement and merchandising. It is not a serious effort to supply produce; it is a serious effort to try to connect with customers on a basis other than price.

Because such efforts will never account for the bulk of what is in the store, such efforts are always going to be a bit of slight-of-hand. The answer is to present what is really happening in a way consumers will connect to and appreciate.

pb

If consumers want locally grown, how are national shippers to compete?

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Niki Eldridge has been promoted to packaging and graphics design manager. She will be responsible for managing all packaging graphics projects from conception to development. She will also be integrally involved in all new product and packaging teams, consulting in design exploration and managing key vendors on timing, quality and cost.



**IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION,
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Kent Beesley is the new retail promotions director for the western region, covering Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Washington. His responsibilities will include educating retailers on how Idaho potatoes can help boost profits in the potato category.



**IMG CITRUS, INC.,
VERO BEACH, FL**

Matt Reel has been hired as a sales manager for the U.S. and Canadian markets. Reel began his career with Seald-Sweet International, where he worked in imports logistics and operations. He moved to Seald-Sweet's sales team and was later promoted to managing the domestic sales team.



**EARTHBOUND FARM,
SAN JUAN BAUTISTA, CA**

Natalia Hrybowych was hired as senior product manager. A veteran of the new product development process, she has 20 years of product and category management experience. Her responsibilities will include managing new product strategy and tactics and adding fresh energy to the integrated product development process.



Matt Kastensmidt has been hired as a sales manager for the company's U.S. and Canadian markets. He has more than five years experience in the Florida citrus industry and worked in his family's groves in high school and college. After graduation, he managed his family's packinghouse in Fort Pierce, FL. He most recently worked for Seald-Sweet International.



John Foster has joined the company as senior manager in charge of its new organic integrity program. Foster brings more than 15 years of experience in organic production, processing, inspection and auditing. His responsibilities will include helping to build a strong program that safeguards the integrity of the company's products.



**ACE TOMATO COMPANY, INC.,
MANTECA, CA**

Parker Booth has been appointed president. His position also includes serving as president of the affiliated Delta Pre-Pack Company and Ace International Marketing (AIM). At Ace Tomato, he plans to explore new sales avenues and expand its tradition and reputation as quality growers, shippers and packers.



**DRISCOLL STRAWBERRY
ASSOCIATES, INC., WATSONVILLE, CA**

Steve Trede joined the category management team as category development manager. With more than 25 years in the produce industry, Trede has a broad range of experience in berry marketing. The category management team works closely with retail partners to achieve optimum berry sales and profitability.



PRO*ACT, LLC, MONTEREY, CA

Max Yeater was promoted to the newly created position of chief operating officer. Formerly vice president of procurement, Yeater has worked for the company for 14 years and has held a variety of positions. His new responsibilities will include operations such as procurement, client services, marketing, business development and food safety.



COASTLINE, SALINAS, CA

Paul Mocettini is the new director of sales. He has 20 years experience in the produce industry and formerly worked for Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc.. Most recently, he spent more than 10 years at Growers Express, LLC. His responsibilities will include helping to expand conventional and organic categories.



**FRESH PRODUCE AND FLORAL
COUNCIL, LA MIRADA, CA**

Carissa Mace was selected president following a 6-month, nationwide search process. With 11 years experience working for trade associations in the produce and floral industry, Mace most recently served as the director of U.S. business development for the Produce Marketing Association. She also has eight years experience working in the nonprofit/association profession.



Ben Wilson was hired as the company's newest sales professional. He has more than six years of experience in the retail industry and has worked for Mann Packing Company, Inc., and Kroger Co. He will manage green onion sales and focus on enhancing the company's retail penetration through innovative solutions to complex retail problems.



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

FREEZE-DRIED SNACKS

Justus Foods, Inc., Georgetown, TX, has introduced freeze-dried fruits and vegetables under the Today's Farm brand, a new healthful snack segment. The freeze-dried fruit is a nutritious and delicious snack for all consumers, particularly children, teenagers, moms, diabetics and athletes. It's packaged in material that allows it to keep its "crispy-crunch."



Reader Service No. 300

NEW SWEET ONIONS LABEL

Sweet Onion Trading Co., Palm Bay, FL, has created a new label for its premium quality sweet onions that originate from Pacific export points, including Peru, Chile, Guatemala, California and Washington. The new label, Long board Sweet Onions, features a stylized image of a surfer cresting a wave on his Sweet Onion surfboard.



Reader Service No. 301

BLACK CURRENT JUICE BLENDS

Allyn Brown, Preston, CT, launched two new black current juice blends, Apple/Black Currant and Black Currant/Cranberry under the Maple Lane Farms, LLC, brand. They contain no preservatives and must be sold under refrigeration. Packaged in 64-ounce high-density polyethylene plastic (HDPE) bottles, they are line-priced along with the traditional black current juice product.



Reader Service No. 302

SNACK PINK PROMOTION

Mariani Packing Company, Vacaville, CA, launched *Snack Pink! And Help Save A Life*, a retail promotion set to run through May 2008. The promotion will focus on four products: 6-ounce cherries, 50-ounce prunes, 36-ounce sun-ripened mixed fruit and 48-ounce ultimate apricots. Mariani is donating \$414,000 to Susan G. Komen for the Cure in support of breast cancer research and outreach programs.



Reader Service No. 303

SUPER FRUITS

Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, has introduced Super Fruits Antioxidant Rich Fruits, a product line made up of dried Goji berries, omega-3 cranberries and dried black currants. The line can be merchandised in the produce department with other dried fruit or on clip strips near fresh and packaged lettuce.



Reader Service No. 304

MIXED SNACK PACKS

Country Fresh, Inc., Houston, TX, has announced a new line of snack packs that combine delectable varieties of fruits, vegetables and cheeses with Labrada Nutrition Hi-Protein Granola Bars. The product is available in select retail chains throughout the Southeast.



Reader Service No. 305

FFVA HONORS COSTCO

The Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, Maitland, FL, recently presented its Merchandiser of the Year Award to Costco Wholesale Corp., Issaquah, WA, at the association's 64th Annual Convention Awards Lunch at the Boca Raton Resort & Club in Boca Raton, FL. Costco has 518 warehouses in locations around the world.



Reader Service No. 306

GIUMARRA EXPANDS MEXICAN ORGANIC OFFERINGS

Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, has launched a line of organic products from Mexico. In response to demand from its customers and consumers, Giumarra now produces shadehouse-grown organic vegetables and melons. The line is packed under the Llano Organic label.



Reader Service No. 307

MANGO SUPPLY CHAIN TO BE STUDIED

The National Mango Board, Winter Park, FL, has organized a one-of-a-kind research project involving producers, exporters, importers, distributors and retailers in six countries. A "Dream Team" of post-harvest scientists has begun a study of the mango supply chain from field to table as part of a major initiative to identify opportunities to improve fruit quality for consumers.



Reader Service No. 308

HONEYCRISP PRODUCTION ON THE RISE

Rainier Fruit Company, Selah, WA, expects to market more than one-half million Euro cartons of Honeycrisp this season, a significant increase over last year. The company also reports an exceptionally large amount of fruit due in part to young orchards coming in to production.



Reader Service No. 309

SUNSWEEP CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

Sunsweet Growers, Inc., Yuba City, CA, reached its 90-year milestone this year. Sunsweet product innovations date back to the introduction of the first pitted prunes and the popular fruit-essence prunes. Today, the company's lineup includes not only dried plums and prunes but also apricots, cranberries and raisins.



Reader Service No. 310

HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED

Allen Lund Co., La Canada, CA, is once again helping Navidad in Barrio, started 1972 by a group of Latino college kids. The group seeks food, transportation and warehousing to distribute food through agencies in Southern California. Last year several California firms donated 16 pallets of fresh produce for Christmas dinner baskets.



Reader Service No. 311

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

Tesco, Polar Bears And Social Irresponsibility



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, Nov. 30, 2007

Simon Uwins is the chief marketing officer for Tesco's Fresh & Easy chain, and for almost three months now he has kept posted on its Web site a piece he wrote declaring that every Fresh & Easy store that opens will have a photo of polar bears in the back room and every new employee will receive a card



from the CEO with the same polar bear picture on the card.

What is with polar bears and Tesco? Here is how they explain it:

POLAR BEARS AT FRESH & EASY?

This picture means a lot to us. Every store we open will have it in the back area, every new fresh&easy employee will receive a card from our CEO, with this picture on the front.

Why?

My 9-year-old son got it first time: "Daddy, the polar bears are drowning because global warming is melting the ice. We have to do something."

The picture is a reminder for us to be careful about our impact on the environment. That's why we've invested in California's largest solar roof installation, to help power our distribution center. Why we've partnered with RMG, a San Diego-based recycling and waste services company, so that we can reuse or recycle all our shipping and display materials.

And why we've built energy saving features into

our store design, such as the use of LED lighting in our freezers, cooler doors and outside signage. Indeed, we think we've reduced the energy usage of the stores we're building by [approximately] 30 percent. We've joined the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) volume certification pilot program, to get them LEED-rated.

But the picture also reminds us to take a much more thoughtful approach to everything we do.

To be thoughtful about how food is produced. We've gone to great lengths, for example, to work with our suppliers to ensure our private label products contain no artificial colors and flavors, no added trans fats, and only use artificial preservatives when absolutely necessary. Indeed, several suppliers have commented that no one has ever asked them so many questions about this before.

To be thoughtful about the work environment we create. Our approach to working shoulder to shoulder that I talked about last week is an example of that.

And to bring the benefits of fresh, wholesome and affordable food to all types of neighborhoods, including those traditionally underserved by modern grocery stores.

Does this mean we're perfect?

Of course not, there's always trade-offs, and we already have a long list of things we want to do, but haven't yet been able to achieve.

But having talked to many people in many different ways about their ideal grocery store, their ideal workplace, and their ideal neighborhood, we're convinced there's an appetite for thoughtful consumption, as long as it's affordable and convenient.

As ever, we'll only find out if we've got it right when we open our first stores, later this year.

If we have, it should be good for customers, employees, neighborhoods, and shareholders alike...and also, in some very small way, for those polar bears...alright son?

— posted by Simon Uwins

Tesco has chosen to present itself to the American public as something different than Kroger, Safeway or Wal-Mart, not only in store concept but in social responsibility.

Yet, there is some sense in which the success or failure of the Tesco effort in the United States may well depend on whether consumers consider Tesco to be sincere in these representations. This is why attacks from the editorial page of the *Los Angeles Times* for not locating stores in poorer areas as promised, which we discussed in our piece *Tesco Takes Heat For Not Supporting Underserved*, really can matter.

Simon Uwins' piece, with its reliance on his 9-year-old son as the source of authority on the impact of global warming on polar bears, reminds one of the famous "Amy Carter" debate in which President Carter was ridiculed after he pointed out that he turned to his 13-year-old daughter, Amy, to help him prioritize different national policy interests:



The debate was sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Held on October 28, 1980, it was a debate between then President Carter and Ronald Reagan. Howard K. Smith of ABC News was the moderator.

MR. SMITH: President Carter, you have the last word on this question.

MR. CARTER: I think, to close out this discussion, it would be better to put into perspective what we're talking about. I had a discussion with my daughter, Amy, the other day, before I came here, to ask her what the most important issue was. She said she thought nuclear weaponry — and the control of nuclear arms. This is a formidable force. Some of these weapons have 10 megatons of explosion. If you put 50 tons of TNT in each one of railroad cars, you would have a carload of TNT — a trainload of TNT stretching across this nation. That's one major war explosion in a warhead. We have thousands, equivalent of megaton, or million tons, of TNT warheads. The control of these weapons is the single major responsibility of a President, and to cast out this commitment of all Presidents, because of some slight technicalities that can be corrected, is a very dangerous approach.

President Carter, of course, lost the election and if Tesco is relying on the authority of a 9-year-old, it may not do much bet-

ter. Because it is pretty clear that this business of polar bears drowning due to melting ice is unsupported by any facts.

In the United Kingdom itself — Tesco's home turf — a judge was recently analyzing the veracity of similar claims made by Al Gore in his movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. The judge, Sir Michael Burton, is from the left-leaning British Labour party so, if anything, might be sympathetic to Al Gore. Yet, on this issue he was clear:

The judge also said there was no proof to support a claim that polar bears were drowning while searching for icy habitats melted by global warming. The only drowned polar bears the court was aware of were four that died following a storm.

Besides, even if the polar bear population was threatened, it is far from clear that reducing energy use makes any sense at all as a strategy to combat such a problem.

Bjorn Lomborg, who has a new book, *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*, put it this way in a *Washington Post* piece:

Of course, it's not just humans we care about. Environmentalists point out that magnificent creatures such as polar bears will be decimated by global warming as

their icy habitat melts. Kyoto would save just one bear a year. Yet every year, hunters kill 300 to 500 polar bears, according to the World Conservation Union. Outlawing this slaughter would be cheap and easy — and much more effective than a world-wide pact on carbon emissions.

Tesco is a giant corporation with extensive resources. One would think it would carefully vet any claims before it starts posting them in every backroom and putting them on postcards sent out by the CEO.

That they didn't... that they elected to use as the centerpiece of such a campaign a sort of pop-culture environmentalism, where Tesco mindlessly repeats claims popularized by movies and parroted by 9-year-olds, rather than engage in serious scholarship on such important issues, makes one suspect that it is all a marketing game.

It is as if at Tesco they believe in things not because they know them to be true or because they represent deeply held values but because they see a marketing advantage to positioning themselves in one particular way.

So if a movie makes a falsehood widely believed, instead of helping its employees and customers understand the truth, Tesco tries to ride the wave.

It is hard to imagine anything less socially responsible than that.

www.perishablepundit.com

There is some sense in which the success or failure of the Tesco effort in the United States may well depend on whether consumers consider Tesco to be sincere.

TOP 100

- ★ Food Safety
- ★ Social Responsibility
- ★ Packaging
- ★ Labor Woes
- ★ Freshness
- ★ Health And Wellness
- ★ Taste And The Quest For 'Something New'
- ★ Locally Grown
- ★ Perimeter Departments
- ★ From Ingredient To Full Meal

Issues and Trends Facing The Fresh Produce Industry In 2008

Experts point to the biggest issues influencing the marketplaces of today and tomorrow.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

What are the important issues and top trends facing the fresh produce industry in 2008? We asked 20 industry professionals who have their fingers on the future to share their views and offer their predictions.

1. FOOD SAFETY

In 2007, the slice of shoppers reporting they were confident the food they purchase at the supermarket was safe dropped from 82 percent in 2006 to 66 percent, according to U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2007, an annual snapshot of the market published in May by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), Arlington, VA. According to the report, 38 percent of shoppers have stopped purchasing certain items due to food-safety concerns — and produce topped the list.

"If consumers think produce is the problem and not the solution, the needle on consumption will go down," notes Chris Nelson, president and CEO of

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Positioning one's company as socially responsible — both within the industry and to consumers — is a major trend for 2008.

MIXTEC Group, Inc., Pasadena, CA. “The problem is that produce is the solution to obesity and a longer life.

“More testing will lead to more recalls and a negative image of the industry to consumers,” he adds. “My personal opinion is that we can’t solve this problem in a statistical way. The focus has to be on removing the cause, stopping it at the source. For example, finding a way to eradicate the deadly strain of *E. coli* in the stomach of cattle. Consumers don’t want irradiation. That day may be coming, but it isn’t here yet.”

“The produce industry must build safety into practices used from field to fork,” according to Bryan Silbermann, president of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE. “Traceability is a critical component that is still missing. For example, we are operating in most instances without unique case identification numbers, company-specific prefixes in our bar coding or source identification on bulk produce. There are lots of good reasons why this is so, and they are mostly to do with how produce has been handled as a commodity product with few real brands. Just as we must show a face in marketing to consumers, it’s time to put

our own unique identity onto the products we sell.”

Following on this theme, Tom Stenzel, president and CEO of the United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, DC, foresees business relationships as a focal point of future food safety practices.

“I envision less emphasis on technological change at the grower or handler level and more focus on an alteration in business relationships,” he explains. “Retailers and restaurateurs need to have better alignment in their supply chain. In other words, they need to know whom they’re buying from and the product’s pedigree. I’ve already spoken with one major retailer who has put together an approved vendor list. This means, for example, that instead of buyers having 25 suppliers to call in order to find the best price and quality products, they now only have five.”

This vendor vetting, says Lee Frankel, former president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ, “will occur with both domestic and for-

research and training, but the funds it collects and grants will also be made available to other leading research institutions worldwide.”

Instead of a perceived negative, food safety and the steps a supplier or retailer take to ensure safe foods can be positioned as a positive, says Rod Hawkes, senior extension associate for the Food Industry Management Program at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. “I think we’ll see more marketing of food safety whether it’s on restaurant menus or signs at retail. For example, look at Wegmans [Rochester, NY]. Director of consumer affairs Mary Ellen Burris has used her weekly column as a place to tell customers about the care the chain takes in buying produce, such as sending their own buyers out to inspect the fields.”

2. THE HOT BUZZ OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Research conducted in July and August 2007 by Opinion Dynamics Corporation, Cambridge, MA, on behalf of PMA, indicates that consumers consider social responsibility of companies that grow and sell produce a highly important factor. Other important issues that fall into this category include organics, distance from farm to store, fair living wages and packaging, according to the report.

“While many place importance on purchasing from socially responsible compa-

Instead of a perceived negative, food safety and the steps a supplier or retailer take to ensure safe foods can be positioned as a positive.

ign or import suppliers. Food safety is a global issue.” [EDITOR’S NOTE: Frankel left FPAA after this article was written. He will become president and CEO of United Potato Growers of America, Salt Lake City, UT, on Jan. 2, 2008.]

Silbermann agrees, noting, “The Center for Produce Safety [based at the University of California (UCDavis), Davis, CA], formed this past summer as a collaborative partnership between industry, government, academia and consumer groups, exists to enhance the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables through research, information exchange, and training around the world. Not only does the center have dedicated staff in Davis, CA, a renowned hub for agricultural

nies, we found only 33 percent rated the produce industry as being either somewhat or extremely socially responsible,” Silbermann says. “This is a 9-percent higher rating than they gave to the rest of businesses in general, but are we willing to accept the fact that 67 percent of consumers see us as giant agribusinesses with no connection to the land or the consumers for whom we grow? We must start telling consumers who we are. We have to stop hiding behind our products and start telling the story of the incredible people who make our industry.”

Consumers today expect firms to be socially responsible and to do the ‘right thing,’ relates Roberta Cook, extension marketing economist for the department



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of agricultural and resource economics at UC Davis. "This benefits the produce industry by opening up new channels," she explains. "For instance, fast-food companies, such as McDonald's [based in Oak Brook, IL], have added more fruits and vegetables to tier menu in order to be more socially responsible."

According to information supplied by McDonald's, in 2006, the chain used 80 million pounds of salad greens including spring mix, 100 million pounds of leaf lettuce and iceberg lettuce on sandwiches, 30 million pounds of tomatoes, 54 million pounds of apples for apple dippers and fruit and walnut salad, 6.5 million pounds of grapes and 4.2 million pounds of walnuts for fruit and walnut salad.

Incorporating more fresh produce in the diet is how some consumers will continue to define their stance on social responsibility, says UC Davis' Cook. "Food has become the new social movement, food as a flash point. Consumers project their values by the way they eat, for example, including more fresh produce and less of other foods, such as meat and dairy."

PMA's Silbermann adds, "Moms today, many of whom are boomers with disposable incomes, aren't ready to return to World War II-era Victory Gardens in their backyards — but they want to connect and support businesses that understand 'more' and 'cheap' are not necessarily better."

3. PACKAGING ON THE RISE

Packaging plays a role in food safety, social responsibility and more.

According to Steve Lutz, executive vice president of the Perishables Group, W. Dundee, IL, "Packaging doesn't guarantee food safety, but it does impact the ability of a product to be tampered with. Packaging also insulates products against cross-contamination. There's also a perception of safety that consumers have and, for this reason, we'll likely see more products in some type of packaging."

Consumers today are specific about the type of packaging they want, notes Silbermann. "They want conveniently sized packaging with colorful graphics that promise not just health but also flavor. They want it in a variety of sizes that are reusable, re-sealable, convenient and environmentally friendly."

"Consumers are also responding to the single-serve or individually packed items, a growth area for bowls and cups and trays, particularly those with room for dressings, dips, croutons and forks,"

he continues. "There are also more and more packs riding the wave of the micro-wave trend. These products have expanded beyond vegetables to include fruit, along with flavorings added right in the package."

Whether it is to catch a consumer's eye and stand out on store shelves, protect a product in transit, extend the product's flavor life or provide consumers with a convenient and healthful snack, he says, "Packaging is becoming more responsive to consumers' needs."

4. LABOR WOES

Most fruit and vegetable crops are labor-intensive to harvest. Since growers rely on seasonal workers to do the job, immigration issues continue to threaten this workforce.

Bob Ludwig, principal with The Hale Group, Ltd., Danvers, MA, says, "It's not about the cost of labor — it's about having enough labor to harvest crops. Some farmers, convinced they won't have this labor in the future, are switching crops. This is bound to lead to a shortage of some products and surplus of others."

The immigration issue, says Cornell's Hawkes, "isn't something that's going to be resolved in 2008."

As the immigration issue becomes more permanent, says FPAA's Frankel, "Businesses will start to make calculated long-term decisions. Ultimately, growers will locate production where the labor is."

John McClung, president and CEO of the Texas Produce Association (TPA), Mission, TX, notes "The state of Texas is now importing more than 50 percent of the produce we sell to the rest of the nation. If the labor supply continues to be inadequate, our growers will expedite this movement and grow and source even more product out of Mexico."

The attempt, says Michael Stuart, president, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), Maitland, FL, "to use the H2A visa system to bring temporary workers in on a seasonal basis is fine, but it's traditionally supplied less than 2 percent of agricultural workers. Using it

to bring in 50 to 70 percent of those workers would be a significant stretch."

Mechanizing the harvesting process is something that's been explored, Stuart adds, "but this doesn't work for a variety of products. For example, Florida strawberries are 100 percent hand-picked."

"Attaching agricultural jobs to the Farm Bill has a potential danger of putting all of our eggs in one basket," according to McClung.

5. THE FRESHNESS FACTOR

The issues of quality and freshness are key today and for tomorrow, says Thom Blischok, president of retail solutions North America and strategic consulting for Information Resources, Inc. (IRI), Chicago, IL. "Retailers will start to differentiate themselves and their products by quality

"Consumers project their values by the way they eat, for example, including more fresh produce and less of other foods, such as meat and dairy."

**— Roberta Cook
University of California, Davis**

and freshness. For example, they might have electronic tags on products that show when they were picked, packed and shipped. This is akin, for example, to the freshness date on a pack of batteries."

Domestic grower/shippers have dramatically improved product freshness through supply-chain efficiencies. However, this has proved more difficult for some imports. FPAA has tackled this area with a positive result. "There are some 30 checkpoints between the U.S. and Mexican border," Frankel explains. "This has doubled the time it takes to ship product into the United States. Last year, we worked with the Secretary of Defense and the Mexican government to streamline the process for fresh produce. It's been well received so far, and with the immigration issues still unresolved, we expect to see shipments of fresh produce from Mexico double in the next few years."

"We've also worked to enhance infrastructure at the border in Nogales in the form of cold rooms," Frankel adds. "Typically, high-risk commodities for infestation are 100 percent off-loaded in Mexico for inspection. In the past, product sat out at room temperature. Now, with the cold rooms, we're able to keep highly perishable products, such as broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, asparagus and berries, for

example, at 33° with the proper humidity.”

6. HEALTH AND WELLNESS

There's no question health will be a major issue in the coming years, says Harry Balzar, president, NPD Group, Inc., Port Washington, NY. “First, we heard how harmful fat was, then we learned about antioxidants and omega-3. How will health manifest itself in the future? That's the unknown. But it will happen. Health is an ever-changing target.”

IRI's Blischok says, “Today's consumers are becoming more holistic, less sporadic. They have a greater awareness of obesity and its link with escalating health-care costs and a greater realization that terrible eating habits are what has made this a reality.”

As a result, he continues, “We'll see more nutritionally enhanced fruits and vegetables developed in the next five years. This might mean products we haven't seen before, such as different kinds of berries or variegated tomatoes.”

According to Michelle Barry, Ph.D., president of Tinderbox, an extension of The Hartman Group, Inc., Bellevue, WA, there will also be renewed interest in ‘naturally functional’ foods, dedicated to

culture, innovation and trends. “Produce is a key category in this regard. There are a number of produce varieties, such as cactus, mushrooms, pomegranate,

based on specific health advantages. say for diabetes or asthma. This repositions the marketing of the category based on customers' specific health needs.”

“We'll see more nutritionally enhanced fruits and vegetables developed in the next five years.”

**— Thom Blischok
Information Resources, Inc.**

that are naturally good for you and hailed as ‘super foods.’”

Savvy marketing will follow this health theme, experts say.

Larry Finkel, food and beverage research director for Marketresearch.com, New York, NY, says, “It's not your mother's or grandmother's plate of vegetables anymore. Sales of fruits and vegetables will be tied into scientific studies as marketers look for the next big trend, the next low carb.”

Blischok agrees, noting, “Instead of saying apples are good for you, and offering consumers a choice of 28 varieties, companies will offer select varieties and market each of those varieties

The trend naturally leads to the need to educate consumers. “Consumer confidence in mainstream science is declining in favor of quasi-science. Trade associations, consumer advocacy groups and marketers need to provide more science-based information, but do so in a way that is meaningful to the consumer,” says UC Davis' Cook. “In that regard, I don't like to use the word ‘educate’ but rather ‘give’ consumers information — information that applies to them, is convenient and is useful to their decision-making.”


From a public policy standpoint, United's Stenzel says, “We'll see health continue to be a major topic in places such as schools and work sites, and fruits and



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vegetables will figure in prominently. For example, the Farm Bill includes a more-than-\$1-billion allotment for fruits and vegetables in schools”

7. TASTE AND THE CONSUMER'S QUEST FOR 'SOMETHING NEW'

Taste is one of the cornerstones of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. That really is a no-brainer. What takes more thought is assuring that produce is at its most flavorful from seed to satisfied consumer.

“Taste is what causes produce to be served more often on a menu,” notes Tom Nassif, president and chief executive officer of Western Growers Association (WGA), Irvine, CA. “Taste is also what leads school children to eat fruits and vegetables for snacks. Our diminishing labor force can affect the taste of produce by hampering our ability to pick products when they're at their peak of ripeness. This is one of our challenges for the future.”

Pursuing taste has led to a rush of new product development. “Produce is ground zero for innovation. Breeders are enhancing the flavor of fruits and vegetables in ways we didn't think possible in the past,” explains Tinderbox's Barry. “For example, there are personal watermelons and purple carrots. The landscape is changing and it's full of examples. These products offer foodies a real connection in their quest for something new.”

Restaurants play an important role in introducing consumers to new produce concepts, according to Hudson Riehle, senior vice president for research and information services, National Restaurant Association (NRA), Washington, DC. “Today's chefs are much more receptive to working with their suppliers and distributors in menu development. Nowadays, restaurant customers have a more sophisticated palate,” he notes. “They enjoy new items and like to try new and different produce items in familiar and unfamiliar dishes.”

In turn, consumers look to buy a greater variety of fruits and vegetables at the supermarket. “Look at all the SKUs in today's tomato category,” admonishes the Perishable's Group's Lutz. “Field. Grape. Heirloom. It's gone from simple to complex. And there's no end in sight. For example, club varieties, such as Campari tomatoes and Piñata apples, continue to be developed.”

“It's not hard to get new products placed on the shelf at retail. The problem is getting them off the shelf and into con-

sumers' baskets,” he continues. “Marketing sophistication will grow and so will the development of marketing programs versus product programs. It's all about making sure these new items don't fall into the commodity trap, making sure consumers understand what they are and place a higher value on them.”

Bill Bishop, chairman and president of Willard Bishop Consulting Ltd., Barrington, IL, notes, “I don't really buy the idea of too much variety in produce. Good merchandisers will present a variety of product to their customers — to thrill and 'wow' them. It's a way chains can — and will continue to — differentiate themselves from the competition.”

8. LOCALLY GROWN PUTTING A FACE ON PRODUCE

More and more consumers are taking author Henry David Thoreau's words to heart as they work to connect their diets to the seasons, says PMA's Silbermann. “In the process, their love affair with organic and local is exploding.

“While flavor is a key to this trend, it is also fueled by the perception that local equals safer, more healthful, fresher, more flavorful produce grown with less impact on the environment,” he adds.

According to the report, *Fresh and Local Foods in the U.S.*, a June 2007 report by Packaged Facts, Rockville, MD, locally grown foods represented a \$5 billion market in 2007, up from \$4 billion in 2002 and projected to reach \$7 billion by 2011.

“This locally grown phenomenon started with high-end chefs and retail supermarkets, and it has now spread across the industry,” notes Uniited's Stenzel.

According to the Packaged Facts report, Whole Foods Market, Inc., based in Austin, TX, has a new company-wide policy for its stores to buy “out the back door” from at least four local vendors. Other retailers, including Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., based in Bentonville, AR, are testing these waters, too.

The locally grown trend, says Laurie Demeritt, president and CEO of The Hartman Group, “is all about the desire on the part of the consumer to know where and how the product came to be. Not just the science. There's an emotional connection here, a human element.”

PMA's Silbermann agrees, saying, “It's all about connections and focusing on the people behind the scenes. The majority of locavores are motivated by this very basic instinct of matching a product with a place or face. Ignore this



The (racetrack) perimeter, where consumers find perishable products, has become a point of differentiation among retailers.

movement at your peril.” Locavore is a word coined to describe those who eat food harvested from within an area commonly bound by a 100 mile radius.

“Local doesn’t necessarily mean a certain geographic area,” notes Hartman’s Demeritt. “More so, it means a sense of place. For example, a blueberry grower/shipper in Oregon was having a tough time selling his product in Japan. When he put pictures of the his harvesters and farms in-store, sales really took off.”

Locally grown is also a way for retailers to differentiate themselves, she adds. “We hear often consumers want one-stop shopping. But in reality, our research shows consumers visit several stores. It’s therefore better to be known for something, perhaps a local product or products, than simply be a generalist.”

Connections with produce don’t exist just on the supply side, according to PMA’s Silbermann. “Our research tells us that it’s also about the way retailers position their produce departments through their people. Consumers are reporting little, if any, interaction with the clerks in most produce departments. They’ve also told us they would buy more if that interaction increased. Is it any wonder why market-leading retailers always have well-trained produce staff who make it their business to engage their customers?”

9. PERIMETER DEPARTMENTS ARE GAINING GROUND

Perishable departments are of prime

importance to retail supermarkets.

Tinderbox’s Barry says, “The trend of the decade is freshness. It’s how consumers today are defining quality.”

According to Packaged Facts’ report, supermarkets rang up 71 percent of total retail dollar sales of fresh foods in 2005, versus 13 percent in supercenters.

In an effort to differentiate themselves, grocery retailers such as Safeway, Inc., Pleasanton, CA; Wegman’s Food Markets, Inc., Rochester, NY; H.E. Butt Grocery Co., San Antonio, TX; and Food Lion, LLC, Salisbury, NC, have emphasized fresh foods and store layouts that emphasize the perimeters of their stores.

According to the Packaged Facts report, this new business model moves supermarkets away from center aisle groceries to fresher, more exciting formats that emphasize high-quality perishables departments and prepared foods.

Of note is statistics presented in an October 2006 webinar hosted by IRI and FreshLook Marketing Group, Chicago, IL, which revealed fresh produce surpassed fresh meat at the top-selling department in perishables, during the 52-week period ending in August 2007.

This repositioning may be just in time. Retail supermarkets are increasingly facing competition from more than a dozen types of retailers for a share of fresh food sales.

IRI’s Blischok points out, “We’re seeing more channel blurring today. For example, fresh produce is increasingly

being sold outside the supermarket at convenience stores, and in the future, I envision at drug stores. It’s not hard to imagine single-serve or washed and ready-to-eat carrots, celery, tomatoes or apples in a refrigerated case by the checkout.”

Critical to remember, says Willard Bishop’s Bishop “is fresh produce is all new business for retail outlets such as convenience or drug stores. There’s a high incentive as a result.”

10. FROM INGREDIENT TO FULL MEAL

Time-starved consumers are demanding more convenience, higher quality, better nutrition and more variety all with an eye on price.

As a result, these same consumers, according to FMI’s *U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2007*, are showing a keener interest in ready-to-eat solutions, followed by heat-and-serve products and in-store amenities, such as hot food bars and salad bars.

The macro trend that’s shown itself in foodservice and now retail, says the NPD Group’s Balzar, “is for packaged meals — not just packaged foods. Produce plays right into this.”

Marketresearch.com’s Finkel agrees. “There’s a re-emergence or re-emphasis on home meal replacement through the retail format, and I see more produce moving through this channel.”

Finkel continues “This presents a challenge for retailers of managing two different supply chains, one to supply the produce department and one to supply the deli or fresh meals department. Done right, it could present significant cost savings.”

There’s also a change in who’s making meals at home today and a shifting of the target audience.

The NPD’s Balzar says, “Men are moving into the kitchen. Men are now preparing 13 percent of all dinners. This is an all-time high. The grill is a major manifestation of this. Show men how to cook fruits and vegetables on the grill and they’ll be more likely to buy.”

According to IRI’s Blischok, in the future, supermarkets may be redesigned to match how contemporary consumers shop actually for a meal. “That means the center of the plate or meats first, vegetables second, and the rest third. It makes sense.”

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Super Bowl Produce

Proper planning and effective merchandising are critical to cashing in on this major selling event.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

A whopping 93 million viewers watched 2007's Super Bowl XLI, and according to the Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group, vegetables ranked as the most common food on American dinner tables during the past five Super Bowl Sundays.

"The Super Bowl offers a tremendous opportunity for retailers to merchandise key items in the produce department and gain incremental sales," says Candice Blackmore, director of marketing for Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA. "By considering what consumers are looking for and by providing these items in high-visibility locations, you not only make it easy to see but also increase the likelihood of an additional purchase as well."

Here, industry experts offer their top tips for moving more produce during Super Bowl season.

STOCK POPULAR ITEMS

Top-selling produce items for Super Bowl promotions are avocados; guacamole kits; salsa fixings, such as key limes and chili peppers; nuts, such as pistachios; and dips like hummus, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA.

The Super Bowl is the No. 1 selling occasion for

avocados. "Avocados and the Super Bowl have a long history together," notes Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Hass Avocado Board (HAB), Irvine, CA, and vice president of merchandising for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA. "Around 21 years ago, the CAC identified the opportunity to connect guacamole with a major event bringing people together at home and away from home. Traditionally, it provided a tremendous launch to the California season for Hass and provided excellent promotional opportunities for the green skin varieties, such as Bacon and Pinkertons, available at the time.

"In 2007, a record 63.1 million pounds of avocados — 95 percent Hass — were sold for Super Bowl promotions. Put another way, this amount of avocados would have made enough guacamole to fill Dolphin Stadium in Miami 20½-feet deep from end-zone to end-zone," she adds.

This year, the combined availability of avocados out of Chile, Mexico and California are projected to be around 80 million pounds in January and 71 million pounds in February. However, wildfires, which swept through California's largest avocado growing region in October, are expected to reduce the state's initial 365-million-pound crop estimate for the 2007-08 season by 10 percent.

"Super Bowl traditionally falls at the end of the Chilean season, in the mid-part of the Mexican season and at the start of the California season," explains Ross Wileman, vice president of sales and marketing for Mission Produce Inc., Oxnard, CA, "so there's a lot of flexibility as to where buyers go for the best variety, eating quality and cost."

Shane Towne, marketing and new business development coordinator for Indianapolis Fruit Company, Indianapolis, IN, states, "In the past, retailers would only carry one SKU of avocado — now it's several."

"A two-size strategy can increase category volume and sales by nearly 100 percent," DeLyser says.

Be sure to have enough fruit in stock, particularly ripe fruit. "Some retail stores have run out of avocados by Super Bowl Sunday," she adds. "In 2006,



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Retailers Nationwide Get Creative For Super Bowl

nearly 4 percent of all annual avocado retail sales volume occurred during the Super Bowl. Remember, too, that during this time, shoppers' demand for ripe avocados can be as much as four-to-one over firm fruit. Fruit sold with 'ripe' stickers can outsell non-stickered fruit by as much as 28 percent."

To assure having the proper ripeness on hand, Mission's Wileman notes, "Some retailers request delivery anywhere from three to five days a week. We have seven regional ripening centers across the nation, so this makes it easier to deliver fruit at the right condition."

This season, grower/shippers and marketers are making it easier for consumers to prepare guacamole. Mission has introduced fresh-cut avocado halves. "These allow consumers to make guacamole they can customize to their own tastes. It also lets them simply slice the halves for use in sandwiches and salads," he explains.

Earlier in 2007, Melissa's introduced a guacamole kit. Packaged in a clamshell, each kit contains two ripe avocados, one Roma tomato, one shallot, two garlic cloves, one lime and one jalapeño pepper. Each kit makes two cups of fresh guacamole.

Z&S Fresh, Inc., Fresno, CA, also introduced a Fresh Salsa Kit in 2007 under the Old El Paso label.

NOT JUST AVOCADOS

"What would guacamole, salsa, chili and other winter comfort foods be without onions?" asks Rodger Helwig, marketing communications director, OsoSweet Onions, which are marketed in the United States by Saven Corp., Waterford, MI. "We get a tremendous boost in sales leading up to the Super Bowl. Our sales can increase 50 to 75 percent in the weeks before the big game."

In the 2007 NFL playoffs, in-demand produce items included vegetables, such as carrots, celery and cherry tomatoes, for party trays as well as pre-assembled vegetable and fruit trays, states Towne of Indianapolis Fruit.

"We introduced our premium party trays in November 2006 and they indexed at 122 percent the week of Super Bowl last year," states Ali Leon, director of fruit, vegetables and corporate communications for Ready Pac Inc., Irwindale, CA. The company's three new premium party tray line includes Tropical Fruit Tray with Lemon Chiffon Dip, Apples with Cinnamon Crème Tray, and Fruit-Cheese-Vegetable Sampler.

In addition, as more consumers are looking for healthful options, hummus is gaining popularity as a Super Bowl snack. "The hummus category in general, organic and non-organic, is up 24 percent year over year," explains Hilary Taube, vice president

of marketing, Galaxy Nutritional Foods, Inc., Orlando, FL. "Layer on top of this the popularity of organic foods, which was a \$13.8 billion category up 16 percent in 2005."

Avocados, as well as other snack items, are featured for Super Bowl promotions at Bristol Farms, a 15-store chain based in Carson, CA. "We hold a merchandising contest in our stores to see who can set the best display," explains Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral. "The theme is obviously around football with mock goal posts and footballs, for example, worked in and around the produce to create excitement. In addition, our stores set up satellite displays of avocados and snack items near the entrance of the store, in the liquor department and in the deli."

Avocados are among produce items featured in newspaper ads and special displays for Super Bowl at Dorothy Lane Markets, a 3-store chain based in Dayton, OH. "Super Bowl is a big promotional time for us," says produce director Jose Manzano. "That's why we build the display right in the front lobby — so customers can see it as soon as they come in. If they weren't thinking about stocking up for the big game when they came in, we make sure to entice them so that they do."

Jim Weber, produce supervisor at Econo Foods, an independent 6-store chain based in Iron Mountain, MI, states, "We set up a large display of avocados, both the Hass and lower-fat variety out of Florida, during our Super Bowl promotion period. There are also three flavors of pre-packaged guacamole dip incorporated as part of our Super Bowl promotional display, which is two to three times the display space as we normally give avocados. We pre-ripen the avocados and price promote them the Thursday, Friday and Saturday before the game."

Peanuts are also a big seller for Econo Foods during football season. "We carry them in bins, but in tote bags instead of loose," he explains. "We observed that 50 percent of customers wouldn't stop to bag the peanuts. Once we started bagging them, we found a 30 percent sales increase."

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of marketing, Galaxy Nutritional Foods, Inc., Orlando, FL. "Layer on top of this the popularity of organic foods, which was a \$13.8 billion category up 16 percent in 2005."

"While conventional hummus is typically merchandised in the deli, organic hummus is sold through the produce department," she adds. Galaxy introduced its 8-ounce tubs of Wholesome Valley Organic Hummus in August 2007. Flavors include Classic, Roasted Red Pepper, Garlic and Spicy Chipotle.

The No. 1 selling occasion of the year for peanuts, states Quaylene Parkey, director of special marketing for Hampton Farms, Severn, NC, is the Super Bowl, followed closely by the World Series.

"In-shell peanuts are very popular for Super Bowl parties," says Terry Williams, national sales manager, Sachs Peanuts, Clarkton, NC. "They have a definite play factor."

"It's important to stock a variety of peanut products to suit a wide range of consumer needs. For example, carry both 3- and 5-pound bags," he adds. "Different bag sizes allow you to hit different price points. Also offer both traditional roasted and salted in-shell peanuts and add our new Tabasco-flavored in-shell peanut to your lineup."

"We see flavored peanuts really gaining ground," Parkey adds. "In fact, our Cajun seasoned in-shell peanuts have experienced a bump in sales. In addition, after the classic

salted, the Chile Limon flavor is now No. 2 in sales for our shelled cocktail peanuts."

This flavor trend applies to pistachios, too. Paramount Farms, Los Angeles, CA, has added two flavors — European Roast and Salt & Pepper — in addition to Roasted & Salted and Roasted No Salt to its Everybody's Nuts line of premium large pistachios. "Since we launched the brand about a year ago, 75 percent of the sales have been incremental pistachio sales," explains Marc Seguin, marketing director. "In addition, the incremental sales are coming on all four SKUs."

START PROMOTING EARLY

After New Year's, start ramping up for Super Bowl promotions, Williams recommends. "The demand for many produce items drops after this time, so it's a great time to bring in something new or enhance displays of no shrink, low labor and high-margin items like peanuts. Also, you've got a base of customers who follow all the games leading up to the Super Bowl and are active armchair snackers."

"I would start promoting to the consumer in early January. As for the buyers, we are targeting them in the early winter to make sure they are on board. We like to give them six weeks prior to the event to discuss, write the ad and figure the best ad campaign for the particular item," explains Justin Bed-

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Reader Service # 12

well, director of marketing, Z&S Fresh.

HAB's DeLyser adds, "Begin 'priming the pump' or, in other words, reminding consumers that Super Bowl is near with in-store point-of-sale materials in early-to mid-January."

Final preparations for a Super Bowl promotion necessitate a twofold approach, suggests Apio's Blackmore. "About two to three weeks before the event, set displays and get the word out about what your store has to

"Some retailers have set up a truck bed in the produce department to give the idea of tailgating."

**— Shane Towne
Indianapolis Fruit Co.**

offer. You want to create visibility early and make the link in shoppers' minds that your store is the place to think of first when the time comes to purchase. The second part happens the week preceding the Super Bowl. Place ads in circulars and step up displays to increase visibility and drive sales right through to game day."

CREATE ENTICING DISPLAYS

To grab consumers' attention, "Some retailers have set up a truck bed in the produce department to give the idea of tailgating," says Indianapolis Fruit's Towne. "Others have lined the floor around the Super Bowl display with artificial turf from their lawn-and-garden department; still others have decorated displays with football helmets and jerseys."

More specifically, DeLyser recommends, "Offer multiple displays of avocados within the produce department."

"Display party trays on refrigerated end caps close to high-traffic areas," suggests Ready Pac's Leon. Attractive signage can suggest to consumers the trays are a perfect addition to their Super Bowl parties."

"Organic hummus merchandises well near the fresh-cut vegetables or party platters. We offer danglers and channel strips to call attention to this new item," notes Galaxy's Taube.

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Cleverly Cross-Merchandise

Paramount Farms is offering retailers an easy-to-set-up, football-themed shipper for a special football promotion set to run Jan. 14 through March 2, 2008. The shipper measures 5-feet high with a 15- by 15.25-inch base, holds four cases of Everybody's Nuts and comes with a tear-off pad of \$1-off coupons for a 7-ounce pack of pistachios.

ADVERTISE, PROMOTE AND WIN SALES

There are two schools of thought when it comes to advertising and promoting popular produce items for the Super Bowl.

"Some retailers say avocados will sell anyway, so they don't promote," Mission's Wileman explains. "Other retailers, the vast majority, opt to promote avocados because they see that they're part of a multiple ring and they want that customer in the store."

Advertising promotional items in the weekly ad circular is crucial, says Paramount's Seguin. "You don't want to wait until customers are in-store to let them know what's on promotion. You want to let them know in advance."

As for avocados, DeLyser says, "Retailers understand advertising avocados is a powerful tool to drive sales. From 2005 to 2007, retailers increased their advertising of avo-

cadados by 28.9 percent and Super Bowl sales have increased by 14.6 percent.

HAB's 2008 business plan includes Big Game promotions as one of four major initiatives. "We have point-of-sale signage

available for retailers, a consumer public relations program in support of communicating Hass avocados as a must-have ingredient for game day party menus and consumer information on HAB's Web site," she says.

"Cross-merchandise peanuts with soft drinks and beer," says Quaylene Parkey, director of special marketing for Hampton Farms, Severn, NC. "It has a hand-and-glove effect."

"Cross-merchandise avocados in the chip aisle or alongside beer," advises Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Hass Avocado Board (HAB), Irvine, CA, and vice president of merchandising for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA. "Within the produce department, tie in all the fixings needed to make guacamole, including lemon, garlic, cilantro, tomatoes and onions. For example, avocado sales increase by 11.7 percent when displayed next to onions, lemons and peppers. Bagged avocado sales increase 15.59 percent when displayed with onions and 6.18 percent when displayed next to lemons."

Candice Blackmore, director of marketing for Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, adds, "Basically, large cross-promotional displays featuring a variety of meal and snacking options for tailgate parties or sporting events will entice shoppers to pick up all of their supplies for entertaining in one central location."

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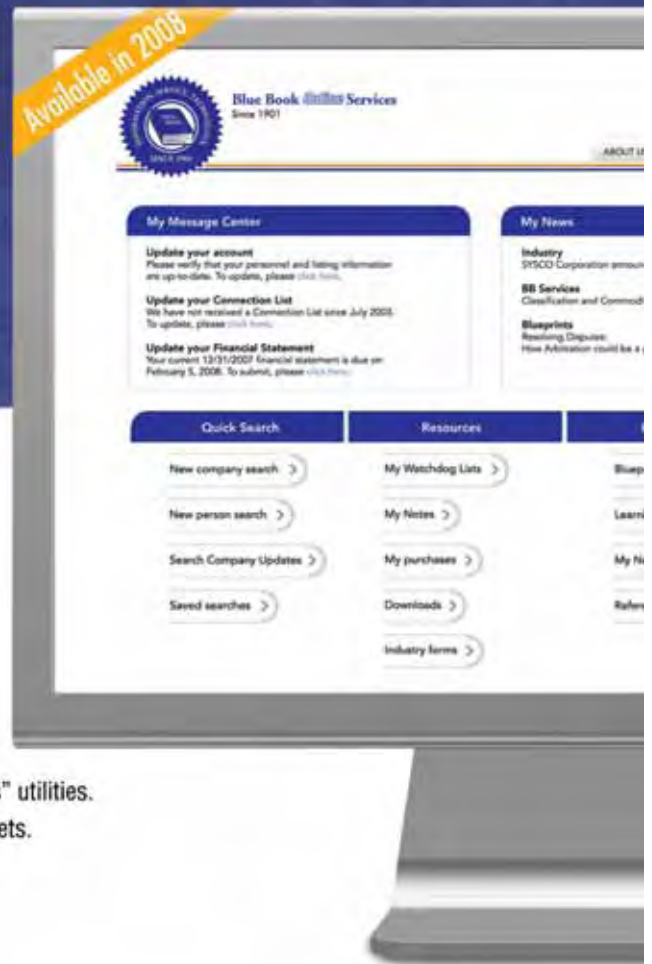
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Weakened Dollar Among South American Import Challenges

Currency exchange rates top the list of variables for these upcoming seasonal offerings.

BY DUANE CRAIG

In the face of a weakening dollar, recent and past weather events and the long-term effects of some unfavorable markets to growers last year, the outlook on South American produce imports is a bit hazy this year.

"You never know what's going to happen," notes Peter Kopke, president of William H. Kopke Jr., Inc., headquartered in Lake Success, NY, about Chilean produce. "It looks like a good crop that's on the late side. So far the growing conditions are good and the quality is expected to be very good so it's just a question of how much will ultimately be shipped. However, volume will be delayed compared to last year and it won't come out the way it did last year. The growers took a terrific beating last March."

Kopke says a poor market and grapes affected by wet weather forced growers to ship less-than-ideal product over a very brief period. He doesn't see that scenario happening this year.

Manuel Alcaino, president of Santiago, Chile-based Decofruit, which offers marketing and quality-control services to both importers and exporters, shares similar views about the upcoming season. "We are very optimistic about the quality of the fruit and the volume," he relates. "We are looking at a very good season regardless of the fact the crop is between one and two weeks late."

A late crop can cause problems due to heavy volumes in a short period of time along with transportation issues due to increased demand without a corresponding increase in cargo space, he adds.

Citing last year's market activity, Alcaino says many times the produce market, like the stock market, overreacts to negative information. "Last year, when we had the rains, everybody knew about it the day after," he explains. "But when we started making an analysis on the real effect of the rain, the damage was much greater from the panic that was introduced than the actual water on the fruit. So this is the kind of information we intend to provide, so at least people can know the real situation and, in turn, make informed decisions." For example, the company now releases a weekly Chilean fresh fruit crop update.

PRICES MAY CLIMB

While more accurate information may help minimize fears about peaks and valleys in supplies, some experts believe the price paid for the produce may be due for correction.

"Many retailers have had the benefit of a market often oversupplied with fruit," according to Mark Greenberg, senior vice president for procurement for Fisher Capespan USA, LLC, Gloucester City, NJ. "Fruit doesn't last long and if you can't sell it today at prices profitable to the producer, it's not like you can wait six weeks because of surplus in the market."

"One thing I am saying to clients who want specific products in specific packages is for them to get me the program they want early because I believe I'm looking at a smaller pool of available fruit," he adds.

The dollar is so weak right now, notes Kopke's Kopke, anything his company sells is at a price 10 percent less than it was last year. "That's a big prob-



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lem for the growers. For the same prices we had last year, they get 10 to 15 percent less, so it destroys their profit margin. The fruit has to bring in more money to make it pay for the producers. The freight is higher because of the situation with the shortage of ships and the prices of fuel. If this continues, the business will change radically."

For the past two years, Chile has experienced very difficult grape production sea-

Growers face the challenge of regaining their profitability in light of this year's major issue of the weaker U.S. dollar.

sons, Fisher Capespan's Greenberg points out. "I would venture to say a lot of the pricing on table grapes that has returned to Chilean exporters has been a money loser to their growers. For this market, the challenge is going to be to regain its position as a market that rewards good producers of good fruit with profitable returns. The weaker U.S. dollar adds to that challenge."

Given good production this year, he says growers still face the challenge of regaining their profitability in light of this year's major issue of the weaker U.S. dollar.

While acknowledging the currency exchange rate will move a certain amount of product to other markets, John Pandol, manager of Mexican sourcing and special projects for Pandol Brothers, Inc., Delano, CA, doesn't see U.S. shelves going empty.

Likewise, Tom Tjerandsen, managing director of North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), Sonoma, CA, highlights the importance of the North American market to Chilean producers. "There's been a lot of conjecture whether or not the volume to North America will fall because we compete with the Euro for fruit," he says, "but given the extraordinary importance of

Chilean Fruit Expected To Soar But Weak Dollar To Affect U.S. Sales

Manuel Alcaino, president of Decofruit, Santiago, Chile, predicts the Chilean fruit industry will move into high gear with new varieties and major production boosts. "There's something very interesting about the cherries," he says. "Chile has a tremendous potential in cherries because when it is in the market, it has few competitors. Due to this beneficial situation, Chile has grown its capacity to produce over the last four to six years. Not only are there a lot of new plantations, but there is also the new technology in terms of genetics. We are seeing good early varieties and good late varieties, which stretch the season a lot more than what Chile had with Bing cherries."

The volume is also growing along with the season. This year, Chile expects 57 percent more cherry exports than last year. Part of the reason the number is so striking is because last year's crop was hurt by adverse weather conditions. Still, Chile expects to ship 38,000 tons this year compared to last year's 24,300 tons, Alcaino notes. The new varieties cope well with shipment by sea and arrive in good condition, he emphasizes. The new varieties will account for 40 percent of Chile's total cherry exports.

Overall, Alcaino says Chile's fruit exports should increase three to five percent over last year's exports. Peaches, however, is expected to decline because many acres of older varieties are being removed and replacements are not up to production yet. Apricots are coming on strong with an estimated 16 percent increase, while nectarines and plums are each expected to gain 3 percent. Likewise, grapes are expected to jump 3 percent with early grapes from the Copiapo Valley gaining 12 percent.

The total amount of fruit destined for the United States, however, may hang in the balance due to a weaker dollar. "In general, fruit will be diverted to Europe rather than the United States, because the Euro is very strong and the dollar is very weak," Alcaino explains. "The Chileans need higher prices to cope with a weak dollar. If the market insists on selling at the same level of prices as last year, the volume to U.S. ports will drop very quickly." **pb**

the North American market, the sources in Chile can't afford to walk away from something that may be just the swing of the pendulum — and it swings both ways.

"The last thing they want to do is to leave their retail partners in North America with the impression they're fair-weather friends and they're only going to be providing support and product when they can generate enough revenue to make it worthwhile," Tjerandsen continues.

Fernando Albareda, trade commissioner at the Consulate General of Peru in Miami FL, doesn't see any major impact from the dollar's devaluation on volumes of asparagus bound for the United States. Since there are few markets that can handle the volumes Peru has, diverting the product to other markets is a difficult thing to do, he points out. He does concede, however, that prices may be higher.

OPPORTUNITIES REMAIN RIPE

While challenges exist, no one underestimates the opportunities available to retailers when sourcing from South America.

"I think the chain stores have wonderful

opportunities," Greenberg says. "Chile, Brazil and Peru are excellent producers of table grapes. Chile and Argentina also produce apples, pears, citrus, kiwi and avocados. Chile is an extremely able producer with a very well-defined, well-developed, sophisticated exporting industry."

Tjerandsen spotlights the large volumes available to retailers to fill a period when profits in produce are traditionally pretty slim. "The first two of the volume items — cherries and apricots — are already on time this year. Everything else is running about seven to 10 days late because of an exceptionally cool spring.

"The increased arrivals in global sourcing are now providing more and more categories in produce for which a 12-month supply is assured. That also includes asparagus and berries, so retailers can be confident in allocating space to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables on a year-round basis, especially since their shoppers are attuned to looking for that," he explains

Chile is responsible for nearly half of all the food shipped from the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern Hemisphere, including more than 70 different varieties of fruits



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and vegetables. "Fruit alone is more than 100 million boxes and that's of the total 225 million they export," Tjerandsen states, "so North America is a principle receiver of that bounty from the Southern Hemisphere."

Due to South America's geographical diversity, retailers have the choice of selecting from an extensive list of products. "The tropical soil and climate allow the growth of bananas, pineapples, papaya and mangoes, just to name a few," notes Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL. "Less tropical climates allow the growth of fruits such as apples, grapes, pears, cherries and Clementines. Growers can also provide retailers with more exotic fruits, such as cherimoyas, star fruit, passion fruit and tamarind.

"The industry has funded — and we are prepared to field on its behalf — a full-blown promotion program that's equal to or greater than any we've ever had in the past."

**— Tom Tjerandsen
Chilean Fresh
Fruit Association**

"Sourcing from South America offers similar advantages as sourcing from Central America," he adds. "Retailers know the right produce suppliers have better control of fruit quality, food safety, traceability, environmental and social conditions. With such an array of fruits and excellent quality, retailers will be able to satisfy Americans' increasingly demanding palates for new flavors."

According to Albareda, Peru's fresh asparagus exports reached \$150 million in 2006 and 70 percent of that was imported into the U.S. The country is also a major supplier of mangos and grapes, and grape production of Red Globes and Flames is expanding. He says

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Reader Service # 24



Peru is a growing supplier of organic bananas and a variety of sweet, yellow onion that is courting favor with American's taste buds. Peru is diversified in its exports.

"In our case, one-third of our agricultural products go to the United States," says Albareda, "and more than a third go to Europe." He says the countries of Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Spain take the bulk of the European shipments, and Asia is increasingly an important trading partner.

One "new" flavor set to satisfy American demand is the papaya, which is readily available from South America, but which can't be grown in volume in the United States, explains Melissa Hartmann de Barros, director of communications for HLB Tropical Food USA, Inc./Caliman International, Pompano Beach, FL.

"Papayas are one of the most healthful fruits in the world and they have become a staple in all supermarkets," she says. Besides the golden papaya, HLB imports single-serving papayas, which are smaller and better suited for small families and couples. HLB's papayas have the added benefit of not being irradiated as are those from other locations, she claims.

PROMOTIONS AND SOURCING SCENARIOS

Not only do importers work closely with retailers to deliver the kinds of produce requested, but they also fill a role in sourcing the desired packaging. This year, Kopke is adding the Disney Garden packaging.

"The industry has funded — and we are prepared to field on its behalf — a full-blown promotion program that's equal to or greater

than any we've ever had in the past," Tjerandson says.

The path to sourcing South American produce is fairly straightforward with subtle variations depending on the partners a retailer chooses to work with. "Retailers don't need to talk to anybody in South America since we take care of that for them," HLB's Hartmann de Barros says. "We negotiate terms and quality standards with the growers and we handle returns if there are problems. We are the link to the product and to the grower." HLB uses air cargo almost exclusively for delivery to the United States, which is posing some new challenges. With the weaker U.S. dollar, more people in South America are traveling and the extra luggage planes have to carry sometimes limits available cargo space for produce. In addition, higher fuel costs have caused a 200 percent increase in freight costs, she says.

"If buyers know exactly what they want, in what packaging and in what time periods, we set up a program through producers in Chile," explains Fisher Capespan's Greenberg. "Chilean exporters are looking for some certainty in the prices that will be returned to them for their fruit. However, most of the fruit from South America is sold on the transactional market, and we are one of numerous companies that sell South American produce, and specifically Chilean produce, to North America.

The bulk of palletized South American produce arrives via ship and is discharged on the West Coast in Los Angeles and on the East Coast at one of three ports along the Delaware River, he adds.

pb

THE FLORIDA STRAWBERRY REPORT



Retailers from north to south rally to promote Florida strawberries during their winter season.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Florida's reputation as the Winter Strawberry Capital is very appropriate. While the Sunshine State ranks No.2 behind California in strawberry production, supplying 15 percent of the nation's total, Florida's Hillsborough County supplies nearly 18 million flats — or almost all of the strawberries grown during the winter.

According to Teagan Donovan, manager and buyer, Jungle Jim's International Market, in Fairfield, OH, "We start bringing in Florida

strawberries in December and run them right through March, and post our biggest displays during peak volume times in February and March. We always sign them as coming from Florida. It really helps make that warm and sunny connection to consumers in the cold of winter."

Florida strawberry growers begin planting as early as Sept. 20 in the northern part of the state and finish up planting as late as Dec. 1 in the south.

"The weather was perfect for planting this year," states Tom O'Brien, president of C&D Fruit and Vegetable Company, Inc., based in Bradenton, FL. "We were right on schedule."

However, he adds, "There can be a lot of temperature fluctuations throughout the season, affecting crop yields and pack-outs on a week-to-week basis. Forecasting isn't an exact science, but we do put out weekly estimates to our retail buyers. Thanks to the Internet, we can e-mail buyers pictures of the fields in real-time to give them firsthand knowledge in planning their promotions."

The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Washington, D.C., predicts a weak-to-moderate La Niña conditions for the 2007-08 winter season, which should result in warm, dry weather. Although dry weather means a decrease in strawberry fungal and bacterial diseases, it also means the possibility of water shortages in the spring.

A drought shouldn't severely impact Florida's strawberries, O'Brien notes. "Most of us are using 100 percent drip irrigation, so we don't have near the water usage we did years ago."

The first flat of Florida strawberries for the 2007-08 season was picked and packed on Nov. 6. Although promotional volumes usually start to peak in January, experimentation with two new varieties could push this up as the holidays approach.

According to Craig K. Chandler, Ph.D., a strawberry breeder with the University of Florida's (UF) Gulf Coast Research & Edu-

"Our advantage in Florida is that we can get berries much faster and fresher to the Northeast than California can. The freight savings are a benefit, too."

— Bob Hinton
Hinton Farms Produce, Inc

cation Center, Wimauma, FL, "This season, two selections from our breeding program will be evaluated in grower trials. The first has the potential to produce high early-season yields of large, attractive fruit. The second is also an early producer, and its fruit is large, flavorful and firm."

At the opposite end of the seasonal spectrum, "Many retailers automatically switch to California at the beginning of April," Gary Wishnatzki, president and CEO of Wishnatzki Farms, Plant City, FL, says, "but that may change, particularly for our regional and East Coast retailers as the sustainability trend takes hold and consumers start demanding more locally grown produce. We've got significant volume of strawberries into April and need to promote it."

Florida's prime strawberry market is east of the Mississippi. "Ninety percent of our crop goes out of state," O'Brien notes.

Bob Hinton, sales manager at Hinton Farms Produce, Inc., Dover, FL, adds, "Our advantage in Florida is that we can get berries much faster and fresher to the Northeast than California can. The freight savings are a benefit, too."

Some 95 to 98 percent of Florida's strawberries are packed in clamshell packs, O'Brien says.

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Promoting Fresh Florida Strawberries

Throughout the country, retailers are reaping the benefits of promoting fresh Florida strawberries. Acme Market, a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA, and owned by Super-Valu, Eden Prairie, MN, is a good example. "We will run buy-one-get-one ads on the cover of our weekly circular in some weeks and inside sub-features in other weeks," explains Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division.

"Either way, we always display the *Florida Fresh* logo to let customers know they are purchasing Florida berries. These ad promotions are coupled with a prominent front table display near the entrance of the department to entice impulse purchases," he adds.

The Valentine's Day promotion featuring Florida strawberries is one promotion. "Stores really rally around and the event has become bigger and bigger each year," Schneider says. "We'll sell fresh strawberries and chocolate-dipped strawberries. This creates a lot of excitement in-store."

Sweetbay Supermarkets, a 137-store chain based in Tampa, FL, features fresh Florida strawberries throughout the season, particularly during a weeklong, in-store promotion in February. "Florida strawberries are one of the featured items we promote in a big way each year," explains Steve Williams, produce director. "It's a real home-field advantage for us, especially being so close to the growers in

Plant City. For example, we work with Astin Farms [Plant City, FL], which can pick the berries, pre-cool them and send them to our distribution centers. We can then ship them out to individual stores all within 24 hours. Now that's fresh."

Every February, in conjunction with the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Plant City, FL, Sweetbay Supermarkets holds a display contest that spotlights strawberries for its associates. "It's one of our biggest merchandising contests of the year with 97 percent of our stores participating," Williams says.

The individual produce managers strive to showcase their creativity. For example, one brought a flatbed truck filled with strawberries into a store to portray a farm-fresh appeal. Others have tied in ingredients, such as angel food cake and shortcakes from the bakery along with whipped cream from the dairy aisle. They then set up a table where they assembled custom-made strawberry shortcakes-to-go for customers.

These special displays are accompanied by front-page ads for strawberries during this promotional time period. In addition, Astin Farm and its family members are featured on in-store signage and in ads. "This is a very successful promotion for us and it's a great way for us to support local farmers and the local economy," Williams acknowledges. **pb**

ingly important. Robert Wilson, president of Wilson & Son Sales, Inc., Plant City, FL, explains, "One-pound clamshells are the workhouse of the category, while 2-pounders and even 4-pounders are strong

second and thirds, especially during peak volumes in production."

Wishnatzki Farms moved to a taller clamshell last season. "We were experiencing bruising on the larger fruit and this

doesn't happen as much with the taller pack style," Wishnatzki notes.

FLORIDA-BRED VARIETIES

Florida strawberries get their high sugar

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content from growing conditions that consist of warm days and cool nights. "The hallmark of our fruit is consistent taste and sugar," says C&D's O'Brien. "This comes from our temperatures, soils and the varieties we grow."

According to UF forecasters, the percentage of acreage in various strawberry cultivars will be similar to last season, that is, about 60 percent Festival, 15 percent Treasure, 10 percent Driscoll cultivars and 20 percent other varieties, which are largely made up of Camino Real, Winter Dawn, Camarosa and Carmine.

George Huppman, sales manager for Dixie Growers, Inc., Plant City, FL, notes, "The Festival variety is the majority of what we grow."

UF's Chandler explains, "Festival, released from UF in 2000, is a grower favorite because it has a sturdy bush that is easy to harvest, doesn't yield huge quantities of fruit on any one date and produces very few cull fruit. Additionally, the Festival is a supermarket favorite because its fruits are attractive, fit well in 1-pound clamshell containers and have a long shelf life."

The Festival is one of six varieties patent-

ed in less than a decade by UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Strawberry Research Center, Dover, FL. The other five varieties include Sweet Charlie, Rosa Linda, Earlibrite, Carmine and Winter Dawn.

"When we're able to bring the price [of organic strawberries] closer to conventional, then we'll be able to expand even more quickly."

— Gary Wishnatzki
Wishnatzki Farms

ORGANIC AVAILABILITY

While there is not a lot of organic strawberry production in Florida, a few growers are venturing into organics. One of the biggest, both in terms of conventional and organic production, is Wishnatzki Farms. In 2003, Wishnatzki teamed with strawberry grower Allen Williford to form Clear Choice Greenhouses, LLC, Thonotosassa, FL, and start organic strawberry production in a 1-acre greenhouse. Three years later, the company added 13 acres of outside organic strawberry production to keep up with increasing demand.

"Heat and humidity make it difficult to grow organically in Florida, but we've overcome the challenges. That's because all major retailers want organic berries year-round and we can now fill that void where they previously had to go without for a month or two," Wishnatzki explains.

This season, Wishnatzki added covered tunnels to six of its outside organic production acres. "This allows us to grow new varieties with excellent flavor that we may develop into proprietary varieties and to double our yields over last year," he explains.

Volume increases are key to getting cost down, Wishnatzki says. "When we're able to bring the price closer to conventional, then

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PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Price is the most common way retailers promote Florida strawberries, says C&D's O'Brien. "We work with several chains in the Northeast. Some offer one steady low price, while others offer a hot price one week and then raise the price to market level the next week. Either way, strawberries are a big item at retail and very profitable since they generate lots of turns."

"Valentine's Day is a big time for Florida strawberry promotions," notes Wilson of Wilson & Son.

Easter is also a good promotional time for Florida berries, says Wishnatzki's Wishnatzki Farms, "Especially if it's early, like this year, on March 23. Locally grown is another ideal theme to hook Florida strawberry promotions and retailers can play on this all season."

This season, the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA), Plant City, FL, will embark on creating a new look and new materials designed to build a brand name for the state's berries using the tag line, *Nutritious and Delicious*.

According to Sue Harrell, FSGA director of marketing, explains, "We're starting this season with a brochure we can hand out to consumers at taste demos and other promotions. Then, we'll keep adding pieces such as bin wrap and recipe pads, so that over the next five years, we'll have a consistent look to our materials that consumers will recognize."

FSGA will host its annual retail display contest again this season. Sweetbay and Publix, the 834-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL, are among major Florida retailers participating in the contest.

Finally, FSGA will also use a portion of its \$100,000 budget for the production and airing of a television commercial that will be broadcast throughout the state.

"The commercial opens with a close-up on a flat of strawberries in the field," Harrell states. "Then it moves into the kitchen, where a mom is washing berries for her children. Key points conveyed are the freshness and the healthfulness of fresh Florida strawberries."

The future of the Florida strawberry industry looks bright, notes C&D's O'Brien. "Strawberries, along with blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, are hailed as super foods, and consumers are now accustomed to buying them every week. Kid's like strawberries too. That's a definite strength we have going and it will only continue to grow."

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Reader Service # 88

High Quality Deep In The Heart Of Texas

The state continues to grow and diversify as a key player in the produce industry.

BY LISA LIEBERMAN

In agriculture, where profit margins keep getting tighter and growing and shipping costs keep getting higher, growers and suppliers need to take advantage of every competitive edge they can get.

Although Texas has had its fair share of setbacks in the past, including two major freezes in the 1980s, these days, Texas is becoming more of a major player in the produce world — because of both its own domestic production and the product it imports from Mexico.

Texas has the jump on many of the country's first domestic products. "We have the first new products of the year in several produce categories," says David DeBerry, president of David K. DeBerry Inc., McAllen, TX. "Early March is the New Year in produce, and there's a lot of excitement going on and a lot of people look forward to what's going to come out of Texas."

Texas is strongest in onions, watermelons, cabbage, greens and red grapefruit. The red grapefruit, which grew from \$19.4 million in 2002 to \$63.3 million in revenue in 2006, has become a particularly strong commodity. The orange category has also picked up substantially, increasing in value from \$6.7 million in 2002 to \$10.6 million in 2006. The value of Texas watermelon increased from \$56 million in 2002 to \$62 million in 2006.

1015 SWEET ONION GROWTH

Texas is well known for its sweet 1015 onion, which comes out in March and is the first domestic sweet onion of the year in the United States.

"We've had some significant growth in the sweet mild onion

category. The sweet onions are available in greater volume for longer periods of time — generally at lower prices on average than they would have been years ago," DeBerry adds.

DeBerry ships 1015s out of Mexico in January and February until the Texas 1015 production picks up in early March. The 1015s don't have any other domestic competition until Vidalia onions start coming out of Georgia in April.

The Texas onion growers face a challenge rooted in success. Since Vidalia onion suppliers have done such a good job of promoting their onions, as soon as the Vidalia season starts, many buyers tend to back off of the 1015s. "I'd like to see retailers lay out the two onions side by side and let consumers decide which ones they like best," DeBerry says.

One difference between the two onions is that Vidalias are thicker and flatter while 1015s are rounder and more globe-like. "In a lot of ways, the 1015s are easier to handle," he notes.

Although competition for the 1015s gets stiffer as the season goes on, Texas and surrounding states tend to stay loyal to Texas produce. "We have our greatest grassroots demand from consumers in places like Chicago, De Moines, Kansas City, Minneapolis and, to some extent, parts of the West Coast and the upper Northwest," DeBerry explains.

TEXAS CITRUS

Thin skin and deep red color distinguish Texas red grapefruit from grapefruit grown in California or Florida. Traditionally, the fruit is available from late September through June, says Paula Fouчек, marketing director for Edinburg Citrus Association, Edinburg, TX.

"The distinctive difference between grapefruit grown in south Texas compared to other areas of the country is that it's a semi-tropical environment. You've got the rich, fertile soils of the Rio Grande River and the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico in the coastal areas that have higher humidity and produce juicy, thin-skinned fruit," Edinburg's Fouчек explains.



Photo courtesy of Texas Department of Agriculture

Go Texan Campaign Fueling Promotion Efforts

David DeBerry, president of David K. DeBerry, Inc., McAllen, TX, says local growers and state organizations are utilizing a campaign to promote more Texas produce. Eight years ago, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Austin, TX, launched the *Go Texan* program designed to promote everything grown or processed in Texas.

"The program is taking off because the trend these days is that consumers are looking to buy local. Eighty to 95 percent of produce grown in Texas is sold in Texas," says Richard De Los Santos, TDA marketing coordinator for horticulture and produce. "The buyers have been very supportive."

The *Go Texan* campaign is getting ready to expand into a new *Go Texan* restaurant program, which will promote Texas restaurants that serve locally grown produce. "We're trying to drive more consumers to restaurants that serve Texas-grown produce, and we're doing a lot more media advertising with that," he says.

Ultimately, the *Go Texan* campaign could go a step further and create "Taste of the City" tours for major cities, such as Dallas, Houston and Austin. "We could do things like a Taste of Dallas or a Taste of Austin, where people would get on a bus and have an appetizer in one restaurant, a main course in another restaurant and a dessert in another place, with all products from Texas," De Los Santos explains.

Paula Fouchek, marketing director for Edinburg Citrus Association, Georgetown, TX, thinks Texas has a very loyal customer base within the state and throughout the country. The Rio Star Grapefruit, which has grown in acreage from 5,650 acres in 2002 to 7,100 acres in 2006, is one of the products that have become especially popular in recent years. **pb**

The Rio Star is the most popular red grapefruit grown in Texas. The Ruby Red, which comprises 10 to 15 percent of Texas grapefruit, is gradually being phased out of production. The advantage of the Rio Star is that it retains its deep red color throughout the year, while the Ruby Reds tend to fade toward the end of the season.

The Rio Star is rich in lycopene, which is an attribute Richard Walsh, consultant for Healds Valley Farms, Inc., Edinburg, TX, wants to see getting more media attention.

In Texas, many consumers wait for Texas specialties like the Rio Star and the sweet 1015 onions to come into season, says Tommy Fulmer, produce manager, Stephens Grocery and Market, Pilot, TX. "People like to buy produce that's locally grown, and whenever we get Texas red grapefruits or sweet onions in, we don't even have to promote them. All we have to do is put up a sign that says Texas onions or Texas grapefruit," he notes.

Texas produces other citrus fruits that are becoming increasingly popular in the state and around the country. The state's oranges are unique because they're light in color, thin-skinned and heavy with juice, Walsh points out.

Surprisingly, California, which is a major orange growing state, is the biggest unloading point for Texas oranges. "We call these oranges juice oranges because they have a lot of juice, so they're good for restaurants or people at home who like to make their own juice. They're heavy in weight and the sugar content is high. A lot of people in California

use them the way they would California Valencias during the summer," Walsh says.

Texas, which has 27,500 acres of citrus, may be considered a small player in the citrus industry, compared to Florida, which has 554,00 acres, and California, which has 251,000 acres, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) *Citrus Fruits 2007 Summary*. However, Texas producers are shooting for the high-end fresh fruit market, says John McClung, president of the Texas Produce Association, Mission, TX. "High-end is where our niche is. Florida citrus goes mostly to processing. About one-third of the red grapefruit in the country comes from Texas," he notes.

TEXAS-GROWN PRODUCE

While many Texas shippers import produce from Mexico, A & W Produce Co., Weslaco, TX, produces almost everything it ships. "We produce 98 percent of everything we ship," says Chad Stutz, sales manager. "Onions and watermelons are our biggest programs."

Growing and shipping everything itself allows the company to control costs, he adds. Another advantage is Texas consumers and consumers in neighboring states tend to be more loyal to Texas-grown produce.

"It used to be that Texas produce wasn't thought to be anything special. But now more retailers are looking for locally grown produce and more consumers want to support growers in their state," Stutz says.

A & W farms about nine months out of



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the year, moving from greens in October to cabbage in November, carrots in March, and watermelons in May and June.

"Most of our greens stay in Texas, but about 65 percent of the rest of our products get shipped outside of the state," Stutz says.

IMPORTS FROM MEXICO AND SOUTH AMERICA

Besides growing domestic produce, I. Kunik Company, McAllen, TX, has imported produce from Mexico since the early 1960s. "During the past decade, we've phased out most of our Texas stuff, and we're importing almost everything from Mexico," says Lawrence Kroman, president. The main imports include bell peppers, cucumbers, carrots, cabbage and citrus, including limes and lemons.

Frontera Produce, Ltd., Edinburg, TX, also imports from Mexico. In the last two years, it began developing partnerships with growers and suppliers in Central and South America, such as Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru.

Frontera imports many items out of these areas, although its core items are mangos, papayas, pineapples, limes, avocados, melons, onions, cabbage and carrots, says Amy Gates, vice president of administration and finance.

In order to keep up with the demand for mangos and other tropical fruit, Frontera is setting up an operation in Peru, packing its own fruit. In Texas, Frontera created its own logistics department in January 2007 to help oversee transportation. "We have a 50/50 split between people who pick up their produce

from us and people we deliver to," Gates says.

The advantage of operating out of Texas is that it offers both buyers and sellers a multitude of options for pick-up and delivery. "We have such a close proximity to the Mexican border that when we have product that crosses the border, we get to look at it right away," Kroman explains.

Most major Texas shippers in the McAllen/Edinburg area in the state's southernmost section are no more than 10 miles away from each other. This makes it easier for buyers to travel to several shippers in one day and pick up mixed loads.

"It's not unusual for buyers picking up stuff from two, three or four shippers on the same truck," according to DeBerry's DeBerry. The ability to buy in smaller quantities gives the buyers much more flexibility. **pb**



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ON THE ROAD WITH DAVE DIVER

Applewood Orchards



Dave Diver is former vice president of produce at Hannaford and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.

Risk-taking played a large role in one Michigan apple orchard's road to success.

Nearly everyone in the produce distribution channel knows one or more people who started small and grew large — with or without an extensive formal education.

For every Horatio Alger story, there are many who do not succeed. Nevertheless, those who do stand out as examples of the opportunities offered by the American dream.

As I drove from New England to the Midwest this past summer, I passed the birthplaces of many of those success stories, but I chose to visit my Michigan friend of nearly 50 years — Bernie Swindeman, co-owner, Applewood Orchards, Inc., Deerfield, MI, — and catch up on the details missed from being away for too many decades.

I finally arrived at the fruit-packing headquarters, after completing my drive through the farmland of southeast Michigan. There I found a message on the roadside marquee acknowledging my visit.

I arrived a week too late to observe any of the action. The last packing and shipping concluded a week earlier. For Applewood Orchards, Inc., Deerfield, MI, this was an unusual occurrence since in most years, their apple supplies last until mid-July or later.

Risky Expansion

It has been about 30 years since I last visited the facility, and it was now unrecognizable because of the growth of storage area and packing space. Here I was in Deerfield, MI, looking at impressive computerized packing lines with a separate control room all tied to the LaGrange, GA, headquarters of Durand-Wayland, Inc., the equipment provider. With this set up, the cause of nearly any equipment problem can instantly be identified and answers obtained for immediate correction.

I really wanted to observe the operation of packing equipment for a special type of mesh bag. A little more than a year ago, a large volume retailer decided apples in mesh bags would sell better than those in poly bags, and it was ready to pay the additional cost to have its apples packed in mesh bags.

Locating and obtaining the expensive equipment on a timely basis proved to be an international challenge. Fortunately, the first few months of operation proved the risk was worth it. Sales figures indicate the retailer's research was correct, and Applewood ordered another



Bernie Swindeman of Applewood Orchards; inset shows the marquee welcoming Dave Diver.

er bagging unit to expand packing for the past season's production. No wonder supplies were exhausted so early!

Now, two additional units are on order and expected to be in place for next year's selling season and to comply with the retail customer expanding distribution. Even with the high costs of high-tech packing equipment, anticipating consumer demand for quality is a risk worth taking in the decision-making process.

From our initial meetings decades ago, I realized Swindeman, one of the family-owned business' owners, is one to accept reasonable-to-high risk as the price for growth. A major consideration for him was being able to stay on the cutting edge of new developments when it appeared the result would be an expansion of customer and consumer purchases.

Beginning fresh out of high school with only a few acres of apple orchards and no packing equipment, Swindeman quickly added necessary packing equipment, which would be upgraded and expanded countless times. After only a few years, he became one of the early Michigan growers utilizing controlled-atmosphere storage during which he avoided disaster the first year — too many CA apples led to lower than expected prices — only to turn it into a successful marketing tool.

He was an early proponent of waxing apples because it provided



retailers with increased shelf life; returns far outweigh the additional costs. Through the years, Swindeman kept up with new growing methods, including going from 40 trees per acre to now planting nearly 1,600 dwarfs on the same amount of soil. The list of cutting-edge activities goes on and on, mostly with successes far outweighing the losses.

No Pain, No Gain

Risk-taking is a normal practice in agriculture. Finding ways to minimize risk by finding unconventional solutions is another. The additional farm labor required for the harvest season is a challenge. Fortunately, Applewood is able to work with a reliable crew leader and a migrant crew doing farm work year-round from Florida up the eastern United States until they reach Michigan in the fall. Sometimes, Mother Nature refuses to cooperate, and the conclusion of vegetable harvesting overlaps the beginning of the apple harvest. Starting apple picking a week late can be potentially disastrous.

Rather than counting the days and hoping, Applewood expanded into growing several hundred acres of vegetables. This way, the company has workers available when needed — an unconventional method of ensuring top priorities are met while the

immigration policy standoff continues.

Gain often requires a little pain commonly identified as risk-taking. Sometimes, the risk-taking goes outside the fresh fruit and vegetable area but stays related to agriculture. Among Applewood's controversial activities is the installation of large cannons scattered in the orchards; they're fired to ward off potential of hail when thunderstorms threaten. There's no way to scientifically prove the value — but Applewood has successfully escaped hail damage for many years while others have not been as fortunate.

While the farm operations were expanding, Swindeman and his wife were raising a daughter and three sons. Observing the success of their parents, the boys opted for on-the-job training and learning from other successful agricultural operators. Now, they are grown men, responsible for a separate division of the company. Swindeman keeps in touch with the business either directly in the summer or via the Internet during the winter season.

Sometimes, risk-taking is expressed through recreational activities. To be successful at ice boating, a pastime unknown in many parts of the country, requires skill, quick reaction to speed and the love of challenge. Swindeman enjoyed successfully liv-

Among Applewood's controversial activities is the installation of large cannons scattered in the orchards; they're fired to ward off potential hail when thunderstorms threaten.

ing on the edge during iceboat seasons in his younger years.

Today, the 15 acres of apples have grown to at least 3,550 acres with additional growing partnerships elsewhere in Michigan. The initial small packing line now handles production from a radius of more than 300 miles. **pb**

This is one example of American family farm know-how in the fresh fruit and vegetable area. If you have a success story you'd like to share, I'd like to hear it. Please send your stories to Dave Diver at ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com.



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There are hundreds of reasons to attend PMA's Leadership Symposium this year.

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The PMA Leadership Symposium has been described as "three days that will help you turn even today's toughest challenges into tomorrow's opportunities". One of this year's speakers, Larry Johnson, provides some insight into his presentation and his thoughts on the Symposium:

You will discuss many of the key points outlined in your book, *Absolute Honesty: Building A Corporate Culture That Values Straight Talk and Rewards Integrity*. What do you mean by "Absolute Honesty"?

Absolute Honesty means telling the truth in a way that divulges all relevant information in a direct, plain manner so that the listener gains a complete and accurate picture of reality. It doesn't hedge or spin the information to enhance one point of view over another, and it doesn't withhold what the speaker knows would influence what the listener will perceive.

Why is an absolutely honest corporate culture more critical today than ever?

If managers can't get honest feedback from their employees, they, like the naked emperor in "The Emperor Has No Clothes" will make foolish decisions. Instead of telling an "emperor" how wonderful he looks in his new suit, employees should be encouraged, if not required, to speak their minds and go to the mat for what they believe in. And just as true, if employees don't get the honest feedback

they need to improve, they will continue to under-perform or misbehave, and the organization will suffer.

The theme for this year's event is "Inspiration for Your Next Big Idea." Would you agree that open, straightforward communications between management and employees is vital for this kind of inspiration to occur?

Our inspiration for writing our book (I co-wrote it with my friend, Bob Phillips) came from a book by Andy Grove, past CEO and Chairman of Intel Corporation titled *Only The Paranoid Survive*. He made the point that in order for a company to stay competitive, it must be innovative, and that one of the keys to innovation is a culture of what he called, "healthy debate." That is, a culture where people are not afraid to be frank, open and honest about their feelings and ideas.

If you had to choose the most important reason for produce and floral industry executives to attend the Leadership Symposium, what would it be?

You know, while the opportunity to learn from the "experts" is always an attractive feature of such a symposium,

there is also the opportunity to learn from fellow attendees. What is learned in the hallways, receptions, and break out sessions can far exceed the formal learning, no matter how good the formal learning is.

The Symposium will also feature three other presenters who are accomplished leaders, and authors: Robert Tucker, George Labovitz, and Thomas Winninger.

For more information and to register, visit www.pma.com/leadership.



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Mexican Produce By The Numbers

The winter deal from south of the border keeps shelves well-stocked.

BY DUANE CRAIG

As Mexico advances its fresh produce production, that bounty continues to fill up U.S. grocery stores from coast to coast, especially in the wintertime.

Of the key worldwide exporters of fresh vegetables, Mexico has the highest dollar value of exports and nearly all of those exports come to the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC. Mexico is the main supplier of snap beans, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplant, onions, bell and chili peppers and tomatoes. Mexico also supplies the same percentage of fruits to the United States as Chile.

All of this produce is grown, sourced or imported by companies like Ciruli Brothers, LLC, Nogales, AZ. Today, the third-generation, family-owned company procures and consolidates a wealth of fruits

and vegetables, including some unique varieties.

"Our lineup includes eggplants, Chinese, Hindu and Italian eggplants, along with colored bell peppers," says CEO Chris Ciruli.

With more than 100,000 square feet of refrigerated warehouse space at international ports in Nogales, AZ and Donna, TX, the company sources a lot of Mexican produce. Once loads are received, inspected and sorted, product continues to warehouses in temperature-controlled trucks, which are monitored for even slight variations in temperature.

The company watches crop information throughout the growing seasons so it's aware of weather events that can affect volumes and prices.

"Last year, in October, we had devastating rains, but this year we had a great October," reports Ciruli. The weather into early November was also good, so he is expecting production this year to be up.

BORDER-CROSSING BASICS

Ciruli is just one of many similar importers, consolidators and distributors operating along the border with Mexico. But across the different business models, the process usually includes some form of repacking.

"Most of the product that comes across is repacked within 20 miles of the border," says John McClung, president of the Texas Produce Association, Mission, TX. "Very little of it goes through with straight loads. Typically, trucks coming across get taken to a nearby packer who breaks them down to be redistributed."

According to McClung, the primary crossing point in Texas is Pharr/Reynosa. "In 2005, we brought in 76,577 trailer loads of produce from Mexico through Texas and the great bulk of those, probably 90 percent, came across at Pharr/Reynosa," he says. "By comparison, Arizona brought in a little over 93,000 loads." He points out a load is between 40,000 to 44,000 pounds.

During peak times in the winter, it's not uncommon for more than 1,000 trucks to cross the border





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Organics With Room To Grow

One supplier in particular is adding organic peppers and other organic offerings from Mexico to its lineup.

"This year, we will be offering organic cucumbers, bell peppers and melons under the Llano Organic label," says Nick Rendon, Nogales division manager for Giumarra Companies Inc, Rio Rico, AZ.

An estimate by researcher Laura Gomez at the University of Chapingo in Chapingo, Texcoco placed Mexico's organic production in 2004 at \$350 million with it involving a little more than 740,000 acres. Coffee accounts for two-thirds of that production and organic mixed vegetable crops occupy 3.8 percent of all organically farmed land. In recent years, organic certification programs have become more prevalent in the country. **pb**

into Nogales, AZ, in one day alone. So besides the necessary expediting needed to ensure food keeps moving quickly, the border crossings also must contend with issues of security and the illicit drug trade.

"They are all under modernization efforts and the reason in part is because of U.S. pressure to keep out terrorists and drugs," says McClung. "For example, they have these huge x-ray machines that x-ray an entire truck at one time."

THE MEXICAN TOP 11

According to the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, Nogales, AZ, of all of Mexico's exports to the United States, there are few that are not available year-round. Tomatoes are the volume and dollar leader accounting for more than 1.6 billion pounds and almost \$1 billion.

While tomatoes have traditionally been the primary produce item grown in greenhouses, those close to the business in Mexico see a move toward more and more items going under roof.

"There's a lot of open field that's going by the wayside and a lot of the peppers are going to greenhouse," says Frank Calixtro, salesman for Calixtro Distributing Company, Inc., Nogales, AZ. "More tomatoes are going to be in the greenhouse and a lot of cucumbers are going into the greenhouse. Every day, you see less and less open field product." Calixtro sees this as making products better since they are grown in a more controlled environment.

Watermelons are Mexico's second-highest volume crop and are available from October to June. In 2006, nearly a billion pounds were produced there with a value of \$121 million, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Washington, DC. [See table on p. 56.] This makes watermelons the lowest dollar item of the top 10 exports from Mexico.

The Mexican states of Colima and Vera

Cruz produce over 750 million pounds of limes, making the commodity Mexico's third highest volume item with a dollar value of

nearly \$138 million. The varieties are Persians and Key.

One of the longest running imports from Mexico is the cucumber. Even though it's now available year-round, the winter season is notable and includes pole-grown, hot-house English and pickling cucumbers. All those cucumbers weighed more than 700 million pounds in 2006. The dollar value of this crop comes to a little more than \$330 million and the Mexican state that supplies the bulk of the winter supplies is Sinaloa.

Sinaloa also supplies the wintertime supply of the fifth highest volume item, squash. The varieties are seemingly limitless, including a range of crookneck varieties, hard shell varieties and favorites like acorn, spaghetti and Italian zucchini. Squash weighs in at 536 million pounds and



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accounts for just about \$200 million in value. These vegetables are well-associated with winter having been one of those items often found in root cellars and still popular today during the cold months for hearty meals. They offer retailers some colorful promotional opportunities.

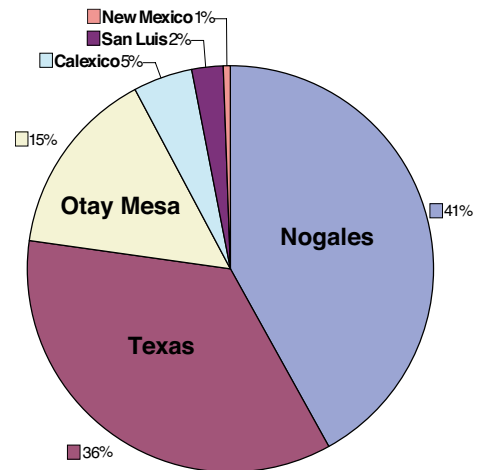
"I think we have a lot of winter time items that work well for retailers," says Ciruli Brothers' Ciruli. "For the East Coast, we have a tremendous amount of hard-shell items coming out of here in the time of year when it's great for retailers to be promoting hard-shell squash because of the consumption in the winter time. There is such a tremendous variety coming out of Mexico whether it is products like eggplant or honeydew or hot peppers. We see it as a great place to source product when it's cold in the

United States."

Sweet peppers come in sixth in terms volume with 521 million pounds and a dollar value of \$289 million. Chili peppers, come in seventh in terms of volume with 450 million pounds and a dollar value of \$234 million. Not only are there ample supplies of green, red, orange and yellow peppers, but the emerging purple and gold are also available. For the early part of the winter deal Sonora supplies through December. Heavy volumes throughout winter come from the regions of Culiacan and La Cruz de Elota in the state of Sinaloa.

At the end of winter, when people are looking for a hint of summer, the mango, Mexico's eighth-largest volume produce item begins to ship. Michoacán is Mexico's top mango producer, and it starts in early

Average Crossings by Top Six Ports of Entry



Source: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

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Reader Service #59

Top 11 Produce Items*** (January — December 2006)

Commodity	10,000-lb units*	\$10,000 units**	Availability
Tomatoes	164,224	918,759	Year-Round
Watermelons	99,494	121,617	October - June
Limes	76,669	137,725	Year-Round
Cucumbers	71,016	330,335	Year-Round
Squash	53,680	197,608	Year-Round
Sweet Peppers	52,153	289,492	November - June
Chili Peppers	45,064	234,279	Year-Round
Mangos	42,242	132,611	March - September
Green onions	32,324	123,571	Year-Round
Avocados	25,756	180,463	Year-Round
Grapes	20,902	152,717	May - June

*Source: USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Fruits and Vegetable Market News

** Source: USDA, Foreign Agricultural Service, HS 6-Digit Imports

***Peppers have been separated in this chart to show the volume and dollar units for sweet peppers and chili peppers individually.

March. Varieties from this area include Tommy Atkins, Haden, Ken and Keitt. Chiapas and Oaxaca also start in early March with Ataulfo, Tommy Atkins and Haden. Guerrero closely follows them also with Tommy Atkins and Haden the last week of March. Other areas fill out the rest of the year to the end of September. Mexico supplies more than 60 percent of the mangos imported by the United States, and it has the distinct advantage of being close so the mangos can be tree-ripened. The mango dollar value tops \$132.5 million and equals 422 million pounds.

Green onions fill the ninth spot in the top 10 produce items from Mexico with 323 million pounds and a dollar value of \$123 million in 2006.

In tenth place, avocados account for almost 260 million pounds and Mexico has surpassed Chile as the top supplier of avocados to the United States. Avocado dollar value is almost \$180.5 million.

Grapes, which are available from May through June with some extending into early July, round out the top 11 produce items. They are one of three items in the top 10 unavailable year-round and accounted for almost 210 million pounds with a value of \$153 million.

pb

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* Cornell University study, 2007

Red Potato Beauties



Photo courtesy of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association

Red River Valley/Northern Plains' potatoes are attracting a large share of consumers through quality production and marketing practices.

BY DAVE DIVER

When I visited some Georgia supermarkets in mid-October, the bright color and overall appearance of Red River Valley red potatoes really caught my attention.

In order to judge whether my experience was an exception or what the retailer and consumer could reasonably expect on a consistent basis throughout the coming season, I would have to visit the producing area. Viewing the area would also give me a better understanding of both production and marketing for the nearly 24,000 acres of potatoes spread throughout the Valley.

Once I arrived, I saw dry land with black dirt made up of loam, clay and organic material — the perfect setting to farm potatoes with more flavor and better nutrition than potatoes grown under irrigation and on lower organic soil; however, the area faces more challenges from Mother Nature on a yearly basis.

This wonderful agricultural area also provides diversity, being able to grow sugar beets and various grains, which are good for improving crop rotations but which compete for the land when input costs and returns among the different alternatives dramatically fluctuate.

With the current record prices for wheat, corn and soybeans, it will be surprising if at least some of the acreage doesn't shift to these grains, which are providing improved income with lower cost

inputs when compared to growing potatoes. Higher returns for grain crops are also putting upward pressure on land rental prices. Should this occur, next year buyers may face higher costs from reduced supply.

ORGANIZATION INVOLVEMENT

The Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), Inc., East Grand Forks, MN, implements an umbrella program for the potato industry. In recent years, the marketing program has shifted from spending dollars for stimulating 1- or 2-week retail programs to using available funds to more directly improve grower returns. NPPGA provided market analysis and communication for all segments of the potato industry in the association, including providing regular selling price ranges to all 16 wash-plant operators in the association, each of which has its own method of providing product to the retail and foodservice markets.

Trade shows, such as those sponsored by the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE, and the National Restaurant



Dave Diver is a former vice president of produce at Hannaford and a regular columnist for *PRODUCE BUSINESS*.

Association (NRA), Washington, DC, are especially productive. Educational programs for school children in the North Dakota area continue to show promise for improving demand and are a primary Association function. NPPGA continues to work closely with the U.S. Potato Board (USPB), Denver, CO, piggybacking off its programs to extend the nutritional and healthful potato message.

Overall, red potatoes account for only 12 to 14 percent of total potato production, with the Red River Valley being the largest red potato producing area by far. Its largest metro markets include Chicago, Boston, New York City and Minneapolis, but various shippers have substantial accounts in the southern and eastern regions.

It's important to recognize one size does not fit all; retailer and consumer interests are constantly changing. A wide variety of private label and packer brand packaging is available in 3- to 20-pound sizes and with a multiple of size grades. Additionally, large volumes are shipped in 2,000- to 2,200-pound totes to wholesalers and re-packers throughout the country.

Paul Dolan, manager for Associated Potato Growers, Inc., Grand Forks, ND, indicates 80 percent of his consumer vol-



Photo courtesy of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association


ume is in 5-pound units.

A and L Potato Company, East Grand Forks, MN, packs nearly 90 percent of consumer units in private label packages, according to president Randy Boushey.

On the other hand, for O.C. Schultz and Sons, Inc., Crystal, ND, focuses on wholesalers and re-packers, says Dave Moquist, sales representative. Some of the latter also include consumer packs with their orders.

In some areas, wholesalers selling directly to retailers operating outside major metropolitan cities find consumers purchasing more in 10-pound units than in 5-pound packages.

Coborn's, Inc., a chain of 25 stores based in St. Cloud, MN, relies on Russ Davis Wholesale, Wadena, MN, for nearly all its fresh fruit and vegetables. In its marketing area, I found Coborn stores to be



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busier than its competitors with superior presentation in nearly all categories, especially with its potato program presentation.

Tri Campbell Farms, Grafton, ND, provides one of the more integrated product selections, including more than a quarter of its volume of Yukons to complement the shipments of the larger red offerings. Andorra low-carbohydrate reds are shipped primarily to the Southeast. The low-sugar content makes them ideal for diabetics, according to T.J. Johnstone, vice president of sales.

To supplement the 8-month northern season and to keep year-round buyers, Tri Campbell Farms also has operations in Florida and New Mexico.

Nokota Packers, Inc., Buxton, ND, packs for 12 different farm groups shipping the majority of potatoes into the eastern seaboard south of New York City, says Steve Tweten, president. With its large volume, it is easy to accommodate stores on promotion without impacting supplies for regular, everyday business. It provides a full range of sizes and packs with private labels accounting for nearly 90 percent of shipments.

EFFECTIVE RESOURCES

Producing and marketing also depend on various types of equipment to improve

and make operations successful. Forty years ago, Kerian Machines, Inc., headquartered in Grafton, ND, came into existence with one product — a speed sizer that separated only by product diameter.

During the intervening years, computerization and other forms of enhancement have failed to alter this ever-updated product market penetration. This is a great example of keeping an item simple while still satisfying the purchaser's need to receive value coupled with efficiency.

During the company's lifetime, it has far expanded its application to numerous fresh fruit and vegetables. Located in a small town, just 50 miles from the Canadian border, Kerian markets worldwide, according to president John Kerian. Both developing- and emerging-market countries appreciate the value of expert sizing with relative ease of adjustments.

While production and marketing are somewhat controllable, buyer consolidation and turnover have potentially major impact on producers, retailers and foodservice operators. However, as product reaches this year's level of condition and appearance, Red River Valley red potatoes will be in a strong position to capture greater share of consumer demand. **pb**



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Reader Service # 81



Boston Continues Its Winning Ways

Weather, economics, food safety — and the Red Sox — are factors in Boston's wholesale produce industry.

By Jan Fialkow



Marco Imbergarmo
Arthur G. Silk Co.



Maurice Trudel
M. Trudel Brokerage



Peter John Condakes
Peter Condakes Co., Inc.



Ed Duval
Peter Condakes Co., Inc.



Jack Ford
New England Organics, Inc.



Pat Lynch
State Garden, Inc.



John Bonafede
J. Bonafede Co., Inc.



Butch Fabio
J. Bonafede Co., Inc.



Peter Bonafede
J. Bonafede Co., Inc.



Gene Fabio
J. Bonafede Co., Inc.



Patrick Burke
Garden Fresh Salad Co.



Chris Rhodes
Community-Suffolk, Inc.

When a trip to the Boston wholesale terminal market begins on the Monday morning after the Red Sox clinch the American League pennant, all conversations begin and end with the home team's chances to win another World Series — which, of course, they went on to do.

In between, talk gets around to produce, but even then the Sox are part of the conversation. “The Red Sox win is good for business because it's good for the restaurants,” opines Sheldon Borotkin, buyer, Costa Produce, Boston, MA.

The merchants on the market — actually two markets, the New England Produce Terminal in Chelsea and the Boston Market Terminal right over the border in Everett — see the future as filled with challenges to doing business as it has always been done and with opportunities to move into a brave new world.

Some of the challenges are unique to Boston. According to Steven Piazza, president, Community-Suffolk, Inc., Everett, MA, hours on the market had to change to accommodate the Big Dig, the massive highway reconstruction project considered to be the largest civil engineering project undertaken since the building of the pyramids. “When the Big Dig started, a lot of customers wanted to be in and out before the construction work started. Now they're here at 2 AM.”

Some of the challenges are ubiquitous throughout the industry. “There's more consolidation in the market and in business in general. It's more prevalent now — there are fewer customers and more competition,”



Jackie Piazza
Community-Suffolk, Inc.



Maurice Crafts
Coosemans Boston

notes Paul Travers, president, Mutual Produce Corp., Chelsea, MA.

This is echoed by Kevin Maher, vice president, Coosemans Boston, Inc., Chelsea, MA, who notes, “There's more consolidation — Lailer [Waldo H. Lailer & Co., Inc.] closed this week. It's not a rapid pace, but it is happening. There's no new blood coming as there was in the past.”

This is not precisely true. Solo Produce opened on the Everett market. Owner Mike Mattuchio says, “I used to have a wholesale delivery service. I have some restaurants that buy direct. The purveyors are coming in to buy. We have some items not found in the other building [Chelsea] plus the staples. We don't have a set offering. I offer anything that's a good deal. I can have lemons for six months, then none for two months.”

An unusual streak of warm weather — daytime temperatures hit the low 80s early in the week and were still in the 60s and 70s at week's end — have impacted market business. After the Sox, it's the topic everyone wants to discuss.

“This unseasonably warm weather is not helping us out. We should be selling squash and potatoes, but people still want peaches and nectarines,” according to Jack Ford, president, New England Organics, Inc., Chelsea, MA. “The local guys are still growing and picking. We go to lots of small, independent stores and co-ops. The small farmers go there, too. That's fine in the summer — we know it's going to happen — but it should be over by now.”

“I can't complain about the summery weather. The entire market is affected by the fact that it's Oct. 24 and we've yet to have a frost,” says

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Peter John Condakes, president, Peter Condakes Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA. “The best local growing season in years has kept people out of the market. The roadside stands and people with backyard gardens are still picking tomatoes!”

“We do mostly local grown. This great weather is helping business. It’s the end of October and it’s still beautiful. We’re still getting locally grown, but it’s mostly from out of state,” notes Costa’s Borotkin.

According to Gene Fabio, president, J. Bonafede Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA, “Watermelon sales are good. They’ve been strong through the fall because of the warm weather. That does put the kibosh on the pumpkin business, although sugar pumpkins sell through Thanksgiving.”

“It’s impossible to say everything a retailer expects every day will be here — weather, personnel — look at the fires in California!,” advises Maurice Trudel Jr., owner, M. Trudel Brokerage, Everett, MA.

Stephen Silk, president, Arthur G. Silk Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA, notes, “Everyone’s fighting for the little bit of business. It’s real quiet — the economy is part of it. Weather has been a factor. It stayed nice all summer, so there has been a lot of local merchandise. It’s still around. People are buying locally — not from us.”

**CHANGING ETHNICITIES
AFFECT BUSINESS**

As in most metropolitan areas, Boston is experiencing waves of immigration that affect the ethnic makeup of the city and its suburbs. Today’s new citizens are from Central and South America, Asia and the former Soviet Union.

“The market is becoming more ethnic — there are more Russians around these days and more Armenians. A lot the items they eat — baby cukes, savory, tarragon, Eastern European foodstuffs — are in greater demand. The Russians here have a good business ethic,” notes Coosemans’ Maher.

“Slowly and gradually, over the last five or six years, there are more Hispanics and Asians on the market. More immigrants are moving into the area and the requests for their produce trickles down. There are some Russians coming to the market, mostly from New York. They’re splitting their buying between Hunts Point and Boston. They’re using both markets — it keeps everyone honest,” notes Anthony Sharrino, president, Eaton & Eustis Co.

“The Indian customer base is growing. We’re doing more business with them because we’re targeting them. The general tend is toward growth in all ethnic areas,” says Butch Fabio, treasurer, J. Bonafede.

“The business has been unpredictable,” relates Community-Suffolk’s Piazza. “The salesmen in the warehouses have been putting in as many hours as ever just to maintain the diverse customer base. There are Russians, Cambodians,

Central Americans. Many of them are 1- or 2-man operations. Some come here early, some come late.”

“Ethnic groups are still a major factor on the market. The newest group is the Russians. They’re opening little stores in the inner city and the suburbs — Allston, Brighton, Brookline, Lynn. They buy a lot of staple items — root vegetables, cabbage, pickles, tomatoes,” explains Angelo Melito, sales, John Cerasuolo Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA. “There’s a community of Turks in the Springfield area, and they come here to buy. In fact, some New Yorkers are coming here to buy as well.”

“The best local growing season in years has kept people out of the market. The roadside stands and people with backyard gardens are still picking tomatoes!”

— PETER JOHN CONDAKES
PETER CONDAKES CO., INC.

“The ethnic groups are going in and finding nice niche markets in the city,” adds Piazza.

**CHANGING THE WAY
BUSINESS IS DONE**

To accommodate both the changing consumer base and consolidation within the retail trade, many merchants on the market have had to change the way they do business. Some of the changes are substantial, others represent tweaks, but all are designed to help the companies remain competitive.

“It’s a continuous search to get a bigger piece of what seems a smaller pie — but my dad said the same thing 35 years ago,” notes Condakes of Peter Condakes. “We’ve picked up some merchants through the Nation Fresh alliance [Nation Fresh, LLC, Springfield, MO]. We don’t fit everybody right, but for the right people, we fit well. There are eight or nine companies and their authorized repackers in the alliance. Our customers include a restaurant distribution company, a mid- to bargain-priced restaurant, one a bit upscale from that and one retailer.

“The regular market business is dwindling slowly — you have to make specific connections to keep it going,” he continues. “Walk-in trade has diminished slowly. Even 10 years ago, I wanted to make it 75 percent committed contact



Michael "Louie" Mattuchio, Junior Peralta and Mike Mattuchio
Solo Produce



Angelo Melito and Ken Cavallaro
John Cerasuolo Co., Inc.



Kevin DeMichaelis and Ron Dugas
State Garden, Inc.



John Finn, San Murdoch and Dave Patnaude
Coast to Coast Produce, LLC

business and 25 percent walk-in. I don't know what the percentage is now, but I want to keep growing it.

"We're working on improving our Web site. It's just to show who we are — it's a static site, no ordering. It's important for people who don't know us at all. We want to make a decent impression. It's not primary, but you need it once you get your foot in a door," he concludes.

"There's more direct buying today. More people are by-passing the market so folks on the market have to adapt," explains Jim Ruma, president, Ruma Fruit and Produce Co., Inc., Everett, MA. "We're more like a broker or a service wholesaler. If a chain's warehouse is out, we deliver directly to the store."

Susan Tavilla, sales, P. Tavilla Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA, notes, "We're doing less and less with the chains. It's mostly fill-in business for them. We do more foodservice now."

M. Trudel's Trudel sees computerization as saving time, but otherwise, he sees his business as basically unchanged. "Computers save time in

the office, but otherwise the business is the same. We arrive at 2 or 3 AM and can go to 4 or 5 PM. We take orders the day before. We acquire what our customers want and everything else we think they may be interested in. We've had some relationships for 20 or 30 years."

Taking a different view, New England's Ford cites the need for first-rate customer service to maintain the customer base. "We deliver to the small, independent guys. Friday at 4 AM, our driver goes to Bangor, ME, and makes seven stops on the way to Portsmouth, NH. I'll deliver anything to anyone — it's how we keep the business. But fuel, insurance, etc., eat up a lot of dollars."

"We were considering an expansion, but got a little cold feet. Now we're doing a major refurbishing. We've replaced all the wooden garage doors with insulated fiberglass. It will help with the noise and cold. We've replaced all the windows upstairs and all the heat pumps," explains Community-Suffolk's Piazza. "In the spring, we'll do maintenance and paint the building. This is the best way to go economically.

Tommy Piazza, sales, Community-Suffolk, notes, "The smaller jobbers are keeping us busy — and foodservice is expanding. There are a lot of people coming up from New York to take advantage of better deals here."

According to Ken Cavallaro, treasurer, John Cerasuolo Co., Chelsea, MA, "Business is good — and competitive. You have to work hard — you can't depend on people walking the market. You have to call them, fax them, e-mail them."

Some merchants are trying to find that perfect niche that sets them apart from everyone else. "The idea that you have to find your niche has been good business over the years. If you fit a niche, people make room for you," says Trudel's Trudel. "I see foodservice and prepared products as being a big factor in the future."

"We're getting into winemaking," says Mario Cutone, president, M. Cutone & Co., Chelsea, MA. "We have wine juice coming out of Madera, CA. People just let it ferment in the 6-gallon container — it takes about 2½ months. Then it's put into bottles. We have merlot, zinfandel,

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Reader Service # 50



Kenny Natorelli, Anthony Bova and Ken Natorelli
Baby Nat's Fruitland



Maryjane Maher and Kevin Maher
Coosemans Boston



Tommy Ciovacco, Mutual Produce and Lou Kertesz,
Fresh Quest



Bob Cutone, Butch Cutone, Mario Cutone and Johnny Tampone
M. Cutone Mushroom Co., Inc.

grenache, cabernet, moscato and Thompson seedless juices.”

Ruma of Ruma Fruit developed a hard-to-duplicate product offering. “Our niche is fiddleheads. We’ve developed a clamshell for retail and are looking into film wrap. Fiddleheads are wild — to grow the market we need to find more pickers. The fiddleheads grow in New England and Canada, but we can ship them as far as Pennsylvania and the Midwest. They are the last of the truly seasonal items. If the weather is too warm, the fiddleheads open and become ferns. If there’s too much snow, the water in the rivers is too high for them to be picked.”

SEASONAL — OR NOT?

Some merchants talk about the seasonality of the merchandise offered on the wholesale market while others either praise or bemoan the loss of seasonal merchandise.

“Business tails off after the summer, but pumpkins take up some of the slack,” says Bonafede’s Butch Fabio. “We don’t begin to see winter

holiday business until right before they occur.

“Vacations are over, so the tourist business is off, although some of the Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine farm stands are still buying,” he continues. “The farm stands don’t produce enough product, so they fill in here. Their business ends when the foliage season is over. Columbus Day weekend is the biggest weekend for the foliage season. Traffic is bumper to bumper.

“Chestnuts pick up toward Thanksgiving. The ethnic buyers pay more attention to Christmas than Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a strictly American holiday. They have all the normal stuff but enhance it with things from their own cuisine. The Hispanics add pasteles, so plantain sales pick up. The newer Asians don’t celebrate Thanksgiving as much. Orange sales pick up around Christmas because Asians give their kids oranges as gifts,” he concludes.

According to Bonafede’s Gene Fabio, “It’ll be slow until February. We get a boost for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but otherwise business is off. We just don’t sell as much in the winter —

business is lackluster.”

“At this time of year, the foodservice sector will be busy with holiday parties,” explains Patrick Burke, sales, Garden Fresh. “Right before Thanksgiving, foodservice and retail get very busy, then things slow down. If the Patriots are in the Super Bowl, it will get busy again. It’s different every year — a bad crop can change the whole dynamic.”

Trudel of M. Trudel wishes there were more seasonality in produce; seasonality causes excitement and it’s locally grown. He’s been in the business long enough to have a distinct perspective on what was versus what is. “There are lots of new items today, not like it was 38 years ago when we started on the market. It used to be you had one type of tomato. Lettuce used to be mostly iceberg. Restaurants used Romaine but otherwise it was iceberg. The margins on the other kinds were too small to sell them. They were only available locally, so nobody carried them.

“With apples you had red and golden delicious out of the West and the rest were local,” he

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Reader Service # 31



Steven Piazza
Community-Suffolk, Inc.



Tommy Piazza
Community-Suffolk, Inc.



Sheldon Borotkin
Costa Produce



Peter Renda
Arthur G. Silk Co.



Brian Scolaro
The Alphas Co., Inc.



Stephen Silk
Arthur G. Silk Co.

continues. "Then Granny Smiths came from California. When we sold the first Braeburns, they looked anemic next to red delicious! Now the focus is on all the other varieties — it's change for the better.

"The only thing that's bad is that we don't have seasons anymore," he contends. "G-d forbid you don't have asparagus every day of the year! Years ago you waited for specific varieties from specific geography, otherwise you didn't bother. Chefs wanting specific items have made it a 12-month year. Foodservice has really sparked the change."

ORGANICS

Organics have not caught on in the Greater Boston area — at least not with the terminal market wholesalers — the way they have on the West Coast, Whole Foods notwithstanding. The merchants offer several reasons for this.

"When organics first started, people laughed. When you have to rely on Mother Nature, product is not as pretty, but people want it," says

Trudel.

Cerasuolo's Cavallaro notes, "People say they want organic but it has to be really, really good because it's really expensive."

Ford of New England Organics, which does direct-store fill-ins for Whole Foods and now Wild Oats, does see price as an issue, but not the only issue. "Stores like Wilson Farms [Lexington, MA] and Idlewild Farms [Acton, MA] stock organics, but the rest haven't caught on yet, mostly because of the price. And sometimes organic items are a one-shot thing.

"I've been trying to get eggplant out of Florida for three weeks," he continues. "It's there but I don't get enough to meet the 10-pallet trucker minimum pickup. I just got lemons for the first time. They were in the \$60 range — and they weren't that good. Still, we carry 140 to 150 organic items. If it's available, we have it. Nobody in Boston has what we have."

According to Pat Lynch, sales, State Garden, Inc., Chelsea, MA, "Olivia's Garden [the company's organic brand] is doing well. We're doing a

Halloween event at the Shaw's [based in West Bridgewater, MA] pumpkin patch area at the Seaport World Trade Center. We also have a booth each year at EarthFest. It's held each year on the Charles River over Memorial Day weekend."

"Our customers are real organic stores — not chains," explains Ford. "Ninety-six percent of my customers don't carry conventional. If we do the right thing, don't try to gouge people — we'll be OK."

Condakes of Peter Condakes admits, "I haven't figured how to make organic fit into our model. I wonder if in 10 years organic isn't conventional. That's the way business is done. There will no be big price differential, everything will be organic. Stonyfield Farms went from natural to organic. I didn't change — they did — so now I eat organic yogurt!"

IMPORTED PRODUCE

Consumer demand for year-round product and the cost of producing product domestically are why so many wholesalers rely on imported



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IT'S THE ECONOMY

The slumping economy and weak dollar are affecting business on the terminal markets. "Business has slowed down," says Angelo Melito, sales, John Cerasuolo Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA. "Part of that is seasonal and part is that people get money-conscious at this time of year anyway. But it seems more so this year because people are worried about their kids' school, the holidays, the economy."

"People are on tight budgets," echoes Jack Ford, president, New England Organics, Inc., Chelsea, MA. "They look at organic and it costs a bit more. They want to do the right thing, but they have to consider their wallets."

"Prices are up and people are waiting for them to come down, so it's been slow," notes Peter Alphas, treasurer, Alphas Co., Chelsea, MA.

High prices are a focus for many of the area's wholesalers. "Prices are already high and the California fires are only going to make it worse. FOBs are high, fuel is high. Fewer people in our position are rolling product — rolling inventories are a thing of the past," says Dave Patnaude, sales manager, Coast to Coast Produce, Everett, MA.

"Today blueberries are at \$65 — 12 in a box. What are you going to retail them for? Price is crucial now. Relationships are not as important as they once were. People want the best price — period. They shop for price and go where they have to get

it," adds Melito.

Several other reasons for increased costs are mentioned. "We buy direct — 60 percent of the price is transportation — only 40 percent is the product. For domestic product, you have a higher cost for fertilizer. Origin sourcing for all products is more expensive. Point-of-origin reporting has higher costs, too," lists Patnaude.

"Produce wasn't an expensive industry, but over the past 10 years, the cost of loads has doubled. More and more farm acreage is for contract merchandise. And the acreage is down. Out West, they have labor issues," he continues.

He sees slotting fees for processed or packaged product as contributing to higher consumer costs, adding, "Publicly traded companies are looking for items that generate a higher ring. You'll continue to see higher prices."

The slumping U.S. dollar is another issue. "Now we have a weak dollar. I'm thinking how it's going to affect the perception of Mexico and Canada selling here," explains Peter John Condakes, president, Peter Condakes Co., Inc., Chelsea, MA. "The Canadians are used to our dollar giving them \$1.30, \$1.60 Canadian. You'd think the peso is stronger against the dollar, too. The weak dollar is going to have a major impact on this industry."

pb

produce through large parts of the year.

"The Mexican [lemon] deal is strong — it's really taking over," relates Jackie Piazza, sales, Community-Suffolk. "There are no California lemons available on a steady basis. The quality out of Mexico is too good — and the lemons are cheaper. Mexico can be \$10 to \$22 cheaper than California.

"There are huge volumes coming out of Mexico — lots of grades with lots of prices," he

continues. "The prices are down because of the volume."

"We do a lot of business with China," according to Bonafede's Gene Fabio. "Luckily, we deal with the upper crust of shippers. They've actually benefited because the lower-rate guys got hurt. The top-rate shippers are still selling and picking up the business lost by the other guys."

Piazza agrees, saying, "You stick with the

guys who are legit and weed out the others."

FOOD SAFETY

When talk turns to Chinese imports, the issue of food safety is not far behind. Combine that concern with the fallout from the 2006 spinach crisis, and it becomes evident that the issue of ensuring a safe food supply is going to continue to occupy a place of prominence.

For many wholesalers, the issues boil down to

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shippers and truckers. “We like to think we have a good product 52 weeks a year,” notes Mutual’s Travers. “A lot of our shippers help with food safety and traceability. They control what goes on the trucks — and it helps us. We’ve been using the same trucking company for years — they’re reliable people. It’s like the rest of this business — long-standing relationships make it work.”

According Sharrino of Eaton & Eustis, “Food safety is affecting everyone. I do business with all the same shippers all the time. They can trace in an instant. Fortunately, I haven’t had to use it. Everything in here has a lot number. It’s just good record keeping, so we’ve always done it.”

“I buy everything from California,” relates Tavilla’s Tavilla. “Several times, for various reasons, I’ve had to trace back. Once I found a knife in a box of cut lettuce. I was able to trace it back to the person who dropped it because the knife had a number on it. It just shows that the system works. Fortunately, no harm was done by the incident. Another time the numbers on a box showed I had received the wrong lettuce. We were able to fix it right away.”

“Coast to Coast is trying to partner with growers who are certified under a third-party audit and with carriers that adhere to the highest cleanliness standards,” says Dave Patnaude, sales manager, Coast to Coast Produce, Everett, MA. “[Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association president] Bryan Silbermann’s presentation to the NEPC [New England Produce Council] was powerful — one of the best I’ve ever seen. It was about people being afraid. It was filled with pictures of people who deal with the product. Then at the end there was a picture of the boy who died [in the spinach crisis]. If there’s another issue, the government will act. Everything will be bar-coded — it will tell where, when, what, which field.”

“Food safety is an issue, although organic consumers think there’s a better chance there won’t be any problems,” according to New England’s Ford.

What actually goes on in the market also has consequences. Garden Fresh’s Burke notes, “We have a HACCP [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point] plan in place. Our customers are comfortable with what we’re doing. Most people are impressed by our processing plant after they visit. It’s good word-of-mouth promotion.”

“Several customers have asked to do surprise inspections of our facilities. We’re clean, so we pass,” adds Tavilla, “but food safety is becoming more of an issue to more and more of our customers. It’s definitely a long-term trend.”

Of course, keeping the food supply safe comes with a price tag. “Safety is a huge issue,” believes Patnaude. “In order to insure better systems, it will cost more. Who’s going to pay for it? In general, everything is more expensive because of safety, fuel, fertilizer. Everything is going up — not coming down.”

Several of the companies on the market are in the process of getting third-party certification. “Certification is increasingly important. Certification just lets you be in the ball game. Those who aren’t won’t be able to play,” states Condaques of Peter Condaques. “We’ve done a lot to stay in the game, but the game’s getting harder.”

“We’re in the process of getting third-party certification. The chains are looking to have it available to them,” notes Coosemans’ Maher. “Everybody will have to do it eventually. We’re about ¾ of the way there; we should have it by the end of the year. You need to have traceability capacity for the chains. If you don’t have it, they


go elsewhere.” A call to Maher confirms Coosemans has acquired certification.

“We let the auditors know when we’re ready and they come back and check our facilities and books. When we get our certification, our customers will be able to find it on-line,” he adds.

“We’ve had customers ask about food safety — I just let them talk to Ed [Duval, food safety and security manager],” adds Condaques.

“The safety issue is only going to get bigger — Russia is aligning with Iran, bioterrorism is a possibility,” explains Duval.

The process of certification is involved and time-consuming. “The certification company



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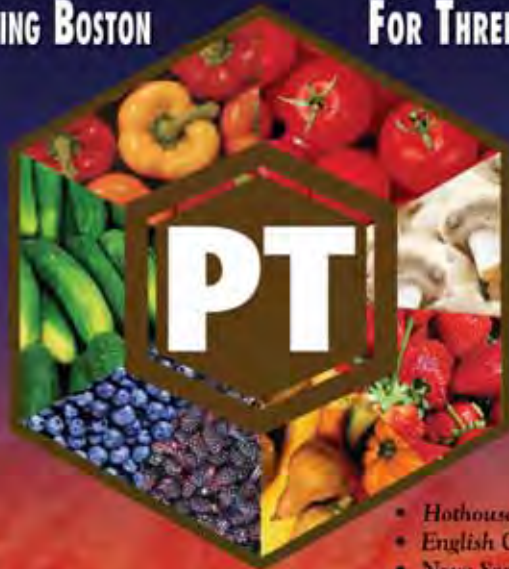
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comes in to look at our facility and helps write up a business plan — how to trace, how to keep pest populations down. It's like a Good Manufacturing Plan," explains Coosemans' Maher. "They hold a class with our crew. The crew gets a manual by e-mail that discusses what to do, what plans to follow, signage, no food or drink in the area, no smoking, even how to clean the bathrooms. It's hard to get the drivers and customers to adhere to no smoking and no eating."

Condakes notes, "Certification involves many issues. How are you tracing lots? What if your customers are being investigated? I run mock recalls to see how quickly my guys respond. In one, I play the customer and say, 'I'm calling from company A and there's a problem with some tomatoes and I need information.' In another, we say the shipper has a problem. We see what the lot numbers are and find out what customer bought them."

"We're in the process of getting certified — our involvement in Nation Fresh spearheaded it. We had to change so much to get there. We had to change the mindset of the people. They had to internalize, 'You will wear gloves. You will wear a smock. You will not eat in here,'" he adds.

"We have a manual of GMPs [good manufacturing practices]," says Duval. "Some things are added, some things are already in practice. It contains job descriptions for everyone who works here. It also sets safety standards — who is in charge of what."

"The certification manuals are dotting all the i's, crossing all the t's — making sure we're doing what we say we're doing," explains Condakes.

Duval continues, "Audits point out things we should have seen ourselves — but sometimes you miss what's right under your eyes. AIB [American Institute of Baking, Manhattan, KS] does our certification — the demand is so great they're now international. Our rating is higher this year. We're going to be as close to flawless as you can get."

KEEPING CUSTOMERS HAPPY

The companies on the market keep on doing what they have done for generations. Community-Suffolk's Steven Piazza notes, "We're in our second year of third-generation management. I have three brothers and a cousin in the business. We're going on 72 years in business."

The successful companies seem to have similar philosophies.

Garden Fresh's Burke notes, "The bottom line is if you don't keep your customers happy, they're not your customers anymore."

For Silk's Silk, the concept is, "We don't carry what we don't know — we do what we know and do it well."

And at Bonafede, Gene Fabio explains, "We're not glamorous, we're underappreciated — but we're part of the large drive shaft that feeds this country."

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A XXXXI

Icarus

This established restaurant stays current while maintaining a devoted clientele.

By Jan Fialkow



Chris Douglass and Bill Flumerfelt

Located in the historic South End since 1978, Icarus restaurant started as a funky storefront in what was then an ungentrified — even scary — neighborhood. Today, the area is safe, renovated and highly desirable, and Icarus, in its present incarnation on Appleton Street for nearly 20 years, draws a legion of upscale diners.

The restaurant, which feels like a private club with its inviting bar and cozy split-level dining room, was bought in 1999 by chef-owner Chris Douglass.

Today, Bill Flumerfelt, chef de cuisine, is in charge of the kitchen. His entry into the restaurant world did not follow the usual culinary-school path. “I was looking into anything to keep afloat and answered an ad for a dishwasher. The job was filled but the chef hired me as an assistant. I peeled carrots and snapped the ends off string beans. That was at the Warren Tavern in Charlestown.”

Fresh produce is at the heart of the menu and the philosophy that governs Icarus. “Produce drives the whole menu at all times of the year. It’s the starting point for the direction I’ll take on a dish. It’s driven by what’s available. If there are excellent tomatoes, I’ll use them as a stepping-off point. If there’s lots of corn, I’ll go from there,” he explains.

“It all develops in an organic way. You have one piece of the puzzle. It guides you to a dish. There’s a lot of opportunity to use high-end, top-quality produce. I have to narrow it down,” Flumerfelt continues. “Local and organic are the trends now. A lot of restaurants say they are doing that, but many are just paying lip service to the idea. You can tell who’s doing it right by looking at the menu.”

He buys the restaurant’s fresh produce from local purveyors and grow-

ers. “My primary wholesaler is Russo & Sons in Watertown, MA. I use Nesson Caag in Litchfield, NH, for organics. Wards Berry Farm in Sharon, MA, is the master of corn — he has lots of varieties. I’ve toured his farms. I use Specialty Foods Boston for specialty vegetables. They just moved from Chelsea to Newmarket Square in Boston.

“I also buy from Serving Ourselves Farm, which is on Long Island in Boston Harbor. It’s a homeless shelter. Jean-Claude Barroud grows primarily for the kitchens of the shelter, but he sells his surplus to local area restaurants. I got introduced to him at Ashmont Grill — Chris Douglass’ restaurant in Dorchester [MA]. There I could change the menu daily,” Flumerfelt notes.

“Here I change the menu eight to 10 times a year. I work with mini seasons, like early spring and spring,” he says. “The guys at Russo buy 365 days a year, but I use only produce with great flavor. If an item has traveled too far and the flavor is compromised, I won’t use it.”

The locally grown movement, which is beginning to have a serious impact at retail, got its start in foodservice. Icarus is one of the premiere practitioners of this trend in the Boston restaurant scene. According to Flumerfelt, “There’s nothing like local corn and tomatoes. The flavor degrades as soon as they’re picked, so I want product as close to the source as possible. This year, the tomatoes just ended — and it’s October! I kept getting them as long as they were available, but at the end, they were losing their complexity.”

Flumerfelt’s dedication to the freshest, most flavorful produce is not an attempt to jump on a trendy bandwagon. “We’re pretty strictly seasonal. It’s been Chris’ mission for many years. I was a sous chef and a line cook here in the 1990s and the concept was in place then.”

PRODUCE BUSINESS visited Icarus in early fall, when the menu reflected produce items typical of the season and the atmosphere reflected the city's joy at another Red Sox pennant. "Now, the produce items will be primarily cabbage, potatoes, root vegetables, celery root, dried beans and pulses, winter squashes," he notes. "Pork lends itself to those vegetables. Lamb lends itself more to spring vegetables. I have trouble in the summer using pork unless I go the Southern route."

Among the appetizers on the early fall menu are seared foie gras, truffled cress salad and potato crisps; crispy duck confit, flageolet beans and sauce Robert; Cushaw pumpkin soup with pepperonata and braised short rib; stuffed piquillo peppers with chorizo and sherry almond sauce; and beet salad with roasted pears, pepper cress and chèvre.

Entrées include pumpkin risotto cakes, Fontina Val D'Aosta, stuffed lady apples and pine nuts; baked sole, lobster, baby spinach and sauce Americaine; grilled Niman Ranch pork chop, guanciale, cranberry beans, kale and tomato; and Seared sea scallops, Wellfleet little-necks, pancetta, fregola and chili herb crumb.

Desserts include pear tart, apple crisp made from local apples, cinnamon panna cotta with candied apple ring, and chocolate molten soufflé cake with vanilla bean ice cream and raspberry sauce.

In New England, in the fall, local apples are at their peak and diners look to fine restaurants to present upscale versions of traditional favorites. "Our pastry chef is using apples from Alison's Apple Orchard in Walpole, NH. There are Baldwins and Honeycrisps in the apple crisp. On the savory side, the risotto is served with stuffed lady apples, currants and pine nuts," Flumerfelt notes.

Boston is a great seafood town and restaurants must pair their produce with the wonderful cold water fish the city's diners expect to find on menus. "Our fish is very local. The Boston seafood scene is great. There are a lot of great fish companies in this town," Flumerfelt acknowledges. "I use only wild salmon. It's off the menu now because the season is over.

"A lot of fishing practices are destructive, so it can be difficult to get the right fish," he continues. "Tuna and flounder are available now. The strong Euro led to a lobster shortage — they were very pricey this year. Fortunately, I have the leeway to take lobster off the menu." The effect of the weak dollar is affecting the foodservice sector as well as the retail sector.

With his unconventional start in the business, Flumerfelt is keen on giving back and takes a strong interest in helping the next generation learn the game. "Mentoring is important," he says. "Chefs showed me and I want to pass

my knowledge on. I grew up on canned vegetables — the only fresh veg was corn on the cob. Back then, you used dried herbs. I'd never seen fresh herbs before I got into this business. There was no stock other than 'cubes.' I like to take my cooks on field trips. We just went to Wellfleet to see some clam farmers."

His pride in the restaurant and its place in Boston's dining establishment is deep and real. You can see it in his eyes when he exclaims, "Icarus is perennially on the list of top 10 restaurants in Boston. It's been on the list for 10 to 12 years at least. And it's been in this location for close to 20 years."

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Reader Service # 75

Reader Service # 90

Fruit Center Marketplace

Niche store owns its place in the crowded retail market.

By Jan Fialkow



The Fruit Center Marketplace, with locations in the highly desirable South Shore communities of Milton and Hingham, began in 1973 as a single store in the town of Weymouth. The fabulous fresh produce was an immediate hit with local shoppers and the company soon expanded to its present two stores. “The Mignosa family is the original owner. Mr. Mignosa is now semi-retired and his sons run the business,” says Steve Digiusto, produce buyer.

As the company grew, it expanded its product offerings to include gourmet and specialty items, imported goods, prepared meals, a uniquely creative floral department, wine and natural and organic items. But it is still the lush, colorful produce department that draws consumers from all over the surrounding areas.

The staff is as loyal as the customer base. Digiusto has been with Fruit Center for 31 years. He started working in produce, but has worked in all the departments at some time during his long career with the company. “Our success is due to our people. Our crew is made up of happy people. The customer service is tremendous. The teamwork is strong. A lot of people have been here a long time. Some of our people have grown up here — and now their kids work for us,” he notes.

Digiusto is not exaggerating. Associates were smiling — and eliciting smiles from shoppers — while they offered to show shoppers where items were located, explaining what was where and why it was there as they led consumers to the items they had asked about. Associates held open doors, moved the occasional in-the-way item out of the way and walked over to shoppers to offer suggestions and recommendations. And the customers did not seem to be surprised at the gracious attitude of the employees. If anything, they seemed accustomed to it.

“This is a strong community store — it’s a destination store,” Digiusto says, and it’s easy to see why. The floral department is filled with cut flow-

ers and beautiful arrangements. There are so many in so many styles that the idea of going to a florist for a special gift — for someone else or for one’s self — is almost impossible to comprehend. The floral department associates are quick to explain the care of the plants and the reasons for grouping particular items together. They also make it very clear that what is available on the floor is a jumping off point and that anything the customer wants can be created.

“The customer base is mostly upscale South Shore families,” explains Digiusto, which makes the reasoning behind the abundance evident.

If the floral department tends toward special occasion items, the produce department is filled with staple and specialty fruits and vegetables that appeal to anyone looking to eat healthfully. “Almost everything comes off the Boston wholesale market,” Digiusto notes. “We’re down there five, sometimes, six days a week. We buy from about 80 percent of the guys on the market. In season, we buy locally and we buy out of Canada.”

A mouth-watering display of fresh-cut produce draws in consumers looking to combine freshness with convenience. “The fresh-cut fruit is done on the premises daily — melons, pineapple, berries. We promote it in our in-store flyer,” he says.

Mike Dwyer, marketing director, describes other methods the store uses to stay in touch with its customers. “We use direct mail, maintain a Web site and manage special events.”

The meat, fish and sushi departments cater to both the upscale clientele and the average consumer, but these are concessions, according to Dwyer. He goes on to say that the extensive wine department, which is about two years old, has proven to be another draw for both segments of the consumer market.

Digiusto speaks glowingly of the extra-mile products that reflect the store’s keen understanding of its customer base. “We carry our own pri-



Steve Digiusto and Mike Dwyer

vate label preserves and sauces. We've also been packaging our own nuts and dried fruit for about two years. It's a huge category for us, an incredibly strong category." The dried fruits and nuts, packaged in random weights, are indeed a destination. Shelves that stretch from floor to roughly six feet high are filled with a wide variety of different nuts in an assortment of flavors, cuts and roasts, as well as numerous dried fruits. It's a baker's — or snacker's — heaven.

Huge displays of Stonewall Kitchen products, located between the floral, produce and wine departments, often prompt consumers to make an add-on purchase to go with their other items. Another prominent display showcases Mrs. Meyers cleaning products, an upscale brand that has become de rigueur with the cognoscenti.

Because Fruit Center wants to maintain constant contact with its customers, "We do cooking and wine classes," Digiusto relates. "We

started at once a month, but are up to twice a month because of their popularity. In November, we do Thanksgiving classes and in December, the classes are for holiday appetizers. The classes use seasonal produce, so customers get to learn about new ways to use familiar products and about some of the more unusual items — and the department gets a corresponding bump in sales. A local professional chef, Connie Spiros, gives the cooking classes — they're demo classes, not hands-on." Since Spiros also does work with the Milton Public Library, promoting its cookbook, she's known in the community and respected as a supporter of community projects and events.

Fruit Center has a reputation for supporting small and start-up companies in the community. Digiusto says that many small businesses in the area have benefited from the exposure they've gotten at the store. "We support local companies as much possible. We promote and feature product from start-up companies. We encourage them to get the necessary licenses and then we support them," he explains.

The bakery specialties in the bakery department come from local bakeries, according to Dwyer, so they have built-in credibility with customers. The calzones and dinners-to-go in the deli department are made in house.

There is also a soup bar, a salad bar and a hot dog grill for those customers looking for grab-

and-go items that offer something beyond the ordinary. Bostonians love their hot dogs, so the grill is a natural draw. It's also located with a view to the produce department, so many shoppers stop there to pick up something to accompany their franks.

Fruit Center knows that in today's competitive world, it can't rest on its laurels. "There are always things to improve," says Digiusto. "We want to keep all areas of the store fresh and we keep updating our equipment. Right now, we're working on the exterior, expanding the parking and updating the landscaping." **pb**

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Reader Service # 79

'Tis The Season For Florida Citrus

Despite a late start, Florida citrus promises high quality and dependable quantity for consumers to enjoy all winter long.

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

During the past few years, Florida has been hit hard by hurricanes that damaged fruit and spread diseases, such as canker and greening. This year, many growers who suffered crop losses have recovered and expect to meet — or even exceed — high demands in quantity and quality.

Recovery and protection of crops drove much of the innovation in the Florida citrus industry as research and development focused on treating and eradicating disease. Despite the focus on maintenance and recovery, as well as a 3- to 4-week delay in many harvests, most growers and shippers appear to be sending out fruit that looks and tastes good; some even have new packaging and varieties to present.

"Overall, it's a good crop set," states David Mixon, chief marketing officer for Seald-Sweet International, Vero Beach, FL. "It's a great season for quality of product."

Paul Genke, director of sales and marketing for the Packers of Indian River, Ltd., Fort Pierce, FL, agrees. "The external appearance is good, picking up only a little wind scarring. With the internal quality, the brix sugar level is a tad above last year and the acid is about the same," he explains.

Peter Palmer, director of retail communications for the Florida Department of Citrus, Lakeland, FL, agrees, saying, "The crop is a little late and a little smaller due in part to it being a little dry this year."

For several years, the ill winds of hurricanes and storms harmed Florida citrus fruit and trees. While direct damage scars and stunts growth, the most devastating effects of the storms are the diseases they carry in. The two major diseases are green-



The sweet, summery taste of Florida citrus is especially welcome during the long, cold months of winter.

ing and canker. Eradication procedures meant to prevent the spread throughout the state and nation decimated thousands of trees and even entire groves.

Florida's strict regulations for eradication in place before the hurricanes mandated that when a canker-infected tree was found, all other citrus trees within 1,900 feet had to be destroyed. The 2004 and 2005 storms spread the diseases so widely that these measures were no longer possible and in January of 2006, the eradication procedure was stopped, replaced by rigorous inspections; more money was put toward scientifically battling diseases. As of November 2007, new regulations and different inspections and treatments at the packing level allow easier shipping of Florida citrus

throughout the nation.

"It's still pretty bad at this junction," according to Brad Cook, marketing manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., Oviedo, FL, "but lots of people are looking to eliminate it. There is enough brain power to find a solution."

Doug Bournique, executive vice president of Indian River Citrus League, Vero Beach, FL, adds, "Millions of dollars are going into research with the brightest females and males out of universities. We've got reinforcements that are spectacular.

"People were unable to research greening with homeland security. It was too dangerous. Now, a number of scientists can start looking at how to defeat the disease and they're already making in-roads," he adds.



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"It's going to be awhile before we get back into full swing," notes Mixon. "We want our retail partners to help let customers know about availability."

According to Rob Rath, sales manager for Heller Brothers Packing Corp., Winter Garden, FL, the company "surveyed all the groves and didn't see either disease." He applauds the result as "a strong diligent effort in the fields to find and eradicate trees that show any signs of disease. It's made a big difference in the main shipping. We're really trying hard to regroup after all the hurricanes — it really paid off. If Mother Nature leaves us alone, we should be good all year."

OVERALL, A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Because of earlier storms and disease, many growers had a late starting season this year. The fruit took a longer time than usual to mature, and some of it, particularly grapefruits and navel oranges, are smaller than in prior years. Some growers also had wind scarring from storms this year. However, growers and shippers are looking at dependable production of quality fruit that is comparable to last year's numbers.

"Prices are comparable to last year," Heller's Rath says. "They should follow the

same pattern as last year. The only item dragging is the Sunburst. We put off ads for a lot of chains, but after Thanksgiving, it should be back to normal."

"The schedule on our Florida tangerine

varieties is back to normal," says Darrell Genthner, director of marketing and business development for Noble Worldwide Florida Citrus Sales, Winter Haven, FL. "The growing conditions have been very favor-

Grapefruit Trends

Grapefruit is a hot topic in the industry. Some rumors slated the fruit to be phased out, due to an aging consumer demographic and how badly disease hit the category. Other buzz talks trends in color. The size of the fruit might be down for this season, but interest isn't.

Doug Bournique, executive vice president of the Indian River Citrus League, Vero Beach, FL, gives a firm "No!" in response to rumors about phasing out of grapefruit due to disease. "We've had diseases before and come back."

On the other hand, Brad Cook, marketing manager of Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc, Oviedo, FL, points out, "Grapefruit is a big focus, though there is a declining market and declining consumption in grapefruit." However, he says, the focus is on "new ways to merchandise, package and promote. We can turn it around. The whole industry is working on it. In the next six to eight months, there should be a great program in place."

Color trends are a point of interest for Rob Rath, sales manager for Heller Brothers Packing Corp., Winter Garden, FL, which packed much of the grapefruit coming out of the state. "We're packing nothing but 'high blush' grapefruits. It's hard to market just a ruby grapefruit," he explains. "Suddenly, there's such a difference. Consumers want red grapefruit. It's really attractive on the shelf. Many stores have switched over to completely high blush."

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Indian River Citrus Spotlight

The Indian River growing region has garnered much attention and respect.

"The USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] gauged all citrus from all over the world," says Doug Bournique, executive vice president, Indian River Citrus League, Vero Beach, FL. "The Indian River has a thin skin, the highest juice and the best taste. It's the best fruit."

When Bournique left the sugar industry for the citrus industry, he didn't think there would be much difference in citrus fruit — until he was asked to judge a citrus contest for Florida. Once he was able to look at the fruit in a neutral way, he noticed the difference between fruits.

"Indian River is the rock star of citrus," he says. "All over the world, everyone wants Indian River fruit. When Florida was hit by hurricanes, customers from all over called, wanting to make sure they had their Indian River fruit. There's a global acceptance." **pb**

able to producing excellent quality tangerines and specialty citrus."

NEW PRODUCTS AND PROMOTIONS

While many in the Florida citrus industry focus on recovery, there's still news in fruit development and packaging.

Bournique of the Indian River Citrus League cites development of new varieties and strains that is happening domestically and globally. "Research is already going at a frantic pace."

"Retailers are always looking for the next item that helps differentiate their offerings versus their competition," explains Noble's Genthner. "Consumers are looking for the next great eating experience. For us at Noble, we have created a price look-up [PLU] label that has all of the needed purchase triggers for Pummelos. Many retailers are developing this as their signature item within the Florida citrus category."

Pummelos are the largest of the citrus fruits and originated in Asia. They are similar to a grapefruit in flavor but milder and with a thicker skin.

Stores can look for Seald-Sweet's new Disney Garden packaging aimed at introducing a new generation to citrus fruits. "It's the first time in the industry that we're con-

centrating on not only adults but also children and adults getting excited about Florida citrus," Mixon states.

"In January and February, when grapefruit is at its peak flavor, DNE [World Fruit Sales, Fort Pierce, FL] offers cross-merchandising opportunities with Ocean Spray juice," shares Kathy Hearl, marketing promotions manager. "Cross-promoting fresh citrus with Ocean Spray juice helps retailers move fresh citrus."

Likewise, the Florida Department of Citrus is gearing up to run a couple major promotions aimed at encouraging consumers to buy more Florida grapefruit, grapefruit juice, oranges and specialty citrus products. "Between January and March, we'll be running custom ads with Michael Marks, the Produce Guy, in televisions located in supermarket meat and produce departments," Palmer explains.

DISPLAY OPPORTUNITIES

There are many ways stores can help build Florida citrus sales. Providing multiple sizes for today's changing family dynamics is a step that makes a big difference.

"We have been seeing a trend where many consumers are moving toward smaller bags because of smaller household sizes," according to Kevin Swords, DNE sales manager. "DNE will be promoting grapefruit in a 3-pound bag. This was test marketed last season and will be rolled out this fall. We

will also be offering tangerines in a 3-pound bag. The smaller packaging hits a good price point and is a great value for on-the-go customers."

Stores can also stress the health benefits of citrus. "Focus on the health aspect," suggests Duda's Cook. "Citrus has vitamin C and vitamin A. It's one of the 'superfoods.' It's good for you, it's good to eat, and it's a good meal solution."

Mixon recommends making a "supreme destination place in the produce department that excites customers, especially during the holiday season."

Sales data show sustainable sales growth for Florida citrus comes from two segments of the category — tangerines and specialty, notes Genthner. "Both are defined as impulse purchases driven by display size, location, quality and signage. When promoting any segment or category, it is important to offer different value propositions within the category to maximize the sales potential of the category and not one item."

Seasonal merchandising as holiday gifts, such as stocking stuffers, and as a winter treat, also help sell more citrus. Cook offers, "In winter, it's a neat item. In cold climates, it reminds people of warmer times to come. It's a 'slice of summer.'"

Education also goes a long way. "Promote citrus as a healthful family snack," recommends Swords. "The big sell is on the taste and health benefits of citrus." **pb**

Canker And Greening

While growers have battled canker and greening for years, the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005 spread the diseases beyond the state's ability to control them. Understanding their devastating effect provides insight into the Florida citrus industry.

Canker is a bacterial infection that causes raised brown lesions on the fruit and leaves of citrus plants surrounded by "an oily, water-soaked margin and a yellow ring or halo," according to the Web site of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL. While citrus canker does not harm humans, animals or plants other than citrus, it affects the industry by causing premature leaf and fruit drop. What makes the disease so devastating is how easily it is spread. Wind-borne rain, lawn mowers, landscaping equipment, human hands and insects can rapidly transport the bacteria from tree to tree and infect entire groves.

Citrus greening, whose proper name is *Huanglongbing*, is a serious citrus disease that affects the plants' vascular system. Once a plant is infected, there is no cure. The plant will produce bitter, inedible fruit and die. Insects, specifically two species of psyllids, spread this bacterium. Psyllids native to the United States are uncommon. In 1998, however, the Asian citrus psyllid was found in Delray Beach, FL. The insect quickly became an established pest. While the bacterium is not transmittable by humans, animals, equipment, wind or rain, there is still a substantial risk from the psyllids. Grafting can also be a problem because it can take years before a diseased tree displays symptoms of greening.

Currently, research is being done on both diseases; diligent growers and packers help contain the problem and prevent it from being spread out of the state. **pb**

Merchandising Cucumbers And Sweet Peppers

Consider shelf space, packaging and pricing when pairing these popular commodities.

BY KIMBERLY A. RINKER

Traditionally, cucumbers and sweet peppers are partners in the supermarket produce section, displayed alongside each other for maximum consumer visibility and access.

During the past decade, bell peppers have established themselves as a staple in salads and national and regional cuisine. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), bell pepper sales in the United States jumped from \$516 million in 2004 to \$586 million in 2006.

Similarly, fresh consumption of cucumbers by Americans has risen steadily since 1985. According to the USDA, 2.1 billion pounds of cucumbers were produced for all uses from 2004 to 2006, with the cucumber being the most frequently pickled vegetable.

The United States currently ranks fifth in cucumber production — behind China, Turkey, Iran and Russia. According to the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), 62 percent of cucumber consumption in the United States is in the fresh form, while the remainder is consumed in the processed form, as pickled or relish products.

America's affection for bell peppers is reflected in the overall trend toward wellness and healthful alternatives in the daily diet. For instance, U.S. consumption of all peppers increased from 12 pounds per person in 2001 to 14 pounds in 2006, with bell pepper consumption increasing from 6.8 pounds per person to 7.7 pounds, according to the USDA.

California leads the nation in pepper production, followed by Florida. The United States ranks fourth in global pepper production, behind China, Mexico and Turkey,



Cucumbers and sweet peppers have shown increasingly strong sales over the past several years.

according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), headquartered in Rome, Italy.

In an increasingly competitive retail world, the quality of a store's fresh produce offering, including bell peppers and cucumbers, is key. Retailers that highlight quality fresh produce can garner greater market share, especially since the trends of wellness, nutrition and organics show no signs of abating.

TRADITIONAL PLACEMENT GARNERS REPEAT SALES

Why do cucumbers and bell peppers complement each other so well in the produce department?

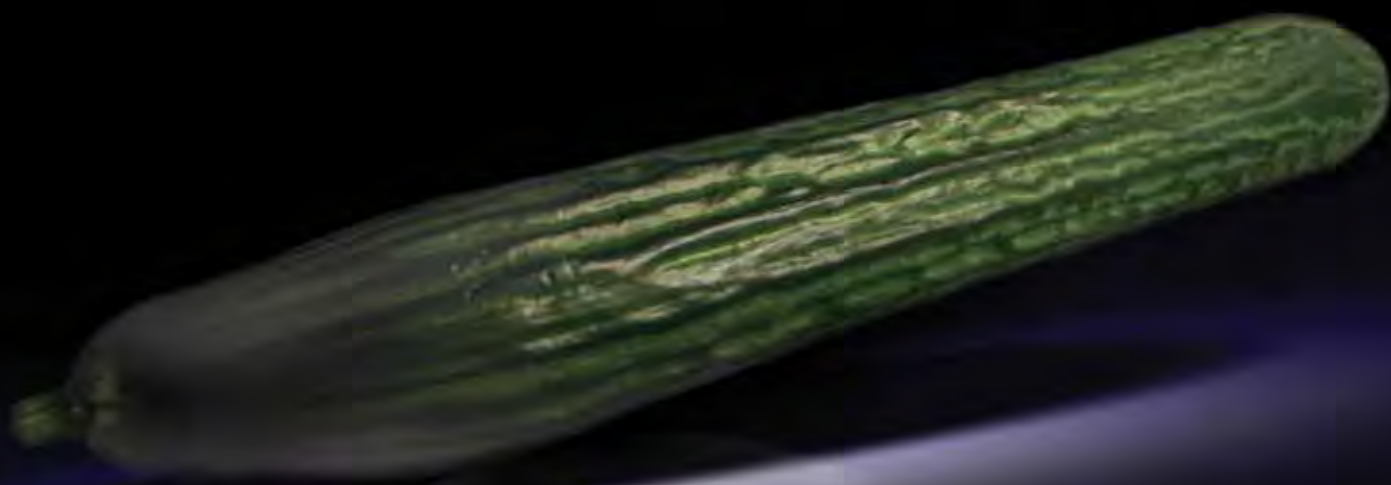
"It's a seasonal thing," notes Scott Seddon, marketing and advertising specialist, Pero Vegetable Company, LLC, Delray Beach, FL. "Typically, these products are grown and harvested at the same time, and when it comes to shipping, they run on the same line and temperatures. From an operational standpoint, I think it just makes sense for these two vegetables to go hand-in-hand."

Mike Aiton, senior vice president, Sun World International, LLC, Bakersfield, CA, agrees. "Traditionally, peppers and cucumbers are neighbors on the wet rack."

"We find supermarkets group peppers and cucumbers together for a number of reasons, but mostly because they are salad items," adds Lee Anne Oxford, marketing



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director, L&M Companies, Inc., Raleigh, NC.

During the winter months, these two items do not always come from the same region, Oxford notes, adding that retailers need to consider points of origin when stocking produce aisle shelves. "Peppers could come from Florida, while cucumbers might come from Mexico. In most cases, we deal with the same buyer for both items, even if we are growing in two different regions. We do find, however, that different customers treat the items differently and they are not necessarily promoted together."

MCM Acres, Ltd., Leamington, ON, Canada, grows bell peppers and cucumbers along with hothouse tomatoes, says Claudio Mastronardi, president, who thinks these two items could possibly be marketed differently due to some shelf life inconsistencies. Additionally, he stresses proper positioning of products is vital for repeat sales.

"Our experiences have shown if cucumbers are marketed beside hothouse tomatoes on the open-air shelf, it not only increases the shelf life but also increases the repetitive sale of cucumbers," Mastronardi advises. "We continually see cucumbers on the cold shelf, creating a condensation between the cucumber and the protective film. This actually reduces the shelf life of the cucumber."

SHELF SPACE: JUST HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

During the past decade, retailers increased the size of their produce departments and greatly expanded their fresh produce offerings, but even with increased square-footage, there is a question of how much space should be allotted for sweet peppers and cucumbers, especially if they are marketed side-by-side.

"Obviously, much depends on the size of the department, the refrigerated space available and the promotions in place," says Sun World's Aiton. "In my opinion, the pepper section needs to be at least four feet to maximize the benefit of all those beautiful colors and shapes."

Pero's Seddon believes it's important to give the colored peppers about half of the total space allotted for sweet peppers.

"Typically, within the produce department, you have 2 to 4 percent cucumbers and 4 to 8 percent peppers," Seddon notes. "Within those percentages, you'll find 40 percent of your pepper items are the green bell, while 20 percent are the red, 15 percent are yellow, 10 percent orange and 5 percent are of the hot varieties. Of course, this is also based on demand, demographics and location, but in general, this is how it is broken down in most cases."

L&M's Oxford points out pepper and cucumber ratios vary widely depending on

Reinforce The Obvious For Maximum Sales

For produce retail executives looking to spice up pepper and cucumber sales, Mike Aiton, senior vice president of Sun World International, LLC, Bakersfield, CA, suggests promoting peppers' diverse list of usages. "Peppers should be sold with a variety of uses explained," he says. "Utilizing frequent promotions and moving peppers and cucumbers around in the department so the location doesn't become stagnant is key. Also, if you are selling these items by the pound, sell them during promotions. For instance, 2 for \$1, and in secondary displays, too"

Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director at L&M Companies, Inc., Raleigh, NC, says proper placement and pricing are important ways to attract repeat customers. "For enhanced pepper and cucumber sales, use traditional low-price advertising complemented with good shelf space in a prime location in the store. Keeping the product fresh and promoting it often throughout the year is a good, simple strategy. Ads with recipes and occasional samplings with a nice dip are good ways to pique interest as well," she adds.

"Recipes, kids' themes, and health and wellness awareness are all good promotional tools," explains Scott Seddon, marketing and advertising specialist at Pero Vegetable Company, LLC, Delray Beach, FL. "The last decade was especially friendly to these items. A good promotion tool to focus on is one that stresses the sweet taste of the peppers and the light, citrus flavor of cucumbers for at-home uses.

"Even though both of these items are somewhat traditional in American households, and on lunch and dinner plates, I think it's very important to remind the consumer from time to time the health and taste benefits of them," Seddon recommends.

To best boost return sales, produce managers must continue to stress these facts to their consumers and "revisit the obvious," Seddon notes. "When you do that, you create excitement," he adds. "Retailers have to keep abreast of crop projections and consumer demand, which will enable them to create customized promotions within their produce departments."

pb

the demographics of the store. "Ideally, the store should be offering what the market calls for in their area."

"The real growth in recent years is in colored pepper sales," Aiton adds. "Sweet red peppers have become major items on the promotion calendar, and we have many customers who buy them by the truckload."

PACKAGING AND PRICING INFLUENCED BY SHELF LIFE

Aiton says enhanced packaging for the colorful bell peppers also plays a major role in promoting consumer pepper purchases. "Colored peppers packed and wrapped together are always attractive and inviting," he explains. "The colors are attention-getting and attract customers over and over."

According to Oxford, L&M packages its produce according to the request of individual retailers. "We package bell peppers in a 3- or 4-count, depending on the store," she notes. "Our only packaged cucumber is in a 3-count bag."

"A lot of time, you let the crop dictate the packaging and, of course, the individual retailers," Seddon notes. "Generally, 70 percent of our product goes bulk and about 30

percent goes into value-added packaging, such as shrink-wrapped groups."

These growers also stress that product shelf life is a major factor produce department executives should consider when marketing these two items.

"Both of these items have a shelf life garnered from their region," Seddon states, "and it varies from season to season. Produce managers have to check these items on a daily basis. They're like moving targets when it comes to shelf life."

"Shelf life is definitely a factor," Aiton agrees. "The first telltale signs of problems are when the product shows shriveling around the stem end. Once this starts, produce managers need to get these items off the display and take their loss."

Pricing cucumbers and the various pepper varieties accordingly is also an issue for produce managers. "Pricing is an individual preference," Aiton notes. "I believe these products should be sold by the pound because the sizing on them is never exact."

"We sell by the pound, based on the retailer and the area. We suggest selling two for \$1, or three for \$1, when considering pricing and promotions," Oxford reports.

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Strategies to educate produce executives and their customers on health and nutrition benefits to drive consumption.

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Interview with Kori Tuggle,
Marketing Manager,
Ocean Mist Farms

Located in Castroville, Calif., Ocean Mist Farms grows a wide assortment of fresh vegetables including broccoli, cauliflower, celery, mixed lettuce, romaine, spinach, and its signature crop, artichokes. Ocean Mist is the largest producer of artichokes in the country with 83 years of industry leadership.

Q: How can you distinguish your product from the pack touting nutritional benefits?

A: Artichokes are a great way to meet several key nutrition recommendations. Artichokes are low-calorie, nutrient-rich vegetables and a great source of antioxidants. One medium artichoke is an excellent source of fiber and vitamin C and a good source of folate, magnesium and potassium. Additionally, artichokes have no fat or cholesterol and provide four grams of protein.

Q: What are the latest news flashes/surprises regarding health/nutrition benefits of eating your product?

A: A 2006 study in the *American Journal of Nutrition* found artichokes have the highest antioxidant level of all vegetables. What was surprising about artichokes is although they are pale green in color, they have a high antioxidant content similar to foods generally recognized as high in antioxidants due to their rich coloring, such as berries. Vitamin C and phytonutrients, specific types of antioxidants found in artichokes, provide a number of health benefits including anti-cancer, anti-aging, heart-healthy, immunity boosting and cholesterol lowering functions.

Q: Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?

A: Artichokes are a nutrient-rich vegetable offering health benefits to all age groups. They are particularly advantageous for seniors because their high antioxidant and fiber content provide a wide range of health benefits for common conditions associated with age. For example, the

dozens of phytonutrients in artichokes provide anti-cancer, anti-aging, heart-healthy, immunity boosting and cholesterol-lowering functions.

Q: Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product you'd like to clear up?

A: Artichokes are higher in antioxidants than many foods commonly touted as rich in antioxidants including cranberries, blueberries, wine and chocolate.

Q: Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand?

A: Artichokes are an antioxidant powerhouse. One medium artichoke is an excellent source of dietary fiber, providing 10 grams of the recommended 20 to 35 daily requirement. In addition to many disease fighting functions, fiber helps maintain a healthy digestive system and aids in weight control.

Q: How does your product deliver a powerful punch of nutrition and what studies back up these claims?

A: The *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found artichokes have more antioxidants than all other vegetables and ranked fourth in antioxidant content out of all food and beverages tested. In the study, researchers from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, the University of Minnesota and the University of Oslo, Norway, used the FRAP (ferric reducing ability of plasma) assay method to measure the antioxidant levels of more than 1,000 food and beverages commonly consumed in the United States.

Q: Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on



labels of your product packages?

A: Artichokes are an antioxidant powerhouse.

Q: What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions can you offer?

A: We communicate our health message on our Web site, on packaging and on customer communications.

Q: What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor?

A: We have materials we insert in cartons for produce managers to use as they build artichoke displays that highlight the nutrition benefits of artichokes.

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Interview with Chris Mayhew,
Vice President of Marketing,
Naturipe Farms LLC

Naturipe Farms, LLC produces a full line of conventional, organic and premium berries, marketed under the Naturipe Farms brand. Headquartered in Naples, FL, Naturipe Farms maintains alliances with premier growers to provide customers and consumers with nutritious, wholesome and delicious berries throughout the year.

Q: *As consumers are inundated more and more about the nutritional values of just about everything, how can you distinguish your product from the pack?*

A: Berries are considered to be super foods. Most health professionals agree a healthful diet should include berries. They are low in calories, high in vitamins and low in fat. They're a delicious source of disease-fighting nutrients. Retailers can offer consumers the full line of conventional and organic berries with the Naturipe Farms label — blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, cranberries and other specialty berries.

Q: *What are some of the nutritional properties in your product that make it an essential part of a healthful diet?*

A: Berries are super foods containing vitamins and phyto chemicals, which may help prevent diseases and disorders. For example, cranberries and blueberries contain a substance which may help treat bladder infections. Extracts from blueberries and strawberries have been shown to have anti-cancer properties. Darker colored berries, like blackberries, contain powerful antioxidants, which in laboratory studies have shown they may help slow down the aging process and diminish the effects of Alzheimer's disease. Berries, in particular blueberries and raspberries, contain lutein, which contributes to healthy vision. Berries are low in calories and high in vitamins and minerals to boost and maintain a healthy immune system.

Q: *What are the latest news flashes/surprises regarding health/nutrition benefits of eating your product?*

A: Berries have become a hot topic, and there is ongoing research in clinical

trials to determine health benefits and develop new varieties with increased antioxidants and health-fighting benefits. Recently, these studies have discovered certain berries may prevent ulcers, improve eyesight and even inhibit the growth of plaque on teeth. Naturipe Farms recognizes the importance of berries in consumers' diets and is actively working on developing new varieties that taste great.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?*

A: All age groups can benefit from the properties of berries: Pregnant mothers can rely on strawberries as a great source of all-important folic acid, the elderly can benefit from the anti-aging benefits of blueberries, and women can ward off urinary track infections with cranberries. Children love berries, which are a delicious, fun alternative to junk food. Researchers are discovering how the different nutrients in fresh berries are beneficial to mind, body and general well-being.

Q: *Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand?*

A: Many studies have linked an increased dietary intake of antioxidants from berries to helping to reduce the risks of a range of diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Q: *What health-related initiatives do you currently have underway?*

A: Naturipe Farms has done a recent update of our consumer-based website, naturipefarms.com, to keep consumers up-to-date on the latest studies and nutritional information, as well as providing delicious super food recipes making it fun and easy to live a healthy lifestyle. New additions to the site are favorite recipe links, a community recipe center, and much more.

Q: *What else can retailers do to relay nutrition/health information to consumers on the retail floor?*

A: There are several effective ways,



such as knowledgeable produce managers, in-store announcements, point-of-sale materials, shelf strips, health information kiosks, signage, danglers and in-store health demos. Today's consumers are asking for more nutritional information for their products. Naturipe Farms is committed to supplying retailers with the latest berry research on health benefits and in-store materials.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health messages about your product to consumers, and what are the solutions?*

A: Educating consumers on easy ways to increase the use of fresh berries in their everyday diets is a challenge and an opportunity. Berries are actually perfect for any eating occasion. Through our web site and consumer relationship marketing campaigns, Naturipe Farms provides all different types of product uses. We have developed a lot of fantastic recipes ranging from appetizers to soups, salads and sauces. We also provide health and nutrition tips.

BERRIES FOR HEALTH

Berries - among the superfoods highest in antioxidants and disease-fighting phytochemicals - are a fun and flavorful part of a healthy lifestyle.

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Mann Packing Company has long been a pioneer in the fresh produce industry. It introduced the first fresh-cut package of broccoli florets in the 1980s and helped put broccoli on the map as a healthful food source with the funding of the first nutritional study on broccoli. It is also a leader in innovative packaging and development of exciting new fresh-cut vegetable products.

The company was founded by H.W. "Cy" Mann, a Stanford graduate who came to California's Salinas Valley in search of employment in the 1930s. Today, Mann Packing distributes more than 35 fresh vegetable commodities under its Sunny Shores label and a variety of value-added retail and foodservice products, including Broccolini Sweet Baby Broccoli, Broccoli Wokly, Mann's Broccoli Cole Slaw, Stringless Sugar Snap Peas, Romaine Hearts, Simply Singles Whole Leaf Singles and the latest product, fresh-cut sweet potatoes.

Q: *As America fights the obesity epidemic and other health problems, consumers are inundated with the nutritional values of just about everything. How can you distinguish your product from the pack?*

A: We have a *For A Healthy Active Lifestyle* logo with Mann's SuperMANN on each of our fresh-cut vegetable products. Within each logo, we call out health attributes for that product.

Q: *Tell us something consumers may not realize about how your product can improve their health and well-being.*

A: I think the most important thing our consumers may not realize is the application ideas on how to add more veggies into your diet. An article published in *The Everett [WA] Herald* (Nov. 19, 2006) points out broccoli is known as the crown jewel of nutrition because it is rich in vitamins and minerals. It reports while many fruits and vegetables are loaded with cancer-preventing substances, broccoli tops the list, offering an outstanding 30 types of these agents.

Additionally, a team of Johns Hopkins scientists recently reported humans can be protected against the damaging effects of ultraviolet radiation — the most abundant

cause of skin cancer — by wearing a topical solution containing an extract from broccoli sprouts. According to Dr. Paul Talalay, a professor of pharmacology, the broccoli chemical extract is not a sunscreen because, unlike sunscreens, this topical solution does not absorb UV light and prevent its entry into the skin but instead works inside cells by boosting the production of protective enzymes defending cells against many aspects of UV damage. (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Oct. 22, 2007).

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?*

A: Our veggies are healthful for all demographics. Our convenient packaging is ideal for anyone on the go and those who have busy schedules. The veggies are washed and ready to eat. You can even microwave steam them in the bag.

Q: *Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product that you'd like to clear up?*

A: Our broccoli products tend to be full of fiber, which could have adverse effects if eaten in large quantities. Beano[®] helps those who are susceptible to flatulence. Also, broccoli contains vitamin K, and if you are on blood-thinning medications, apparently you should avoid eating too much so the medication works properly.

Q: *Can you come up with simple, catchy phrases that could be used to market health benefits of your product?*

A: We've already created a new slogan and logo: *For a Healthy Active Lifestyle*. Because all vegetables are healthful for you, this communicates the ease of preparation along with the goal of having a balanced, healthful diet and lifestyle.

Q: *Can you point to studies backing up the nutritional claims of your product?*

A: The studies are endless. John Hopkins is continuing to do studies on the phytochemical components of broccoli. Anyone can find a great deal of information googling broccoli.

Interview with Gina Nucci,
Director of Foodservice Marketing,
Mann Packing Company



Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on labels of your product packages?*

A: Each product of ours is different. A variety of our statements include high in vitamin C, naturally low in carbs, good source of folate, good source of fiber, high in antioxidants, and preservative free.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions can you suggest?*

A: We believe all consumers know vegetables are healthful. It's providing them tasteful usage ideas and pleasant experiences with the products to keep them buying them. We have updated our web site, www.veggiesmadeeasy.com, with creative recipe ideas on how to simply add veggies to their meals: from breakfast scrabbles to Mexican burritos. And streaming videos to teach those consumers who aren't that familiar with cooking on just how easy it is! Fresh Veggies Made Easy is our mission.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor? Can you provide creative that directly link your product to health and encourage action-oriented steps?*

A: I think healthful recipe and usage ideas would be great. Most consumers do not know how to cook. Additionally, retailers are using innovative displays, in-store magazines and weekly advertising to cross promote healthful products. In-store demos and wellness programs are also growing. Making veggie consumption as easy as possible is what's important.

History

where we come from matters.



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Interview with Carla Laylin,
Senior Marketing Manager, Produce
Products, T. Marzetti Company

The T. Marzetti Company, the specialty food arm of Lancaster Colony Corporation, offers both retail and foodservice products. The company markets a wide variety of brands including: Marzetti, Girard's, Cardini, Teresa's and Pfeiffer Salad Dressings, Marzetti croutons, Slaw Dressing, Jack Daniel's mustards, Romanoff Caviar, New York and Mamma Bella frozen garlic bread, Reames frozen egg noodles, Inn Maid egg noodles, Chatham Village croutons, Sister Schubert's homemade yeast rolls and Marshall's biscuits.

Q: *As America fights the obesity epidemic and other health issues, consumers are inundated with information. How can you distinguish your product from the pack?*

A: As about 70 percent of purchase decisions are made at the point of purchase, the package becomes an increasingly important communication vehicle for health benefits, in addition to the nutritional panel. Our products across the dip and dressing categories are labeled to provide 'instant communication' to the consumers.

Our dressing line has *No Preservatives* clearly marked on the labels. In early 2008, we are adding an *All-Natural* claim to our dressings. This lets the consumer know immediately the product does not contain any artificial flavorings, colorings, MSG, etc.

We offer numerous light products in the dressing category (creamy line and vinaigrettes) and in the Veggie, Apple and Fruit Dip segments. We also offer Fat Free dips: the Light and Fat Free products are easily differentiated at shelf. Additionally, all of our dips also call out *0 grams Trans Fat*.

We recently enhanced our vinaigrette packaging by adding ingredient vignettes, which, with the clear packaging, better reflects the premium quality ingredients and increases our shelf appeal.

Our Organic Dressing line was recently redesigned and should be appearing on the shelf in early 2008. The clear labeling and ingredient vignettes allow the goodness of the dressing to show through. Given the growing popularity of fruit dressing varieties, we are adding an Organic Raspberry Cranberry to our lineup.

Q: *Tell us something consumers may not realize about how your product*

can improve their health and well-being.

A: Our products in the dressing and dip category are created to enhance fresh fruits and vegetables and help families eat more of them. A recent UC Davis study found kids ate 23 percent more vegetables when they were served with a moderate helping of ranch dip/dressing. Seventy percent of kids say ranch dip/dressing is a must for veggies (survey conducted by Impulse Research). Recent research shows fat-soluble veggies like carrots, spinach and broccoli have nutrients that are better absorbed with a moderate amount of fat, like ranch dip/dressing.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your products?*

A: Our dressings and dips appeal to a broad demographic profile. Our Light Dressings offer half the fat and minimally 1/2 fewer calories than the originals, with the same great flavor profile. Vinaigrettes in general are lower in fat calories than the creamy varieties, and we also offer Light Vinaigrettes. All of our more healthful segments show strong growth.

We also see trends emerge and strive to offer products fitting those trends. We introduced a line of Hummus Veggie Dip and Spreads. Hummus is particularly popular with younger consumers and those interested in healthful snacking. It is lower in fat and saturated fat than other dip alternatives. It also provides protein and fiber. We also offer different shapes and sizes of hummus packaging to use in fresh-cut veggie trays.

Another trend we have seen emerging is 100-calorie packs. You can have the product you like, not a 'diet' version, but it is portion controlled. We have just introduced 100 Calorie Packs of Light Ranch Veggie Dip and Cream Cheese Fruit Dip. Each unit of dip is 1.5 ounces. Six units are bundled together in a snack pack. Packaging screams *100 Calorie Pack* so the consumer can easily identify on shelf. Target audience is female ages 25 to 54.

Q: *Are there any myths or confusing*



nutrition information about your product you'd like to clear up?

A: Since salad dressings and dips contain oils, consumers may associate them with trans fats. Like most dressings and sour cream-based dips, ours are made with non-hydrogenated vegetable oils, so our products do not contain trans fats.

Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on your product's labels?*

A: We highlight/differentiate on shelf as much as possible within those guidelines. We use different color coding to differentiate the Lights/Fat Free from the regular items on the shelf. On the dressings, we will claim the *All Natural No Preservatives* in a prominent location, so the consumer will take notice. The USDA Organic Seal is prominent on our Organic line, assuring the consumer our organic dressings and dips contain the necessary 95 percent organic ingredients to qualify for the seal.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions can you offer?*

A: Our primary means of communication is through our packaging. Labeling space is at a premium, so it is a challenge to communicate in-depth messages. Using point-of-sale materials and focusing advertising messages on the health benefits help.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor?*

A: The best options are point-of-sale materials where we have more space to tell our story and to provide healthful recipes.



New Crouton Packaging and Flavors!



Hummus... For Goodness Sake

Marzetti Hummus was created for the produce department, the perfect place to promote this delicious, nutritious snack dip/spread. Marzetti is the brand consumers know and trust in produce.

New 100 Calorie Packs

Light Ranch Veggie Dip and Cream Cheese Fruit Dip are now available in portion control packs for fresh fruit and veggie snacks.



Reader Service # 40



Cal-Harvest Marketing, Inc.
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Website: www.calharvest.com

Interview with John Fagundes,
President, Cal-Harvest

Cal Harvest Marketing, Inc., a large grower of kiwifruit, was formed in 1988 and is owned by Fagundes Agribusiness, based in Hanford, CA. Cal Harvest markets fresh fruit in North and South America and the Pacific Rim.

Q: *Can you point to the nutritional properties in your product that make it an essential part of a healthful diet?*

A: Dr. Steven Pratt, the author of *SuperFoods Healthstyle*, recently added kiwifruit to the elite list of SuperFoods. It's a nutritional powerhouse and has rightly earned its new SuperFood status.

A 2-piece serving has twice the vitamin C of an orange, as much potassium as a banana and as much fiber as a serving of bran flakes — all for about 100 calories. Kiwifruit is also a good source of magnesium, sodium-free and a low-fat source of vitamin E.

Q: *What are the latest news flashes/surprises regarding health/nutrition benefits of eating your product?*

A: Bite for bite, kiwifruit contains more essential nutrients than 27 of the most popular fruits, as proven by a Rutgers University study, making it one of the most “nutrient dense” fruits in the world.

Recent research conducted by the University of Oslo in Norway reveals that consuming two to three kiwifruit per day can work to thin blood, reduce clotting and lower fat in the blood that can cause blockage. In short, kiwifruit consumption has similar effects to the daily dosage of aspirin recommended by physicians to improve heart health.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?*

A: Kiwifruit is popular among children because of its small size, convenience, sweet taste and colorful appearance! And because of its nutritional value and year-round availability, moms love it, too. Kiwifruit is also popular among adults and senior citizens. Research has linked it to reducing the risk of age-related macular

degeneration, the leading cause of irreversible blindness in older Americans.

Kiwifruit also has a moderate-to-low glycemic index of 52, making it a safe choice for those with Type 2 diabetes.

Q: *Are there simple, catchy phrases to market the health benefits of your product?*

A: Here are some messages developed by Cal Harvest and the kiwifruit industry: *Fuzzy Fruit — Fabulous Flavor*, *Power UP with Kiwifruit — A Nutritional Superpower*, *Kiwifruit — The New SuperFood*, *Green Kiwifruit — The Classic Original* — *A Super Tropical-Sweet Sensation*, *Organic — 100% Super Natural Quality*, *Chewable Vitamins*, *Lean*, *Green Kiwifruit Machine*.

Q: *How does your product deliver a powerful punch of nutrition? Do studies back up these claims?*

A: Many studies, available on the Cal Harvest and industry web sites, support the previously mentioned health claims. Green kiwifruit also works well as a natural digestive aid and may help relieve asthma symptoms in children.

Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on your product's labels?*

A: FDA has approved the following nutrient content descriptors for kiwifruit: low-fat, saturated fat-free, sodium-free, cholesterol-free, high in fiber, high in vitamin C, a good source of vitamin E and a good source of potassium.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions can you offer?*

A: Though kiwifruit has been readily available in North America for many years, some consumers have never tried one. Efforts should always be made to get consumers to try the fruit and experience its unique taste year-round: California produces the most volume of fruit October through April; Chile offers fruit April through August; New Zealand exports



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kiwifruit to North America June through October and Italian kiwifruit comes in January through April.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor?*

A: Display: Display kiwifruit next to other SuperFoods such as avocados, blueberries, oranges, broccoli and pomegranates to form a “Power Aisle,” and display kiwifruit sliced and over-wrapped.

Point of Purchase/Signage: Signage should promote the health and nutritional benefits of kiwifruit. Make sure consumers see placards showing the ease of cutting and scooping the fruit. It can also be eaten whole (skin included) once the fuzz is rubbed off.

Offer in-store demos: Most people will buy kiwifruit after sampling it.

Sell in multiple pack styles and sizes: Give consumers a choice by placing bags or multi-unit packages with bulk displays.

Advertise: Sales increase as much as three times when advertised.



A world of kiwifruit profits at your fingertips



The "Cal King" label of kiwifruit represents one of the largest kiwifruit growers in California. This label is marketed by Cal Harvest Marketing, Inc., a family-owned farming and marketing organization that has been at the fore-front of the kiwifruit industry in California since the 1970's. This kiwifruit has been **grown, picked and packed with care and pride for over 30 years**. The label is now available in both conventional and organic styles. Cal Harvest also markets kiwifruit from Chile and New Zealand to assure you have a high quality, year-round source of kiwifruit.

For information contact: Donna Fagundes • donnaf@calharvest.com • John Fagundes • john@calharvest.com
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Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.
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Interview with Donna Bundrick-Griffin,
coordinator, marketing and promotions,
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.

The Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc. company grows, packs and ships fresh, high-quality vegetables to retail outlets including grocery stores and foodservice vendors. Through state-of-the-art technology, the company is committed to providing consumers with high-quality vegetables and dedicated to supplying the marketplace with the most wholesome vegetables providing great nutritional value, impeccable looks and optimum food safety, thus continuing to generate good business ethics and good consumer relationships. The Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc. company continues to play a very important part in the Produce for Better Health Foundation by endorsing the 5-A-Day Programs, contributing its part in producing a healthier America.

Q: *How can consumers distinguish your product from the pack? Can you point to the nutritional properties in your product that make it an essential part of a healthful diet?*

A: Our greens are very consumer friendly because they are cleaned, washed and already cut to help today's consumers prepare healthful meals for their families. Greens are low in calories, fat and sodium. They are high in vitamin A, vitamin K and cholesterol-free. Greens are also good sources of riboflavin, potassium, calcium and iron.

Our packaging now displays the American Heart Association logo which signifies it is a heart-healthy product.

Q: *What are the latest news flashes/surprises regarding health/nutrition benefits of eating your product?*

A: Women can have healthier babies by enjoying greens. Since greens are good sources of riboflavin (one of the B complex vitamins) and iron, in addition to being very low in calories, fat and sodium, cholesterol-free and high in vitamin A, expectant women can be assured of getting the best nutritional value by including greens in their diets. Also, those people with iron-poor blood can help with this health problem by including greens in their menus. Consumers can improve their health and well-being by including greens in their diets

since greens contain iron. Iron is essential for healthy red blood cells and gives the body energy. It is most important to include foods that are rich in iron in the diet.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?*

A: Since many older people have iron-poor blood, they have to supplement their daily menus with iron. Therefore, it would be very beneficial for the elderly to include greens in their daily menus.

Q: *Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product that you'd like to clear up?*

A: Yes. Greens can be enjoyed any time of the year. They make a perfect addition to spring and summer meals. Greens are most versatile and can be included as an ingredient in many delicious recipes such as hors d'oeuvres, soups, stews, casseroles, even breakfast dishes.

Q: *Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand? Can you come up with simple, catchy phrases that could be used to market health benefits of your product?*

A: Since lack of energy and tiredness is common among people of all ages, greens make a very wise and very sound choice for all people to improve their overall performance. Some catchy phrases may include: Go For the Greens, Greens Give 'Go' Power, Go for the Gold with Greens, Greens Make the Grade and Goodness with Greens.

Q: *How does your product deliver a powerful punch of nutrition?*

A: Our products are very low in calories, fat and sodium. They are high in vitamin A and good sources of riboflavin, potassium and iron. Scientific studies show by enjoying foods low in calories and fat, cholesterol-free and high in nutritive value, consumers will experience much better overall health.

Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can*



make, what can be advertised or put on labels of your product packages?

A: Low in calories, fat and sodium; cholesterol-free.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions do you have in mind?*

A: The biggest challenge for including greens as a part of the diet is individual preferences. More promotion and marketing strategies will help remind consumers about the benefits of greens.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutrition/health information to consumers on the retail floor?*

A: One-on-one visits, sampling of products and recipes that include products, and point-of-purchase colored materials including pertinent consumer information (nutritional value, recipes sampled and other suggested uses, additional products by vendor) are all part of an effective retail floor strategy.



Getting Better All The Time

You have to admit, Mom was right. Greens really ARE good for you. Now there's plenty of science to back her up, and even the American Heart Association has certified our collard greens.



We've listened to the consumers. That's why we redesigned our packaging, and that's why we know your customers will reach for more greens the next time they see our displays. Nature's Greens—a new twist on an old favorite. See for yourself why all the fuss made so much sense.



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Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee

P.O. Box 909, 118 N. Second Street, Parma, ID 83660

Tel: 208-631-6160

Website: www.bigonions.com

Contact: Sherise Jones

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Interview with Sherise Jones,
Marketing Director, Idaho-Eastern
Oregon Onion Committee

The Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee is committed to producing and shipping healthful yellow, white and red Spanish Sweet variety onions. As a member of *Fruit & Veggies — More Matters* to promote good health through the consumption of produce and as a member of the National Onion Association, the Committee works to increase overall onion consumption which contributes to the good health of our nation's consumers.

Q: *As American consumers are inundated with information about the nutritional values of just about everything, how can you distinguish your product from the pack? Can you point to the nutritional properties in your product that make it an essential part of a healthful diet?*

A: Onions contain concentrated levels of quercetin, an antioxidant that recent studies show may inhibit the growth of some cancer cells. Quercetin is a naturally occurring chemical that neutralizes free radicals in the body and protects cell membranes from damage. Recent scientific research articles appearing in the journal *Nature* and in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* suggest eating onions may help prevent the loss of bone density that leads to osteoporosis. Onions contain naturally occurring compounds reported to reduce blood cholesterol. Heart patients are often advised to eat raw onions to increase blood circulation and to reduce blood pressure and clotting. The onion contains about twice as much vitamin C as a medium-sized apple. Because water is not normally poured off cooked onion dishes, they retain most of their nutrients after cooking. In addition to vitamin C and quercetin, onions contain beneficial fiber, potassium, folic acid, phosphorous, vitamin B6, and prostaglandin.

Dr. Irwin Goldman of the University of Wisconsin-Madison says, "Onions may be among the vegetables that will be prized

not only for their addition to our cuisine, but for their value-added health characteristics."

Q: *What are the latest news flashes/surprises regarding health/nutrition benefits of eating your product? Tell us something that consumers may not realize about how your product can improve their health and well-being?*

A: One onion contains about twice as much vitamin C as a medium-sized apple and as much as an average-sized orange.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups (i.e., kids, the elderly, etc.), with your product? If so, can you delineate the reasons why?*

A: As referenced above, Boomers should find this information useful in choosing to include more onions in their diet.

Q: *Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand?*

A: Idaho-Eastern Oregon onions add wonderful flavor to any recipe, with minimal sodium and zero fat and cholesterol.

Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on labels of your product packages?*

A: To adhere to the FDA guidelines, use the nutritional chart.

Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers? What solutions do you have in mind?*

A: Over the years, onion consumption has risen. Consumers have become aware of the onion health benefits and because



onions add flavor to most dishes, we don't see a slow in the use of onions nationwide. The key isn't to get the health message out but rather to consistently work on new and innovative recipes consumers can increase their onion consumption.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor? Can you provide creative merchandising/marketing/promotional ideas that directly link your product to health and encourage action-oriented steps?*

A: Because onions already have a strong health-benefit following by consumers, we have instituted an Onion Lovers Month retail display contest taking place in January to target those customers who each year make resolutions to eat more healthfully and lose weight.

**January 2008
is Idaho-E. Oregon
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Interview with Alan Dolezal,
Vice President of Sales,
Turbana Corporation

Turbana Corporation is the North American Marketing arm of C.I. Uniban S.A., the world's largest banana producing cooperative. In 2005, Fyffes obtained a 50 percent ownership position in Turbana, leading to Turbana's current status as North American Marketer of Fyffes Gold label super sweet pineapples. Headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, Fyffes is the largest produce importer into the European Union, with annual sales of over \$2.6 billion.

Q: *As America fights the obesity epidemic and other health problems, consumers are inundated about the nutritional values. How can you distinguish your product from the pack?*

A: Fyffes Gold Pineapples are healthful and taste great! They're extremely high in vitamin C and low in calories and contain virtually zero sodium or fat. Regarding obesity, and in particular childhood obesity, Turbana is very proud Disney Garden has named Fyffes Gold as its pineapple of choice in the new Disney-Imagination Farms campaign aimed at increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among children.

On a lighter note, we also think Fyffes Gold Pineapples contribute to positive mental health. Pineapples have always had an exotic image conjuring up thoughts of tropical locales and warm, sandy beaches — the kind of images to put a smile on one's face, especially in winter.

Q: *Tell us something consumers may not realize about how your product can improve their health and well-being?*

A: People may not realize fresh pineapple's status as an anti-inflammatory agent and its ability to boost oral health. Pineapple contains bromelain, a protein-digesting enzyme that helps suppress and counteract inflammation. Pineapple is also extremely high in vitamin C, a high intake of which greatly reduces the risk of gum disease.

Q: *Are there any notable health reasons to target specific demographics or age groups with your product?*

A: Childhood obesity is a major concern in our society, and Turbana is very happy to be partnered with Disney Garden and Imagination Farms for the purpose of

implementing a program that will help our children to develop healthful eating habits that will continue through their teen years and into adulthood.

Q: *Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product that you'd like to clear up?*

A: One misconception about fresh pineapple is that it can be difficult to prepare. Our Fyffes Gold Pineapple has preparation instructions on the back of the tag, demonstrating how easy it is to cut a pineapple! We also offer a hand-held Easy-Slicer corer. Additionally, many retailers core our Fyffes Gold Pineapple and offer both whole and pre-cut fruit in their produce departments.

Another misconception is that pineapples are seasonal; Fyffes Gold Pineapple tastes the same and contains the same dietary attributes 52 weeks a year. The shell color of the fruit may vary slightly from time to time, but the consumer taste experience and the nutritional benefits inherent to the fruit will not.

Q: *Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand? Can you come up with simple, catchy phrases that could market the health benefits of your product?*

A: The *More Matters* campaign and the Produce For Better Health Foundation (PBH) are great sources for consumers to learn about the benefits of fresh pineapple relative to various health issues.

Our *Fyffe Times Better* slogan addresses five common health issues, since our pineapple is an anti-cancer agent, enhancer of the body's immune systems, natural anti-inflammatory agent, proven aid to achieving good oral health and inhibitor of strokes and heart attacks.

Q: *How does your product deliver a powerful punch of nutrition?*

A: A daily slice or two of our pineapple provides half the recommended daily intake of vitamin C, the benefits of which include strengthening the immune system, reducing risk of heart attack and stroke and heightening oral health. The high manganese and vitamin A content help prevent free radical damage to the bodies' cells.



Free radicals are known to have a cancer-causing role.

Q: *Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on your product's labels?*

A: Our pineapples are not packaged and the tag is the only place for some narrative, so they don't make ideal billboards. We work with our retail partners to formulate and execute health-oriented advertising and promotions through store circulars, seasonal promotions emphasizing health and fitness and in-store promos using customized POS materials that support health- and nutrition-oriented themes.

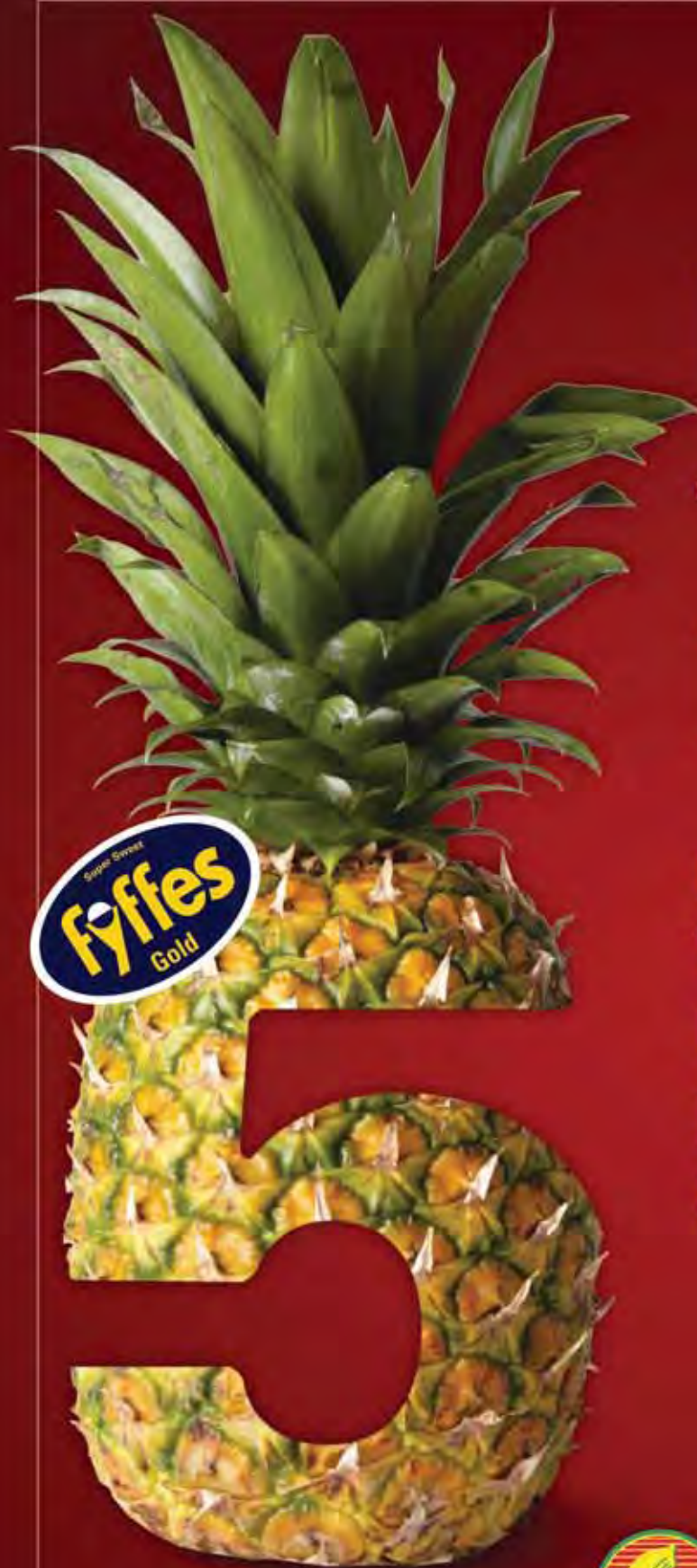
Q: *What challenges do you face in getting the health message about your product to consumers and what solutions do you have in mind?*

A: In the age of instant information, it's easy for consumers to feel awash in a sea of conflicting claims and health messages. The key is to provide information from credible, certified sources (PBH, AMA) and present this information clearly and concisely.

Q: *What are the best strategies to relay nutritional/health information to consumers on the retail floor?*

A: Pineapples can be highlighted as both a healthful cooking ingredient and a nutritious snack. The display and the message should achieve maximum visual impact.

A unique vehicle for our message is the Disney Garden/Imagination Farms program. We can help affect a real paradigm shift in the way children, and the American family in general, perceive and consume fresh fruits, obviously including pineapple.



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Reader Service # 4

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UNITED STATES
Potato
BOARD

U.S. Potato Board

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Tel: 303-873-2312 Fax: 303-369-7719
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Interview with R. Mac Johnson,
Vice President, Domestic Marketing,
U.S. Potato Board

The U.S. Potato Board, representing approximately 4,000 potato growers and handlers nationwide, was established in 1971 to promote the benefits of eating potatoes. The USPB was one of the first commodity groups to develop and use an FDA-approved nutrition label.

Q: How can you distinguish your product from the pack given the vast amount of nutritional information Americans are bombarded with? Can you point to the nutritional properties in your product that make it an essential part of a healthful diet?

A: Not only do Americans feel inundated by nutrition claims, but they also feel lectured to regarding what they eat and whether they exercise. So while research tells us the potato's specific nutritional values, e.g., 45 percent of the daily value (dv) of vitamin C and 18 percent dv of potassium, are our most compelling points, we try to deliver these messages with a light touch — a spoonful of sugar, don't you know.

For the past three years a Healthy MR. POTATO HEAD balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade has been our publicity hook — opening the door to unprecedented media coverage on the positive nutritional values of potatoes.

Q: Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product that you'd like to clear up?

A: The biggest myth about potatoes is they cause you to gain weight. Not true! A 5½-ounce potato has 110 calories and is fat free.

The scientific evidence supporting calorie balance is so strong the Food and Drug Administration published a report — appropriately named *Calories Count* — documenting the importance of total calories when it comes to weight control.

Another potato myth regards the glycemic index (GI). This complex subject has been seriously simplified in popular diets. For example, the GI of a food is not simply stated, as it will vary widely depending on preparation method, inclusion of other foods, variety or origin of the food and other factors.

A study recently published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* provides further evidence the GI of a diet is not important when it comes to weight loss. Researchers from Harvard and the State University of Rio De Janeiro in Brazil tested diets with similar calorie and macronutrient levels but with differing GIs. At the end of 18 months, there were no significant differences in weight loss between the two groups.

(www.ajcn.org/cgi/content/abstract/86/3/707)

Additionally, in a recent review published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Glenn Gaesser, professor of exercise physiology at the University of Virginia, found diets high in carbohydrates are almost universally associated with slimmer bodies. You can view a White Paper on this and related subjects at www.healthypotato.com/nutrition.asp.

Q: Can you connect your product's nutritional properties to health issues consumers can understand? Can you come up with simple, catchy phrases that could be used to market health benefits of your product?

A: We sure can. In fact, the good health news for potatoes keeps adding up. Highlights from recent studies include:

Researchers at the University of Melbourne and the Cancer Council Victoria, who worked independently from any food industry sponsors, investigated the association between a variety of dietary patterns and development of Type 2 diabetes. The results indicated that a dietary pattern characterized by meats and fatty foods was associated with increased diabetes risk, while a dietary pattern characterized by a variety of salads and cooked vegetables, including potatoes cooked in ways other than frying, was associated with a decreased risk.

(www.aje.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/165/6/603)

In 2004 the National Academy of Sciences increased the recommended intake for potassium. This is largely based on evidence of potassium's role in controlling



hypertension and preventing stroke. One serving of skin-on potatoes (5.3 ounces) contains 620 mg. of potassium. Potatoes rank highest among the top 20 most frequently consumed raw fruits and vegetables. And as noted, a 5.3-ounce potato contains almost half the daily value of vitamin C, which is an antioxidant that keeps the immune system healthy.

Q: Since the FDA has strict guidelines on what health claims a company can make, what can be advertised or put on labels of your product packages?

A: The nutrition label and its specific information have been proven to be our most effective consumer message, e.g.,

- 45 percent dv of vitamin C
- 18 percent dv of potassium (with skin on)
- 110 calories, no fat, no cholesterol
- 2 grams fiber (with skin on)

US Potato Industry Unveils New Nutrition Message



45% Daily Supply
of Vitamin C

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and Minerals

The US potato industry has adopted an industry-wide campaign signature linking potato goodness with today's consumers. "Potatoes...Goodness Unearthed™" is the culmination of several months of in-depth consumer research, industry input and ideation, all designed to help consumers connect with the core nutrition message "potatoes are good for you"—a message creating a new attitude and giving consumers a new way of looking at potatoes to which they have always related—potatoes are a healthy, nutritious, good tasting, nurturing food.

A far-reaching consumer campaign launches January 15, 2008, along with campaign materials for fresh grower/shippers to take to their retail marketing partners for a coordinated, industry-wide campaign. "Potatoes...Goodness Unearthed" will also be incorporated into the current United States Potato Board's Best In Class (BIC) and BIC Fast Track programs to retail partners and consumer communications programs.

"Potatoes...Goodness Unearthed" will deliver the potato nutrition message and consumer recognition that will increase consumption of US fresh potatoes and potato products.

Call (303) 369-7783 or visit www.uspotatoes.com





Thank You!

Produce for Better Health Foundation thanks those who support our efforts to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. The foundation expresses a special thanks to those who contributed \$10,000 or more this year and those who have made commitments to A Campaign for Children's Health.

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Almonds' Popularity Boosting Produce Profits

As almonds gain interest among consumers, produce managers are finding benefits to promoting this popular snack.

BY MAURCIA DELEAN HOUCK

Almonds are a hot commodity right now, and getting hotter all of the time, according to statistics from the Modesto, CA-based Almond Board of California's (ABC) *U.S. Consumer Attitudes, Awareness and Usage of California Almonds Report*, which showed almond production and sales have grown nearly 70 percent since 2001. That's great news for an industry enjoying the resurgence of healthy eating practices among today's produce buyers.

"The improved taste and health perceptions of almonds have all impacted consumer purchasing habits," notes Molly Spence, ABC spokesperson. Almonds' nutritional value, taste and cost are all reasons why many consumers are now citing an increase in their consumption as a snack food and in day-to-day recipes.

MORE HEALTHFUL EATING CHOICES

No one disputes the health benefits of almonds. They contain virtually no cholesterol and are low in calories and high in important antioxidants that can help fend off a variety of diseases including cancer. As a result, many health-conscious consumers are ready to replace more traditional snack items with almonds.

The nutritional perspective may be at the heart of almonds' popularity in recent years. The industry is now successfully targeting its marketing and promotional cam-



With a pervasive health message influencing buying habits, consumers are turning to almonds as both a snack and a recipe ingredient.

One of the industry's leading marketing tactics includes a saturation of health information regarding the benefits of almonds in health and women's publications nationwide. "That marketing campaign alone has dramatically boosted sales," explains Cindy Broughton, spokeswoman for Golden West Nut Company, Ripon, CA.

"People want to feel good about the snacks they eat, and almonds provide consumers with a great taste to satisfy their hunger without the guilt associated with eating something that's bad for you," adds Marsha Venable, ABC assistant manager for marketing services.

paigns toward a more health-conscious message; almond sales grew a dramatic 23 percent in 2007 and are expected to continue rising in 2008

Consumers now have an easy way to consume almonds responsibly, notes Dominic Engels, vice president of marketing for Paramount Farms, Los Angeles, CA. The

company recently introduced a new snack-size almond treat for health-conscious consumers. Almond Munchies are available in several flavors including honey dipped. It is one of many ways almond growers and packagers across California are trying to meet consumer demands as interest in almonds continues to grow.

INCREASING SALES

Jared Smith, sales and marketing manager, Fisher Nut Company, Modesto, CA, recommends showcasing the health benefits of almonds as a way to increase produce

department sales.

Fisher Nut reaches out to consumer by using displays, advertising and even giveaways. "Find different ways to highlight almonds and the demand is virtually guaranteed to go through the roof," according to Smith.

For example, ABC offers a small tin of almonds that contains one single-serving of almonds (approximately 23 individual nuts) to help consumers see firsthand how many almonds they should constitute a serving.

Customer demographics should also be considered when promoting almonds, sug-

Nutritional Information

Amonds are a healthful alternative to high-sugar, high-fat snacks. Offering great taste and solid nutritional value, almonds have been called "the perfect" food. According to the Almond Board of California (ABC), Modesto, CA, almonds help address consumer dietary concerns while satisfying appetites and cravings.

When promoting almonds in-store, ABC urges retailers to make nutritional information available through displays and advertising.

Here are six facts that are helpful in promoting almonds:

1. Eating just one ounce of almonds – 23 nuts – per day can help a person consume fewer calories throughout the day, thus promoting a healthy weight loss.
2. The fiber in almonds actually helps to block absorption of some of their fat.
3. One ounce of almonds can provide 50 percent of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin E and 25 percent of the recommended daily allowance of magnesium.
4. Eating almonds may reduce blood sugar and insulin, helping to stave off diabetes.
5. Some evidence indicates eating almonds may help prevent colon cancer.
6. A handful of almonds contain as much calcium as $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of milk and as many antioxidants as a cup of cooked broccoli. **pb**

gests Golden West's Broughton. "Timing is another important aspect of increasing sales," she explains. "Of course, the holidays are well-known for their sales potential, but produce departments should also take into account the demographics of a store's customer base. This also includes paying attention to different cultures. The traditions of the consumer base can also play a large part in promoting almonds properly within a particular store."

Increase sales this January!

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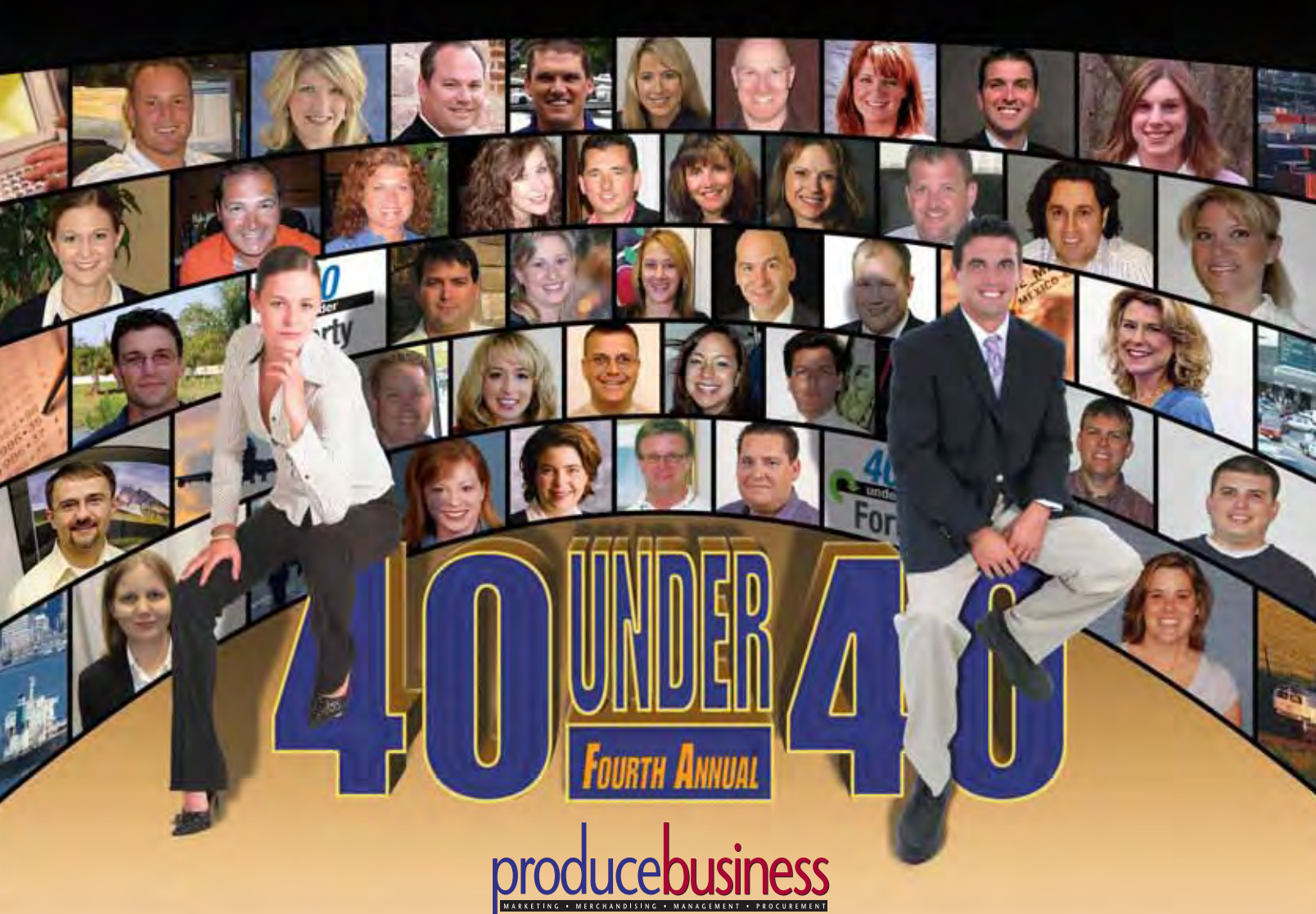
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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its third annual 40 Under Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of April 1 (People born after April 1, 1968).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 1, 2008, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

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Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: producebusiness@phoenixmedianet.com



Photo courtesy of Golden West Nut Company

Carrying a wide variety of almond products, including sliced, whole, blanched, slivered, chopped as well as almond milk, almond butter and even almond flour can all help boost sales, stresses Smith. Stores may also consider adding organic almonds to the product mix.

"Many food producers are jumping on the almond bandwagon due to the almond's popularity growth, taste and price," Fisher's

Smith contends.

Because almonds are readily available in produce departments as grab-and-go pre-

**"We are confident
the demand for
almonds will
continue to grow,
and California
growers are
preparing to meet
that demand."**

**— Richard Waycott
Almond Board
of California**

packs of variously flavored almonds as well as in bulk packages and trail mixes, Americans are finding it easy to add almonds to

their diet. This translates into increased department sales.

LOW PRICES BRING A WIDER AUDIENCE

Price is also a factor contributing to almonds' newfound popularity, some experts say. According to Smith, higher yields are making almonds more affordable than other nuts such as cashews, walnuts and macadamias. This, in turn, sparks increased use in recipes and as snacks.

Golden West's Broughton agrees, saying, "Almond prices remain good, giving the consumer much more value."

In 2007, the almond industry enjoyed a record-breaking crop, harvesting more than 1.3 billion pounds. Those numbers are expected to continue to increase, according to Richard Waycott, ABC president and CEO. "We are confident the demand for almonds will continue to grow, and California growers are preparing to meet that demand," he explains.

Almonds present retailers with an opportunity to offer consumers a healthful product they want at a price they can afford. In the process, almonds increase traffic flow in the produce department and boost sales and profit margins. **pb**

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Reader Service # 32

Jerry Butt

Chris Nelson

CALIFORNIA CUT FLOWER COMMISSION SACRAMENTO, CA

Kasey Cronquist has been hired as the executive director/ambassador. He most recently served as president/CEO of the Carpinteria Valley Chamber of Commerce. Cronquist is charged with developing strong grower relations and support within the industry as well as taking a leadership position with international, national and local industry groups.



Reader Service No. 351

NEW PRODUCTS



COMBO GIFT FEATURES FLOWERS

Creative Graphic Products, Burton, MI, offers customized designs for the Greeting Card Bouquet line. The floral gift accented with a greeting card base can be designed, approved, ordered and delivered in less than three weeks. The vase holders are manufactured and distributed out of Michigan. Orders for existing designs can be shipped within 24 hours. Depending on access to labor, retailers may order the holders with or without flowers.

Reader Service No. 350



LET THEM EAT NO MESS CAKE

Birdola Products, Grand Rapids, MI, introduces Deck & Patio feed cake, a no-hulls wild bird food that fits in the Birdola feeder. The 2-pound 1-ounce cake of 100 percent edible feed is held together by a protein binder that is good for birds. Designed for use at condos, apartments and gardens, the no mess Deck & Patio offers black oil sunflower hearts and chips, peanuts, hulled millet, and cracked corn.

Reader Service No. 351



CUSTOMIZED CAPRI CARDS OFFERED

Landscapes Within, Inc., Boulder, CO, introduces floral department custom capri cards printed in the United States on recycled, glossy paper. The special-order cards are merchandised in an easy-access spinner display. Donating a portion of profits to Alzheimer's research, the company also offers greeting and fold-over enclosure cards. All cards feature alluring close-up photography and are available blank and with a large range of inscriptions.

Reader Service No. 352

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HONORING ROSA PARKS

Organic Style Ltd., San Rafael, CA, has partnered with The Rosa & Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development, Detroit, MI, to honor the 52nd anniversary of Mrs. Parks' historic protest against segregation and racism by introducing Freedom, a rose in her honor. Certified sustainably grown by VeriFlora, Freedom roses are available to retailers exclusively from EcoFlowers.com, the wholesale sister company of Organic Bouquet, both of which are brands of Organic Style.



Reader Service No. 353

FOCUS ON FLOWER LONGEVITY

The Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association, Annapolis, MD, announces that the Floral Logistics Coalition and breeder community will meet March 5, 2008, in Tampa, FL, immediately prior to the WF&FSA Convention and Floral Expo. Discussion will focus on how the Coalition can create a broader awareness in the industry about flower varieties that perform profitably and provide longer shelf life.



Reader Service No. 354

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

Fresh Flowers — Handle With Care

Enhance shelf life by taking necessary steps to ensure beauties stay fresh.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Fresh flowers are the heart and soul of the supermarket floral department. “Fresh flowers represent in the neighborhood of 50 percent of all floral sales in a typical supermarket,” notes Tom Lavagetto, president of Floral Consulting Group, Spokane, WA.

Poorly handled fresh flowers deteriorate quickly after leaving the store, however, and that means the customer becomes disgruntled and is unlikely to be a repeat buyer.

“If you get a promotionally priced bunch of flowers and it dies in two days, it gives the perception to the customer that mass market floral is inferior,” says Julie Anderson, founder of Julie Anderson Consulting, Albuquerque, NM.

Delivering high-quality fresh flowers to the consumer is a team effort that begins with producers and continues with retailers. “You have to look at it from the farm to the store,” Anderson says. “You have to look at each piece of the distribution chain. The biggest gaps in the distribution chain are usually in the warehouse and the store.”

There are a few rules for handling fresh flowers that are, if not easy, at least straightforward. “They have to be clean, they have to be cold and they have to be caring,” says Terril Nell, head of the environmental horticulture department at the University of Florida (UF), Gainesville, FL. “If they aren’t, flowers aren’t going to last.”

THEY HAVE TO BE COLD

Fresh flowers are best kept at temperatures slightly above freezing. “They should be from 35° to 38°, but if I can get them below 40°, I’m happy,” Nell notes.

No time should be wasted in getting the flowers into a cool environment as soon as they reach the back of the store. “The product needs to come through the back door

and immediately be put in a refrigerated area away from ethylene producers,” Anderson explains. “Any extreme will cause a quicker deterioration in the quality. You do have control over the temperature. We are not training the handlers of the product in the proper handling.”

Too often flowers are left at normal room or outdoor temperatures for valuable minutes or hours.

“When flowers are received, sometimes they are left on the dock rather than putting them right into the cooler,” says Jim Kaplan, president of Pokon-Chrysal, Miami, FL. “[If warehouses don’t have coolers specifically designed for off-loaded floral items,] they should be put in the dairy cooler right off the truck.”

Once flowers leave the dairy cooler they should go to coolers specifically designed for flowers, says Kaplan. These coolers are not the same as refrigeration units used for beer, dairy or soft drinks.

“Floral coolers should specifically be designed for flowers,” says Marcy Britigan, founder of MEI Systems, Chicago, IL. “A floral cooler gently cools without removing humidity from the environment. We do not want to create a cool and dry environment, which is fine for beer, but not for flowers.”

Floral coolers should be rated in terms of their ability to cool without reducing the relative humidity. Floral coolers should not utilize misting or spraying. Doing so will create an environment where pathogens, such as *botrytis*, can grow and thrive, which is bad for the flowers,” Britigan says.

For open cases, the goal should be to keep cut flowers in the 38° to 40° range, Britigan advises.

“There is ongoing research on the optimum temperature for cut flowers, and each



Properly refrigerated backrooms are as important as beautiful displays.

variety has a different optimum temperature,” she says. “But at the store level, you want them at 36° to 38° and relative humidity between 85 to 92 percent.”

THEY HAVE TO BE CLEAN

The process of making sure fresh flowers are in a clean environment should begin even before they are in refrigeration at the store.

An important part of this is removing the foliage from the lower parts of the stems before they are put in a solution. Any dead or decayed flowers should also be immediately discarded.

“If the flowers come in buckets you need to change the water, sanitize the bucket and put them in new water with preservative every couple of days,” instructs Lavagetto.

“You need to make sure they start clean when you pull them out of the cooler and put them on the shelf,” adds Kaplan. “All flowers need to be re-cut with a clean uten-

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sil before they go into a new solution.”

The buckets need to be washed out with a cleanser that will get the buckets clean without leaving a residue that would harm the flowers.

“Our focus is on keeping bacteria out of the water and keeping the buckets clean,” states Jeff Koontz, marketing manager, SteriloX Food Safety, a division of Malvern, PA-based PuriCore. “Our system uses salt, water and electricity to generate a food-safe sanitizing solution on site, on demand. The SteriloX Solution is highly effective at killing a broad range of pathogens and spoilage organisms.”

This solution saves on labor because the buckets can simply be wiped out, refilled with the solution and then used again.

“You should change the water frequently whether the flowers are refrigerated or not,” Anderson’s Anderson says. “At least add some water every day if you can’t change it.”

The life of the product can literally be cut in half if it is not given a clean environment.

“I’ve seen water just re-used,” UF’s Nell notes. “The buckets weren’t washed, and new solution wasn’t put in. There’s nothing clean about it. This can reduce the life of your flowers by 50 percent.” **pb**

Flowers Must Be Fed At The Store And Beyond

Floralife, Inc., Walterboro, SC, has just introduced a premium rose cut-flower food engineered with ingredients to keep bouquets and floral arrangements looking fresher longer. Research indicates it can increase the vase life of cut roses by two to four days.

Jim Kaplan, president, Pokon-Chrysal, Miami, FL, recommends using a processing solution rather than a flower food solution. A flower food solution is 80 percent nutrients, while a processing solution is 30 percent nutrients. The remainder is material to lower the pH and maintain the water quality. “We don’t want the flowers to develop while they are still on display,” he says about his preference for more moderate doses of food.

Pokon-Chrysal sells its solution in tea bags with measured amounts of the solution. It is still necessary to measure the amount of water in the display buckets to know which size tea bag to use. “You must take care you have the right amount of solution for the water,” Kaplan explains. “Accurate dosing is very important, and too much solution is bad for the flowers.”

Proper dosing is essential to make sure flowers are not harmed by nutrient or preservative overdoses. “Too much preservative will kill fresh flowers,” says Tom Lavagetto, president of Floral Consulting Group, Spokane, WA. He recommends using a dosatron, which is an injector that allows a precise amount of preservative to be used. Preservative suppliers should be able to provide a complimentary dosatron.

It is the retailer’s responsibility to make it easier for the customer to continue care after the flowers leave the store. “Your display should include packets of preservative that come with the flowers,” he says.

If repeat fresh flower customers are a priority, retailers must begin with producers who supply a quality product. “You have to buy the best quality flowers available — you should never buy for price,” Lavagetto continues. “The customer does not remember what they paid for the flowers — they remember only how long they lasted.” **pb**

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RETAIL PERSPECTIVE



Fresh-Cut Implications

The excellent fresh-cut produce presentation at the recent PMA Fresh Summit by the Perishable Group's Steve Lutz, executive vice president, and Jonna Parker, senior account manager, provided a number of stimulating and thought-provoking topics.

For example, a report by ACNielsen revealed quick trips to the grocery stores account for 68 percent of all store visits. Sales from the quick-trip category amount to \$32 per consumer per store visit. While this sales average is substantially below that of other store shopping visit categories, it nevertheless accounts for tremendous volume and highlights the potential opportunities for fresh fruit and vegetable sales, particularly from consumers making multiple store visits each week.

Contrast this to medium-trip shoppers who comprise only 18 percent of store visits and purchase an average of \$56 per trip, routine long-trip consumers who represent 10 percent of store visits and buy an average of \$106 per trip, and the infrequent extra-long-trip consumers who make up 4 percent of all store visits and purchase an average of \$256 per trip. As a composite, each of these three groups account for approximately 20 percent of store sales, while those making the quick-shopping trips account for 40 percent of overall store sales. These results warrant further research and analysis of this significant group's shopping patterns.

Is it any wonder that Food Lion recognized this trend several years ago and proceeded to develop its Bloom store concept directed particularly towards this consumer group? As a result of the initial effort, Bloom stores have already evolved into a second-generation store layout and presentation, making the shopping experience even more impressive and convenient.

Tesco's new foray into the U. S. market is definitely built around these shopping dynamics. Whether they are successful in this country will be more closely related to how the consumer perceives the chain's offerings and the competitive response than the concept related to quick trips.

Interestingly, a nearby Kroger store recently began changing the express checkout hours of operation. The change from an always-open express lane to modified hours is as much about increasing the efficiency of the front end as anything else, but the new hours convey an interesting shopping pattern message.

Now, Monday through Friday, the express lane is open from 4 PM to 8 PM. On Saturday and Sunday, it's open from noon to 8 PM. Obviously, the weekends are when the store is the busiest and warrant separating limited-item customers from the stock-up shoppers.

However, the staffing hours during the normal workweek provide the greatest interest and raise questions for those responsible for produce department operations. This late-afternoon-to-early-evening timeframe is when the largest proportion of convenience customers visits the store. Operationally, is this the time when the department is at peak presentation and has knowledgeable clerks available to answer consumer questions? Unfortunately, this is all too often a time for relying on the least-experienced personnel.

There are not only operational considerations but also opportunities to develop special display options perhaps directed near checkouts and food-to-go areas.

In the Southeast, according to the Perishables Group, the contribution of fresh-cut to produce departments is approaching double the average U.S. rate (13.9 percent compared to 8.2 percent). Overall, fresh-cut melons account for approximately 35 percent of fresh-cut fruit sales with unbranded fruit making up 69 percent of all fresh-cut fruit sales.

Typically, melon sales seem directly correlated with climate. The warmer the season, the faster melon sales start to zoom, especially as temperatures break the 80° barrier. In the Southeast, the 80° range is expanded and the number of days with temperatures over 90° is far higher than in most states with the exception of several in the Southwest — thus the increased potential for fresh-cut fruit sales.

Now observe fresh-cut offerings. Among the leading retailers in the Southeast, Publix processes most fresh-cut fruit and vegetable units in the in-store preparation area — often in full view of the consumer. The message is very clear. The fruit is fresh and the displays

are attractive with wide variety. Here, unbranded becomes, in fact, a consumer brand identification.

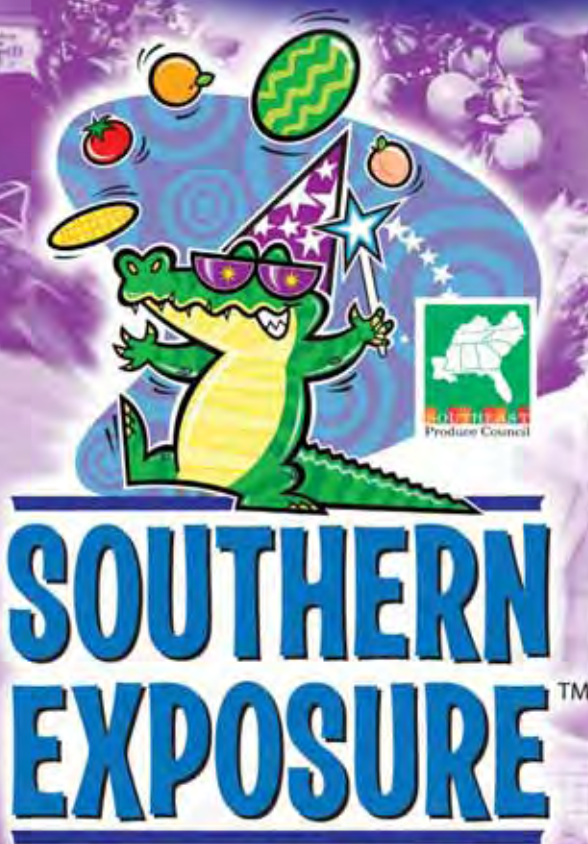
This program approach requires management willingness to look beyond percentage results and understand that value-added equates to expense-added in terms of higher labor and supply costs offset by increased sales, making a positive net contribution to the bottom line and improved consumer impression.

Recognizing the potential from satisfying the needs of the convenience-oriented, quick-trip shoppers poses strategic questions for food retailers as well as product suppliers and makers of equipment to enhance retail efficiency. With fresh-cut sales growth outpacing the growth of the balance of the produce department, unbranded literally becoming a brand, and with the quick store visit predominating, those connecting the dots may be the ones to achieve competitive advantage.

Whether Tesco is successful in this country will be more closely related to how the consumer perceives the chain's offerings and the competitive response than the concept related to quick trips.

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Q&A With Kaarin Goodburn

Q: Jo McDonald, [technical services manager for the British Retail Consortium (BRC), London, England], says the CFA [Chilled Food Association, Kettering, England] plays a critical role in advancing food safety in the United Kingdom, and serves as a companion to BRC's post harvest initiatives by addressing field and growing operation issues. What is the organization's background and purpose?

A: The association was formed in May 1989 to set and maintain food safety hygiene sectors for the industry to protect consumers. The action came out of lysteria outbreaks in 1988. Government officials told the industry unless you sort out food safety problems internally, we will legislate regarding lysteria. So, an association was rapidly formed.

Q: Is food safety for the wholesale world regulated by the government? Is there evidence consumers refuse to buy at greengrocers because they feel chains are safer?

A: Wholesalers are food business operators according to E.U. law, and hygiene and food safety liability rules apply. Safety is largely a matter of perception. There are very few recalls related to greengrocers possibly since the traceability is not good enough to trace back. However, there is a political drive by a vocal but still relatively small proportion of the population to favor local stores/suppliers/produce. This drives toward greengrocers — some of whom have taken the marketing initiative in some cases to capitalize on this and make local sourcing a unique selling proposition. However, few greengrocers sell prepared produce — the market is set up around the multiple retailers.

Q: Do CFA members have to abide by the organization's food safety standards?

A: Yes. Membership is linked to adhering to CFA's food safety guidance and getting accreditation for doing so. This includes main factory standards, best practices guidance and microbiological guidance to growers. Members must undergo audits of their factories. They have to commit to complying with all the other food safety guidelines related to field and growing operations.

Q: Do these CFA standards apply outside of the United Kingdom?

A: Yes, internationally to raw materials used by members, since microorganisms respect no geographical boundaries.

Q: In the United States, there is much discussion about containing food safety problems by developing a more efficient and accurate traceability system. Is this less of an issue in the United Kingdom because of your concentrated supply chain?

A: We have instant traceability when a food safety problem is discovered. We have the ability to check back quickly to which field the product was grown, when fertilizer was applied, what pesticides were used, what the weather was like during harvest, the water used, etc. All information relevant to food safety is logged in. The reason we do not have big issues here is because of built-in traceability, supplier

assurances, dedicated bases, all controlled from the seed onward. All growers in these dedicated supply chains have to comply with the same field standards.

Q: Tell us more about your auditing procedures. In the United States, suppliers can be inundated with audits from different customers, which can lead to duplications and unnecessary costs. The BRC created common standards and auditing procedures to address this issue. Does CFA do the same on the field side?

A: When we researched the audits concept originally, we asked what became of the European Food Safety Inspection Service [EFSA, Milton Keynes, England] to establish itself. Now, the EFSA is an international auditing company, which grew out of our working group in 1989. EFSA was formed by Campden & Chorleywood Food Research Association [CCFRA, Chipping Campden, England] and The Meat and Livestock Commission [MLC, Milton Keynes, England], working together quite independent of anybody to audit the standards we wrote. CFA was committed from the outset to the whole concept of chilled food manufacturing hygiene and audits and accreditation.

Q: There is much discussion here about the government's role in food safety. What about in the United Kingdom?

A: The government here is only waking up to what we've done. The systems are in place here. The standards are internally measured here. It's not just a matter of luck we haven't had outbreaks like the United States has. I've researched *E. coli* 0157:H7 infection rates from food, and they are 12.4 times higher in the United States than in the United Kingdom.

We've never had an *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreak related to produce in this country. Indeed many of the salmonella instances have been imported, and many through the wholesale chain that is not part of our dedicated supply base.

It is a matter of cost and effort to minimize risk. If you're dealing with a high value salad, there is no reason not to put effort into it. When you get to the wholesale market, where value is lower, traceability is more difficult. Sometimes you can't nail the supplier or market it came through and the problem is lost in the ether.

We're ahead of the game in regulatory requirements beyond HACCP [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point]. HACCP in the field is not a mandatory requirement in Europe. It's too complicated, politicians say, but we do it. Now Europe has a bigger population than the United States with a wide range of countries and economies. Suppliers to U.K. major multiples are at one end of the spectrum while a small grower in relatively undeveloped economies is on the other.

Instead of talking about the need for international standards, let's sort out local problems in our fields and get them fixed. You can't get the pathogens off once they're there. We have to deal with the basic things going wrong in the field causing most of the outbreaks.

*Excerpted from the PERISHABLE PUNDIT — July 4, 2007
Interview by Mira Slott*



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Right now, and on through July 7, 2008, we're taking entries for the **20th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program**, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of five categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, and commodity organizations. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

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2. Type of business.
3. Names and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2007 and May 31, 2008).
4. Promotion objectives.
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Diamond Foods • Family Tree Farms
FL Tomato Committee • The Giumarra Companies
Grimmway Farms • Idaho Potato Commission
J. Kings Food Service Professionals
Litehouse Foods and Rainier Fruit Company • Litehouse Foods
Mann Packing Company, Inc. • Mastronardi Produce Ltd.
Melissa's/World Variety Produce., Inc.
NJ Department of Ag. • NM Department of Ag.
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DECEMBER 2007

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
A & L Potato Company, Inc.	62	41	800-365-5784	218-773-1850
The Alphas Company, Inc.	64	59	617-884-5921	617-884-5932
Apache Produce	56	60	520-281-2282	520-761-1829
Apio, Inc.	28	12	800-454-1355	805-343-6295
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	59	42	800-437-4685	701-746-5767
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	22	36	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Black Stallion Logistics	64	10	646-401-9995	646-514-1614
Blue Book Services	31	1	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
J. Bonafede Co., Inc.	66	52	617-884-3131	617-889-2929
C&D Fruit & Vegetable Co., Inc.	45	88	800-899-9175	941-747-8895
Cal-Harvest	92-93	18	559-582-4000	559-582-0683
Calixtro Distributing	54	61	800-359-0921	520-281-3438
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	78	21	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
John Cerasuolo Co., Inc.	65	50	800-875-8286	617-884-8272
CF Fresh	36	48	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Chilean Avocado Importers Association	25	13	202-626-0560	
Coast To Coast Produce Co.	69	62	877-836-6295	617-381-0067
Columbia Marketing International	35	11	509-663-1955	509-663-2231
Community Suffolk, Inc.	68	19	617-389-5200	617-389-6680
Coosemans Boston	65	63	617-887-2117	617-887-2579
Curry & Company	33	64	503-393-6033	503-393-6085
M. Cutone Mushroom Co., Inc.	66	31	617-889-1122	617-884-3944
Del Monte Fresh Produce	120	20	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	3	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	22	25	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	77	35	561-978-5714	561-978-5705
Earthbound Farm	21	91	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	119	5	800-557-7751	813-869-9850
Eastern Propak, LLC	48	65	856-881-3553	856-243-0154
Eaton & Eustis Co.	70	66	617-884-0298	617-884-2611
Edinburg Citrus Association	48	68	956-381-8520	956-383-2435
Edinburg Citrus Association	47	67	956-381-8520	956-383-2435
Fisher Capesapn	38	69	800-388-3074	514-737-3676
Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	41	70	850-487-8908	850-488-7127
Flavour Pict Produce, Inc.	81	47	888-FLVRPKT	519-326-0851
Frank's Distributing Co.	53	53	520-761-1578	520-281-2425
Fresh Partners AB	78	23	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Produce & Floral Council	110	29	714-739-0177	714-739-0226
Garden Fresh Salad Co., Inc.	67	71	617-889-1580	617-889-3035
The Giumarra Companies	43	72	610-268-0286	213-628-4878
Al Harrison Co. Dist.	54	73	520-281-1222	520-281-1104
Idaho Potato Commission	17	16	208-334-2350	208-334-2274
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Promotion Committee	96-97	8	208-631-6160	208-722-6582
Kirkey Products Group, LLC	78	34	407-331-5151	407-331-5158
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	48	57	800-796-2349	718-542-2354
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	37	56	800-796-2349	718-542-2354

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Lisa Inc.	54	74	520-281-1863	520-281-2848
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	88-89	6	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	11	7	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
T. Marzetti Company	90-91	40	614-846-2232	614-842-4186
Mediterranean Pleasures	27	49	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Mexico Quality Supreme	57	96	877-281-9305	
MIXTEC Group	106	32	626-440-7077	
Mutual Produce Corporation	73	75	617-889-0035	617-884-2544
Naturipe Berry Growers	86-87	14	239-591-1664	239-591-8133
New England Organics	75	51	617-884-4141	617-887-1899
Nokota Packers, Inc.	60	43	701-847-2200	701-847-2109
Northern Plains Potato Growers Association	61	44	218-773-3633	218-773-6227
Ocean Mist Farms	84-85	33	831-633-2144	831-633-4363
Old El Paso	30	55	800-467-0788	559-432-2888
Olivia's Organics	73	90	617-884-1816	617-884-4919
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	38	24	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Plain Jane	56	60	520-281-2282	520-761-1829
Produce for Better Health Foundation	102	22	888-391-2100	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	51	37	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	117	38	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.	94-95	76	803-894-1900	803-359-8850
R.C.F. Produce, Inc.	55	77	520-281-0230	520-281-9670
Rosemont Farms Corporation	29	95	877-877-8017	561-999-0241
Ruma Fruit & Produce Co., Inc.	68	78	800-252-8282	617-387-7894
Sambrailo Packaging	40	54	831-724-7581	831-724-1403
O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	21	39	701-657-2152	701-657-2425
O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	62	46	701-657-2152	701-657-2425
Arthur G. Silk, Inc.	75	79	617-884-1370	617-884-7693
Southeast Produce Council	113	80	813-633-5556	866-653-4479
Spokely Farms	62	81	218-946-2825	218-946-2014
State Garden, Inc.	73	90	617-884-1816	617-884-4919
S. Strock & Co., Inc.	71	82	617-884-0263	617-884-7310
Sucasa Produce	55	83	520-281-1409	520-281-9467
Sun Valley Group	109	84	800-747-0396	707-826-8708
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	15	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
P. Tavilla Co., Inc.	70	85	617-884-9100	617-884-2696
Thomas Produce Sales, Inc.	55	58	520-281-4788	520-281-2703
Tri-Campbell Farms	62	45	800-222-SPUD	701-352-2008
Turbana Banana Corp.	98-99	4	800-TURBANA	305-443-8908
United States Potato Board	100-101	28	303-369-7783	303-369-7719
Uncle Matt's Organic	48	86	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions	104	17	252-459-9977	252-459-7396
Weyerhaeuser Paper Co.	19	27	800-TOP-BOXES	
Wilson Produce	55	89	520-375-5752	520-375-5852
Wishnatzki Farms	42	87	813-752-5111	813-752-9472
Z&S Distributing Co., Inc.	30	55	800-467-0788	559-432-2888

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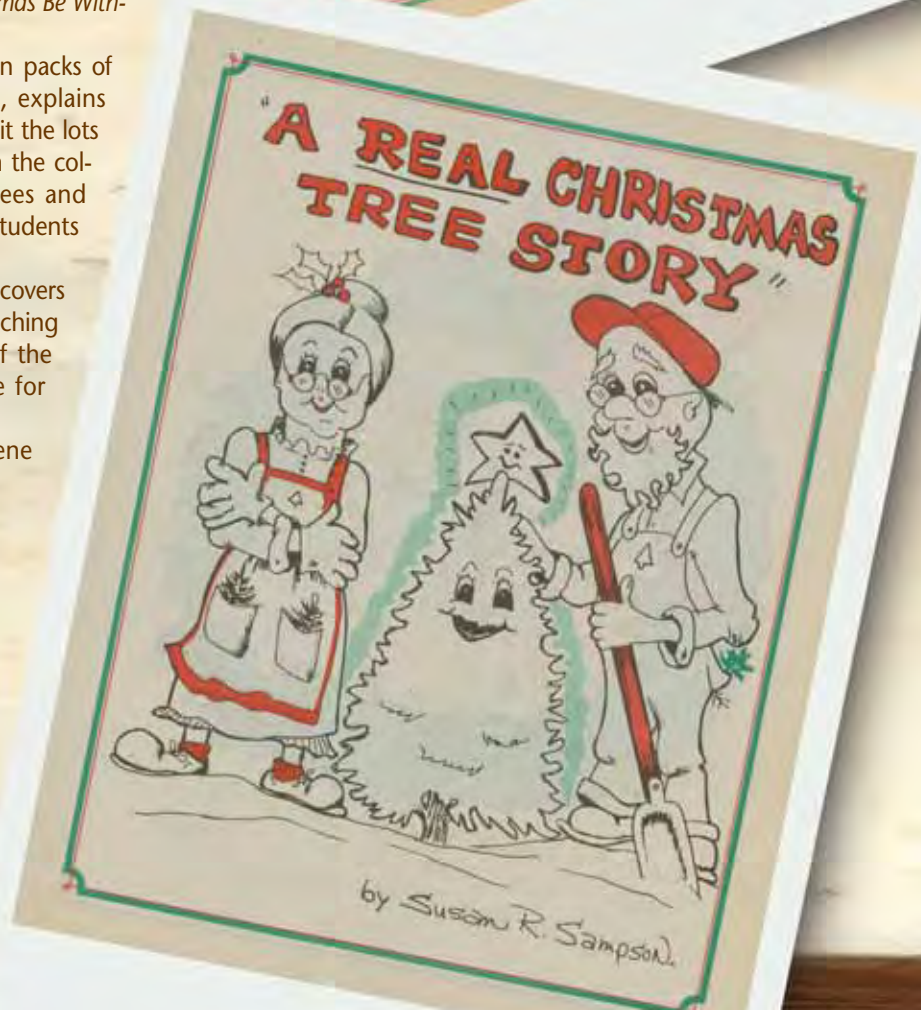
Blast from the Past

Since the early 1980s, family-owned Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery, Merrilan, WI, has produced more than just hardy Christmas trees on its 6,600-acre farm. The 55-year-old wholesale grower teamed up with artist Susan R. Sampson to publish five editions of a coloring book aimed at educating schoolchildren about how Christmas trees are grown. The first coloring book was titled *What Would Christmas Be Without Real Christmas Trees?*

Still distributed today, the books are sold in packs of 100 to private Christmas tree lot companies, explains company owner Arlene Frelk. When families visit the lots to purchase Christmas trees, children are given the coloring books for free. Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery has also given the books to young students during tours of the farm.

Each coloring book edition features varying covers and storylines, but all focus on the theme of teaching children about the growing process. Some of the editions include information on how to care for fresh-cut trees once they leave the lot.

PRODUCE BUSINESS would like to thank Arlene Frelk for her help in gathering this information.



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

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