

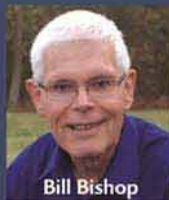
# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## What's Trending?

PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke with produce industry leaders to bring you the Top Ten trends for 2012

1. Immigration Reform: The Need For Legal Farm Labor
2. Food Safety Commitment Continues
3. Locally Grown Moves From Trend To Norm
4. Boosting Consumption: The Focus Is On Future Generations
5. Health Remains A Hot Topic
6. Flavor And Innovation
7. Social Media Goes Viral
8. Convenience Remains Top Of Mind
9. The Need For Value
10. Sustainability



Bill Bishop



Steve Burnham



Lorna Christie



Roberta Cook



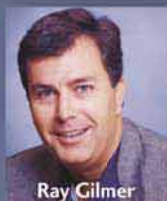
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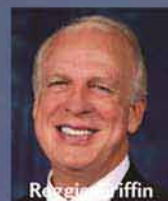
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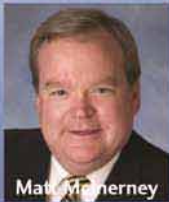
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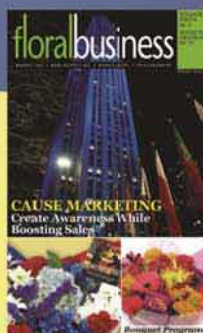
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**THIS MONTH'S WINNER**



**Mike Bushy**  
Perishable Specialist  
Teals Market  
Paynesville, MN

Like many others, Mike Bushy has spent his career in the produce industry. "I've been at Teals for two years, but prior to that, I was with Supervalu for 24 years where I was a produce merchandiser and buyer," says Bushy, who started what was to become his life-long stint in the produce business in college, when he worked as a stock boy at a local supermarket. "After I graduated, I continued on as a produce manager, and haven't left the business."

Teals is an independent retailer serviced by Nash Finch, and has nine stores through-

out Minnesota, North and South Dakota. "The majority of our produce comes from Russ Davis and Nash Finch, with individual stores dealing directly with any local suppliers. As the perishable specialist, I am responsible for merchandising all nine locations, so I am on the road quite a bit, as you can imagine," says Bushy.

But he wouldn't have it any other way. "I enjoy the business," he says. "It's fast-paced, and there is never a dull moment. PRODUCE BUSINESS helps me keep up with it. When I read the magazine, I gain new ideas about products and how to best merchandise them.

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

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**QUESTIONS FOR THE DECEMBER ISSUE**

- 1) Name three marketing programs used by APEAM to draw attention to avocados from Mexico.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is Dave Nelson's phone number at Bard Valley? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is the new product being marketed by Coastline? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How big is Garden Fresh's new state-of-the-art facility? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the address for Lucky's Real Tomatoes? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What year did S. Strock & Co. begin its business? \_\_\_\_\_

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## UNITY KEY IN DEEPENING SPECIALTY CROP FOOTPRINT IN FARM BILL

By Patrick Delaney,  
communications manager,  
United Fresh Produce Association

**T**he Food, Conservation and Energy Act, more commonly known as the most recent Farm Bill, is a giant piece of legislation. At 250,286 words, it is the sixth-longest law in American history, but it is giant also for the landmark impact it made on the fruit and vegetable industry when it passed in May 2008.

The 2008 Farm Bill changed many lawmakers' perceptions of the role of specialty crops in federal agriculture policy, and altered — we hope permanently — the standing of fresh fruits and vegetables in the law that governs the nation's food production capability.

Renewed roughly every five years, the Farm Bill had traditionally been dominated by livestock, dairy and the "big five" commodity crops of corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton and rice. The 2008 Farm Bill, however, set aside monies for the first time to develop opportunities for fruit and vegetable producers as well, a group that generates approximately 50 percent of plant-based farm gate receipts. These groundbreaking provisions, including the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, have produced a massive return on Congress' investment, and continue to benefit not only the fresh produce industry, but also the health of the country at large.

The upcoming Farm Bill, slated for 2012, is one that the industry hopes will build upon the headway made by its 2008 predecessor. However, that sustained success depends on what is a budget-conscious — and particularly acrimonious — Washington. In late November, shortly before the Thanksgiving recess, the 12-member Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction — dubbed the "Supercommittee" — failed in its mission to establish a framework for deficit reduction, and missed an opportunity to

accept the recommendations contained in a 2012 Farm Bill package agreed upon by the leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees that would trim USDA expenditures by \$23 billion over the coming decade. Per its original rules, the Supercommittee's impasse now triggers an automatic \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts, and the fate of the Farm Bill is tossed back into the air.

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance represents the interests of fruit and vegetable producers and other specialty crop growers on

benefits of including fruits and vegetables in Farm Bill programs.

In conjunction with the NAFB convention, the Alliance launched its website at [www.strongeragriculture.org](http://www.strongeragriculture.org), including information about the 2008 Farm Bill programs that help specialty crop producers, such as state block grants, pest and disease program research, Market Access Program funding, nutrition and more. Additionally, the site houses policy priorities and recommendations, as well as audio clips from industry leaders like Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Adam Putnam, California Department of Food And Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross, and Alliance Co-Chairs Keeling, Tom Nassif of Western Growers, and Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association's Mike Stuart, among others.

The Alliance told that story in Kansas City to everyone who would listen,

and that's the secret: spreading the message about the importance of the programs established in 2008 and ensuring that the good work done by those programs is allowed to continue in 2012. The headwind that specialty crops are up against, however, is strong, and can be best summed up by one reporter's question.

"What do specialty crops have to do with the Farm Bill?" he asked.

"A lot more than we used to," said Gilmer, before counting off the ways Farm Bill programs help make specialty crop producers more competitive, and by extension all of American agriculture stronger.

Gilmer and Keeling can't do it alone, though, and it will take an entire industry activated, vocal and united to ensure that our collective success is secured into the future.

**...THAT'S THE SECRET: SPREADING THE MESSAGE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAM ESTABLISHED IN 2008 AND ENSURING THAT THE GOOD WORK DONE BY THOSE PROGRAMS IS ALLOWED TO CONTINUE IN 2012.**

Farm Bill issues. With representation from 120 organizations, the Alliance has been at the forefront of the effort to maintain the standing of specialty crops in the 2012 Farm Bill and has been working to ensure that the legislation is one from which fruit and vegetable producers will benefit. As part of that effort, the Alliance has worked to raise the profile of specialty crops within the larger agricultural community. Recently, members of the Alliance traveled to Kansas City for the annual convention of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters, an organization dominated mainly by reporters covering livestock, dairy and commodity crops, to spread the message that specialty crops are here to stay. Speaking with more than 100 farm broadcasters, National Potato Council's John Keeling and United's Ray Gilmer stressed the

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# BIG DECISIONS IN THE YEAR AHEAD

By James Prevor  
President & Editor-in-Chief



**D**ecision-making is at the core of leadership. How do decisions get made and what types of conditions and what kinds of leadership lead to optimal decision-making?

On a governmental level, in both the United States and Europe, the situation is portentous not so much because poor decisions are being made, but because the political dynamic seems to preclude the possibility of making the correct decisions.

Take Europe, for example. For all the talk about “bailing out” the various countries, it is worth noting that none of the plans recently enacted or proposed involved doing anything for the people of the countries. The bailouts were for holders of debt.

It is pretty clear that those who irresponsibly purchased these securities are the ones who should suffer the consequences of their own incorrect judgment or imprudent action. This is true ethically; it is outrageous to raise taxes on some poor German laborer so that some holders of Italian debt can be bailed out. It is also true economically. It has been said that capitalism without bankruptcy is like Christianity without hell; the concept just doesn't work.

This is not just an issue between governments. Ireland, for some odd reason, thought it desirable to guarantee the debts of all the banks in the country, thus burdening innocent taxpayers with debts they didn't undertake and bailing out the creditors of these banks.

In the United States, much of government policy for the past half-decade has been aimed at bolstering the housing market. There is certainly a big political constituency for this — namely home-owners. Yet there are plenty of people who would like to buy homes and can't. It is inappropriate for the government to intervene in favor of the interests of sellers over the interest of buyers.

The too-big-to-fail doctrine is repeated *ad infinitum* with little evidence that such a thing is true. Had Bear Stearns gone bankrupt, there is little evidence that any catastrophic thing would have happened, and there is a lot of evidence that bailing the firm out undermined popular support for *laissez-faire* economic principles — and for good reason. All of a sudden, people realized that the system was now a “heads-I-win, tails-you-lose” proposition. If Bear Stearns makes billions, its investors keep the profits, but if it goes bust, the taxpayers take the hit.

The Occupy Wall Street crowd laments that “Wall Street” was bailed

out by the taxpayers and then says that since bankers were bailed out, so should everyone else — everyone else meaning everyone with a student loan, anyone behind on their mortgage, etc. OWS is right that it was outrageous to provide taxpayer money so that Wall Street could be bailed out. The mistake is in blaming the bankers. It is human nature that people will try to take advantage of whatever opportunities exist to make a buck — if that includes becoming beneficiaries of public largess, that avenue will be enthusiastically pursued.

There is no possibility of bailing out everyone all the time. As Margaret Thatcher said, “The problem with socialism is that, sooner or later, you run out of other people's money.” The reasonable policy prescription is to constrict the freedom of action of government so politicians can't use the public purse to win friends and influence people.

The Founding Fathers thought that abuse of government could be limited by the scale of the Republic. In *The Federalist No. 10*, James Madison wrote that “factions” would keep the government in check. In other words, different special interests would hold each other in check. It worked for a long time.

What the Founding Fathers did not count on was that governments would, one day, purport to do everything. So when the great program crops pushed the last Farm Bill, the produce industry did not form alliances with a goal of defeating the Farm Bill. Instead, the industry demanded a sliver of its own as its price for going along with the bill. Multiply that dynamic by thousands of industries and interest groups and thousands of bills and you see quickly how we can fall into such trouble.

How can we get out? Much of the industry efforts place the emphasis on leadership and, indeed, if you listen to the Republican critique of President Obama or of President Obama's critique of Congress, you get pretty much the same idea: That if only our leaders were good enough, these problems could be transcended.

Perhaps. It is not obvious that we have many leaders with learning, temperament and character similar to Washington, Adams, Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, etc. Perhaps such people could solve our problems. If these people did exist though, is there any great likelihood that our culture and political process would bring these leaders to positions of prominence and influence?

The year ahead will be filled with big decisions. The fate of Europe hangs in balance and the United States faces a Presidential election as well as the election of the whole House and a third of the Senate. Every year is crucial for many businesses. Let us hope the leaders are up to the task... and the followers as well.

**pb**

Every year is crucial for many businesses. Let us hope the leaders are up to the task... and the followers as well.



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**Conference Management:** NASFT, New York, NY  
**Phone:** (212) 482-6440 • **Fax:** (212) 482-6459  
**Email:** erivera@nasft.org  
**Website:** www.fancyfoodshows.com

**January 16 - 17, 2011**  
**NJDA/VGANJ CONVENTION**

The 2012 New Jersey State Agriculture Convention will be held in conjunction with the State Vegetable Growers Convention the week of January 16.  
**Conference Venue:** Taj Mahal, Atlantic City, NJ  
**Conference Management:** NJDA/VG  
**Phone:** (609) 439-2038 • **Fax:** (609) 826-5254  
**Website:** www.nj.gov/fAgriculture

**January 18 - 20, 2012**  
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The Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE) is the trade event showcasing the latest trends in foliage, floral and tropicals in warm and inviting South Florida.  
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**Conference Management:** Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Association, Orlando, FL  
**Phone:** (407) 295-7994 • **Fax:** (407) 295-7994  
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**Conference Management:** Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE  
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**Email:** solutionctr@pma.com  
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**January 22 - 24, 2012**  
**SWEET POTATO CONVENTION**

California Sweet Potato Council, the main national organization for the promotion and marketing of sweet potatoes, hosts the 50th Annual United States Potato Convention.  
**Conference Venue:** St. Regis Resort, Dana Point, CA  
**Conference Management:** California Sweet Potato Council, Livingston, CA  
**Phone:** (309) 394-7311 • **Fax:** (209) 394-4232  
**Email:** info@cayam.com  
**Website:** www.cayam.com

**January 24 - 26, 2012**  
**HOTEL, MOTEL & RESTAURANT SUPPLY SHOW SOUTHEAST**

**Conference Venue:** Myrtle Beach Convention Center Myrtle Beach, SC  
**Conference Management:** Leisure Time Unlimited Inc.,

Myrtle Beach, SC  
**Phone:** (843) 448-9483 • **Fax:** (843) 626-1513  
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**Website:** www.hmrss.com

**FEBRUARY 8-10, 2012**  
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**Conference Management:** Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany  
**Phone:** (493) 030-382048  
**Email:** berlin@exhibitpro.com  
**Website:** www.fruitlogistica.com

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**Conference Venue:** Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, FL  
**Conference Management:** Southeast Produce Council Inc., East Ellijay, GA  
**Phone:** (813) 633-5556 • **Fax:** (813) 653-4479  
**Email:** info@seproducecouncil.com  
**Website:** www.seproducecouncil.com

**March 14 - 16, 2012**  
**WORLD FLORAL EXPO 2012**

**Conference Venue:** Jacob K Javits Convention Center, New York, NY  
**Conference Management:** HPP Exhibitions, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
**Phone:** (312) 066-22482  
**Email:** jasper@hnp.nl  
**Website:** www.worldfloralexpo.com

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**Conference Management:** Fresh Produce Association of the America, Nogales, AZ  
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**Email:** info@freshfrommexico.com  
**Website:** www.freshfrommexico.com

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**Conference Management:** Produce for Better Health Foundation, Hockessin, DE  
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**Email:** fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org  
**Website:** www.pbhfoundation.org

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS**



**HASS AVOCADO BOARD NAMES 2011-12 TERM OFFICERS**  
 The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced new members to the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB) during the November 10th board meeting. The HAB board of directors then elected officers for a one-year term ending November 2012, including: Jimmy Lotufo (pictured left), chairman; Jamie Johnson, vice-chairman; Tom Sowden, treasurer; and Bob Schaar, secretary.



**ALPINE FRESH LEADING THE ASPARAGUS INDUSTRY INTO CANADA**  
 Miami, FL-based Alpine Fresh reports that 26,640 pounds of fresh Peruvian asparagus has shipped from Miami into Canada destined for the Canadian retail market. One of the first produce companies to obtain an in-transit permit from the USDA, Alpine is paving the way for more shipments into Canada. Along with others, Alpine has played a key role in the industry in the ongoing process to obtain this permit and acquire authorization and approval from the USDA.



**PHILADELPHIA MARKET EXPLORING EXPORT PROGRAM**  
 The Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market's 26 distributors hosted allied industries for an export seminar. The invitation-only event included representatives from ocean freight companies who discussed the opportunities and challenges involved in developing a fresh fruit and vegetable export program from the market. With many steamship lines delivering produce to metro-Philly, PWPM believes its merchants have a very significant opportunity to take advantage of economical ocean backhaul rates to serve fresh, high quality produce to customers across large parts of the world.



**VILLAGE FARMS LAUNCHES NEW LOGO AND PACKAGING CONCEPT**

Eatontown, NJ-based Village Farms is rebranding its image, presenting a brand-new logo that represents its commitment to eco-sustainability, quality, safety, technology, taste, innovation and community. Village Farms has been developing new exclusive varieties that build on consumer taste preferences, eye appeal, quality and shelf-life.



**EUROFRESH CAPTURES PRESTIGIOUS CHEFS BEST AWARDS**  
 Wilcox, AZ-based EuroFresh Farms was awarded the 2012 Chefs Best Certified Award for all tomatoes and cucumbers the greenhouse grower produces and ships in the United States. The most highly rated products include: Tomatoes on the Vine (TOVs), Romas, Campari, Bella Bites, Long English Cucumbers and Mini Cucumbers. Award-winning products are easily identified by the three chef heads profiled on the double gold medallion.



**RIVER RANCH WINS PMA 2011 BEST NEW PRODUCT LAUNCH FOR HERITAGE BLEND PRODUCTS**

River Ranch Fresh Foods won a "Best of Show" award in the 2011 Best New Product Launch category for its new Heritage Blend, a proprietary salad blend featuring a robust variety of petite red and green lettuce varieties. The award evaluates candidates based on their trade show execution of new product materials and innovation in generating awareness. Heritage Blend offers more plate volume, three to four more days of shelf-life, and two to three times more nutritional value than traditional Spring Mix.

**WATERMELON RETAIL DISPLAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED**

Orlando, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board announced the Grand Prize winner of its July retail display contest is Macey's Supermarket in Lehi, UT, which showcased the world's largest watermelon display with over 188 bins of fresh watermelons at the store's grand opening event. Sold in just four days, an additional 40 bins were ordered to get through the remainder of the event. The Grand Prize Winner receives \$1,000 and the opportunity to attend the National Watermelon Association convention in Amelia Island, FL, on February 22-26, 2012.



**CURRY & COMPANY SIGNS COMMITMENT FOR SWEET ONION CERTIFICATION**

Brooks, OR-based Curry & Co. has signed a three-nation commitment of flavor certification for its domestic, Peruvian and Chilean sweet onions. The end of the 2011 Vidalia onion season marked the second year of Curry & Co. using National Onion Labs to certify its sweet onions. The field and certification information allows Curry & Co. to not only prove the quality of its products, but also allows the company to work with each and every farm manager to improve their products for the coming season.

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

**NEW PRODUCTS**

**VILLAGE FARMS INTRODUCES HEAVENLY VILLAGIO**

Village Farms introduces the exclusive North American premier of a new variety of specialty tomato — the “Heavenly Villagio Marzano,” an authentic Mini San Marzano plum tomato. Born and bred across the Atlantic, this Heirloom-type plum tomato variety got

its name from the town of San Marzano near Naples, Italy, and was originally grown in the rich volcanic soils of Mt Vesuvius. Eaton-town, NJ-based Village Farms’ is pleased to be the first grower in North America to introduce this variety to its customers and consumers.



**TEMKIN INTRODUCES SINGLE-LAYER MODIFIED ATMOSPHERE PACKAGING**

Temkin International modified atmosphere packaging technology is now available in single-layer wicketed bags. With optional hermetic seals and patented laser micro-perforation technology, Temkin’s wicketed bags can effectively and affordably extend the shelf life of fresh produce. Temkin’s bags also can be custom-tailored to include zippers, bottom gussets, and a variety of wicket styles, providing added convenience and value. The company’s four locations, with headquarters in Payson, UT, enable high volume order delivery in shorter turnaround times.



**CRST LAUNCHES NEW TRANSCONTINENTAL TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED TEAM SERVICE**

Cedar Rapids, IA-based CRST International Inc. announced the launch of a new expedited Temperature Controlled Team Service (TCTS). Initial services, which include both chilled and frozen products, already have begun. TCTS will cater to cold-chain retailers and producers looking for quality service to deliver products. TCTS will use CRST drivers and equipment, including new Thermo King Refrigerated units and insulated Utility Trailers that can maintain temperatures as low as -20°F.

**COASTLINE LAUNCHES LEAF•EZ LIL GEM HEARTS**

Salinas, CA-based Coastline has launched Leaf•ez Lil Gem Hearts, a petite blend of romaine and butter lettuce available in a 6x3 retail bag, 8x2 retail bag and 24-count liner. The mini-heads make portion planning and upscale serving options simple. Ready to eat and serve after just minutes of preparing, they are pre-portioned to improve yield and reduce waste. High impact

graphics and an easy grab-and-go handled bag are designed to increase impulse sales.



**CORRECTIONS**

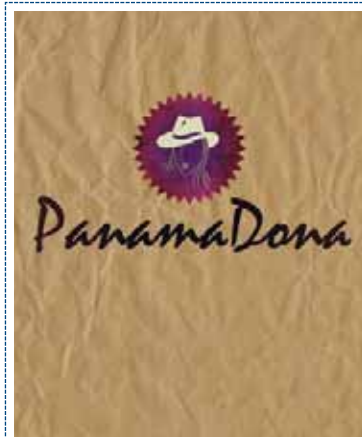
In the November issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, Lucky Lee of Lucky’s Real Tomatoes was misquoted on page 58. She is not married. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* regrets the error.

Also in the November issue, the Green Cart initiative was not described properly. Green Carts is a public-private initiative between the NYC Department of Health and the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. Karp Resources provides technical assistance and community relations support as part of their agreement.



**MELISSA’S OFFERS TOMATILLO SAUCE**

Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., Los Angeles, CA, offers a natural, preservative-free Tomatillo sauce made with fresh tomatillos, onions and a pinch of garlic. The ideal base for authentic salsas, sauces and marinades, each container is a shatter-proof plastic tub that holds 16 fluid ounces. The product can be refrigerated for up to 17 days.



**NEW PINEAPPLES FROM PANAMA**

The Panama Dona, a new brand of super-sweet Gold pineapples from Panama, will soon make its debut to U.S. consumers. While the brand itself is new, the company has been growing pineapples for over 12 years, and is a long-term supplier to Fyffes, a major European distributor. Produce from Panama has many benefits to U.S. receivers, including proximity, economic and logistical growth, plus year-round supply availability and flexibility. The brand’s new logo features a lady (“Dona”) wearing the country’s famous namesake hat. A new website, [www.panamaproduce.org](http://www.panamaproduce.org), has also been developed. Other tropical products in addition to pineapples will be introduced over the next few months.

# Higher Food Prices Challenge Retail

BY STEVEN MURO, PRESIDENT, FUSION MARKETING

## The Rise in Food Prices

As gas and food prices continue to climb, and unemployment faces a slow recovery, shoppers are looking for deals while retailers clamor for sales. It's tough out there, but now is the time to maintain your brand's position, especially with escalating food costs and increased competition in the industry.

Fresh produce prices have increased significantly this year. The fresh fruit index is up 7.9 percent and fresh vegetable prices are up 5.9 percent from last year. View the table at right for other fruit and vegetable price increases.

Consumers are feeling the impact of higher food costs. A typical shopper buying his or her Thanksgiving meal probably paid an additional 13 percent increase over last year's prices. It's likely, too, that shoppers are noticing the same price for reduced package sizes — a disguised price increase passed onto the consumer. Moreover, shoppers are now finding "sale prices" at the old regular price.

The U.S. Labor Bureau indicates that food prices are rising faster than wages. According to the USDA, food prices for all food will increase 2.5 to 3.5 percent in 2012, and consumer prices for fresh produce are expected to increase at a faster pace. Prices for beef, pork, eggs and dairy products are estimated to rise at a slower rate in 2012. However, the fate of these price predictions will hinge on a variety of factors including weather, fuel prices and the value of the U.S. dollar.

## The Shift at Retail

A recent Gallup poll indicated that the percentage of people that said they had enough money to buy food in the last 12 months fell to its lowest level in three years. It comes as no surprise then that consumers are looking for ways to stretch their dollars, especially since approximately 43 percent of

shoppers are buying less food and 22 percent are shopping at less expensive stores, including dollar stores.

Dollar stores are benefiting from the newly dubbed "forever frugal" consumers — those who buy only what they need, avoid premium labels, clip coupons and seek lower-priced goods. In fact, Family Dollar, Dollar Tree and Dollar General all rank in the Top 10 of Capital Markets' list of the fastest growing retailers. It is estimated that the three combined will open 2,400 stores over the next two years. In the past, dollar stores operated in secondary and tertiary markets. As the recession continued, they moved into primary market locations. Additionally, some dollar stores are expanding grocery offerings and some are experimenting with grocery-only concepts, which will create more competition in the shifting retail environment.

The intense pricing competition has triggered Wal-Mart to refocus on its low-price strategy. In an attempt to make shopping more convenient than dollar stores with a one-stop shop approach, Wal-Mart brought back thousands of products previously eliminated from its inventory. The altering retail environment and fluctuating consumer buying behaviors are likely causing other retailers to shift direction, too.

Many retailers miss their mark by slashing prices to compete in the short term. This may unintentionally reposition their brand, in the mind of the consumer, as being totally price-driven. When consumer confidence improves, the retailers rising to the top will be the ones offering value to their customers or those with the best logistics to continue to be a low-price leader.

There are many ways to communicate value without resorting to a price endgame. Take Whole Foods Market, for example. They may offer discounts, but their strategy is to

Apples	+ 2.1%
Bananas	+ 4.1%
Citrus	+ 2.0%
"Other" Fruit	+14.8%
Potatoes	+14.7%
Lettuce	+2.4%
Tomatoes	+5.4%
"Other" Vegetables	+4.1%

CHART COURTESY OF FUSION MARKETING

never compete strictly on low prices. Shoppers value Whole Food's organic and flavorful foods, and they are willing to pay more for them. Part of its success is based on brand equity. Even with increased food prices, Whole Foods is expected to weather the rising commodity costs and has reported sales growth during the recession.

Clearly, margins and profits are important. Communicating your store as the low-price leader to gain volume can be detrimental if it doesn't support your brand's position in the market. When a retail giant competes in the price game, they have solid store logistics and supply chain management in place to offset costs as part of their overarching strategy. However, if everyday low prices don't fit your retail mantra, don't dilute your brand by focusing solely on low-bottom prices to stay competitive in the short-term. Strengthen your value by appealing to your core market with key messaging that supports your brand's value position and image.



Fusion Marketing is a full-service agency in Chatsworth, CA, providing its broad client base with expertise in produce, consumer packaged goods, distinct-marketing perspectives and diverse capabilities. Fusion's marketing research and capabilities are proven to uncover business opportunities. Find more information at [www.fusion-mktg.com](http://www.fusion-mktg.com)

# Staying True To Brand Identity Isn't Easy

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

**S**ometimes data points deceive. When considering inflation, economists typically remove from their calculations food prices and other highly volatile items in an attempt to estimate a “core” inflation. If fresh produce prices rise or fall, it typically has more to do with weather and crop conditions than any fundamental change in produce prices.

When surveys claim things such as that 43 percent of shoppers are buying less food, yet there is no evidence this is so in volume sales at retailers, and when there is a supposed boom at farmer’s markets, CSAs, etc., it is more interesting to think about why consumers would say such a thing in a survey than to think about it as if it were true.

And when certain low cost retailers boom, it may indicate less of a flight to low cost retailing than a shift in market share from a giant such as Wal-Mart, which has lost its way, to competitive formats.

It is also true that sometimes one has to do things to survive in the short term that severely damage a business in the long term. Deep recessions are commonly one of those times. Retail is a business with lots of fixed costs. A 10 percent drop in sales is a catastrophe for most retailers.

If one is an upscale retailer at a moment in time when upscale is either unsustainable for many consumers because of their own financial setbacks or at a time when upscale goes out of fashion perhaps because it is deemed showy, one is faced with a difficult conundrum. If one stays true to one’s brand and image, one will probably sustain short term losses. Now perhaps, being true to one’s brand may also pay off in the long term — though, as famed economist Lord Keynes pointed out, “In the long run, we are all dead.” To put it another way, the question often is whether a company has the financial wherewithal to stay the course or if it needs to improvise in the hope of living to fight another day.

It is important to remember that Whole Foods was forced to raise new capital in the midst of the financial crisis and Great Recession. If it had been unable to raise funds, its future was very uncertain.

Wal-Mart has been gradually surrendering its low price leader reputation. Why it is doing this is unclear. Perhaps the Walton family of today is different from Sam’s family and it is now pushing for the company to maintain profits so it can maintain dividends.

Imagine a dramatic announcement that Wal-Mart was going to suspend its dividend and reinvest that money in price reductions. Imagine that every quarter Wal-Mart pledged to reduce its profit margin to provide better value for consumers. Imagine Wal-Mart announcing that its goal was for every quarter’s profit growth to be less than sales growth. Such gestures, both marketing and substance, might well help Wal-Mart reestablish its low-cost reputation. In the long run, that would be of inestimable value.

Dollar stores are booming, but it is not obvious that consumers suddenly want to shop at smaller stores. Although the recession may have created some real estate opportunities in better locations, the big issue is that Wal-Mart is no longer the low price leader. No amount of marketing will succeed in obscuring that fact.

We would not agree that Wal-Mart is refocused on its low-price strategic position. It is focused on marketing gimmicks to make people think Wal-Mart is low price, not actually being the low price leader.

Look at Wal-Mart’s Christmas price match program. It just promises to match prices, not beat them. It only matches print ad prices, thus allowing stores to undersell Wal-Mart with impunity as long as they don’t run print ads. Then it doesn’t give people their money back, just a Wal-Mart gift card. It is not a sincere effort to beat everyone on price; it is marketing fluff. Wal-Mart knows what prices its competitors are selling at. It

**Everyone can be true to his or her brand values if it doesn’t cost short term money. Only really exceptional companies manage to commit to a brand image and pay the short term price so as to succeed in the long term.**

should not allow itself to be undersold in the first place — but that would impact margins.

This is really the issue. Everyone can be true to his or her brand values if it doesn’t cost short term money. Only really exceptional companies manage to commit to a brand image and pay the short term price so as to succeed in the long term. Upscale firms mess up their image by implying they are cheap. Value-oriented marketers mess up their image by promoting things that aren’t so — the lowest price.

Shifts in the economy matter, but typically brand meaning can’t shift on a dime, so being true to one’s brand makes a lot of sense. But impatience is easy to summon when money is being lost.



# CANTALOUPE CRISIS ANALYSIS: While “Blame The Auditor” Frenzy Rages, It Pays To Look At Best Practices Vs. Standard Practices

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 10.23.2011

*We've carefully analyzed the cantaloupe crisis in a number of previous pieces.*

**W**hen Elizabeth Weiss of *USA Today* broke a story — “Listeria-linked Cantaloupe Farm Had Rated High In Audit” — detailing the fact that Jensen Farms received a top score — 96% — in a Primus audit done six days before the first person fell ill from these cantaloupes, we received many letters. One letter gives us a clue as to the issue the industry has to deal with regarding audits:

*What is your feeling about the responsibility of the third-party certifier of the safety of the melons?*

— Craig K. Harris, Department of Sociology,  
Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan

Of course, anyone who works in this area knows that neither Primus nor any other auditor acts as a “certifier of the safety” of any produce item. There are no consumer websites urging consumers to buy audited product by these auditors and no corporate shield stickered on the cantaloupe or other items.

Although commercial buyers are free to set up their own standards — and the world is filled with organizations that have standards, and one can get an audit on one's conformance with those standards — typically audits are simply scored against standard industry practices. They are not scored against optimal food safety practices at all.

That is what happened in this case. Jensen Farms did not have, and apparently Wal-Mart and others allowed it not to have, a Primus GFSI Audit. This was a standard Primus Good Manufacturing Practices Audit.

We have great respect here at the Pundit for Trevor Suslow of UC Davis, whose work we have featured many times, including several that specifically address cantaloupes and food safety.

We also deeply appreciate the work of Stephen Patricio, who is the chairman of the California Cantaloupe Advisory Board, the Center for Produce Safety, and president and CEO of Westside Produce.

Press reports lately, though, quote both Trevor and Garrett in a manner that mischaracterizes the state of the industry regarding standards on washing cantaloupes. The media is portraying it as if the Gold Standard practices of a half-dozen large California/Arizona firms are standard throughout the industry. They are not. We would say the issue boils down to our original point that regional and local buying is interfering with food safety.

The issue is this: In the past, Jensen Farms used a “hydro cooler” that had used re-circulated water to wash and cool the melons. The re-circulated water was treated with an antimicrobial. This season, it switched to a “one pass” system that did not use re-circulated water. It also did not use an antimicrobial.

Still in the *USA Today* article, the quotes are clear:

*Suslow, an expert on the post-harvest handling of produce at the University of California-Davis, said he was rendered “speechless” at news that Jensen was using untreated water to wash its melons. The problem, which Suslow called a “red flag,” was a switch by Jensen to a new fruit-washing system in July 2011. According to the FDA report and Gorny, that month Jensen Farms purchased and installed a used potato-washing machine to wash its cantaloupe.*

*According to the audit done by Primus Labs in August 2010, it appears that Jensen Farms had previously used a “hydro cooler” system to wash and cool the melons as they came in from the field, using re-circulated water that was treated with an anti-microbial to kill bacteria.*

*For the 2011 harvest, the farm switched to a system in which*

*cantaloupes were washed with fresh water that was not re-circulated and “no anti-microbial solution is injected into the water of the wash station,” the auditor, James Dilorio, noted on the first page of his audit.*

*“You would flat-out never do that, absolutely not,” said Suslow. No matter how clean the source of water is, once it's sprayed on “any kind of surface where you have multiple produce items rolling across it, you're trying to prevent cross-contamination ... so you always add something to the water.”*

*The problems that were found at Jensen Farms are “Packing House 101,” said Stephen Patricio, chairman of the California Cantaloupe Advisory Board. “Every common surface must be cleaned, rinsed and sanitized,” he said. “These are all just known, recognized practices.”*

Dr. Suslow and Mr. Patricio are, of course, free to attempt to persuade others that these are desirable, indeed, essential steps. They may well be correct. In fact we suspect they are correct.

It is worth noting, however, that they have not succeeded in persuading Wal-Mart or Costco of these facts. Neither retailer, nor any other retailer that we are aware of, has a specification on procurement of cantaloupes that all cantaloupes must be washed with an anti-microbial if the water is non-recirculating.

The FDA guidance on the matter makes no mention of any requirement for antimicrobial usage in single-pass or non-recirculating systems.

## **Melon Cooling Medium**

*Microbial reduction on melon surfaces is dependent on disinfectant concentration and contact time. However, once present on the surface of a melon, human pathogens cannot be completely eliminated by washing.*

*Prolonged soaking of melons in aqueous solutions containing wash water disinfectants is not an effective means of eliminating surface microbial contamination of the melon rind and may actually aid in the infiltration of human pathogens into the edible portions by creating an infiltration driving force.*

*Melon cooling water also may be a significant source of microbial cross contamination if there is insufficient water disinfectant present.*

## **FDA recommends:**

*Evaluating water quality of cold water used to cool melons to ensure that water is of sufficient microbial quality for its intended purpose.*

*Evaluating and monitoring water disinfectant levels to ensure that disinfectant is present at levels sufficient to reduce the potential risk of cross-contamination when melon cooling water is re-circulated.*

*Using single pass (or one use) cooling water of sufficient quality for this intended purpose also may be used to cool product.*

The issue is really Best Practices vs. Standard Practices. Dr. Suslow and Mr. Patricio work mostly in California and Arizona, and this is the location of the world class facilities that handle high volumes. These desert cantaloupes are either field-packed — and thus not washed at all — or packed with sophisticated wash systems that Dr. Suslow and Mr. Patricio are talking about.

When the FDA goes into a facility, it has the gift of 20-20 hindsight and unlimited time and resources to solve a food safety issue such as this one. It is thus able to identify many ways in which this facility falls



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short of the ideal. It would be a terrible mistake for the industry, though, to think that this was some horrid facility. It was not. It was a perfectly mainstream facility, better than many.

The flaws the FDA found at Jensen Farms could be found in the vast majority of produce packing facilities with a team there day and night swabbing and looking for days and weeks on end. But as with Jensen Farms vs. the California/Arizona industry, these packing facilities account for a small percentage of the nation's produce.

### **Auditors Not At Fault**

Auditors don't write standards and don't write POs. Any buyer has the right to go to Primus or any auditor and say, "We don't want standard industry practices... We only want to buy world-class best practices." We have no doubt Primus would gladly change its audit and fail people left and right.

To expect auditors to impose such standards on the trade without the support of either government regulation or buyer demand is to place bizarre weight on a very thin reed. The government, media and academia should understand, though, that, almost by definition, everyone cannot be "best of class," so demanding a "best of class" standard will mean flunking lots of producers, indeed most producers.

## **The flaws the FDA found at Jensen Farms could be found in the vast majority of produce packing facilities with a team there day and night swabbing and looking for days and weeks on end.**

The key to food safety is to know whom you are buying from and to have worked with that company over many years to achieve shared values. There must be transparency and mutual commitment to work together.

### **What To Do About Audits?**

Recognizing that this "blame the auditor" frenzy is bizarre, we can say that the industry does need a different kind of auditing tool. Right now, the system is that auditors go out, produce an audit and they give a score that is typically cued to industry standard practices and put comments in the notes. In this Jensen Farms situation, for example, the fact that no anti-microbial was being used in the wash water was specifically indicated in the notes as a possible area for analysis. It wasn't scored against Jensen on the audit because it is not required in the FDA Guidance or by standard industry practice.

In theory, what is supposed to happen is that the audit will be submitted to Wal-Mart, a food safety expert will carefully review it and many discussions will be held about each of these notations on the audit. Wal-Mart, Frontera and Jensen Farms will all come to a conclusion about whether the additional safety gained by adding an antimicrobial to the water outweighs its cost and perhaps other negative impacts, say chlorine on the workers. They will also come to an agreement on which antimicrobial to use and in what quantity. They will request a follow-up visit by the auditor to confirm this problem has been appropriately resolved.

This is the way current audits are designed to be used. The problem is that this ideal procedure is almost never followed. This is one important reason why our references to an aligned supply chain as the key

to food safety are so important. It takes a lot of resources to vet and stay on top of a supplier. A company must constrain its supply chain because it can't possibly do the right job on a large number of vendors.

As a practical matter, what has happened is that audits are consistently misused. So when questioned about food safety, many buyers at retail and wholesale may just say, "Hey, these guys got a 96 on their Primus audit," and never even look at the paper.

So, with these facts and this horrid situation, we would lay out four key issues for the trade regarding audits:

#### **1) What Standard Does Each Retailer Want?**

There are many standards out there, but most audits focus on standard industry practices. That is what the whole movement toward harmonization of audits almost intrinsically leads to.

The first question a retailer has to address is whether it is satisfied with that standard. Wal-Mart, for all its pushing on food safety, didn't demand a different standard of audit. It didn't demand a GFSI audit, and it didn't ask Primus to fail the facility unless it operated under all "best practices."

The trade associations like to suggest that we can have a unified standard.

#### **2) Who Is Going To Determine "Best Practices"?**

Ok, we now all realize that the audit is based on industry standards and, surely, many buyers will say that industry standards are too low and they want to audit firms for best practices.

Sounds good. But who decides what is a best practice? Is it dry harvesting of cantaloupes? Or is it washing with an anti-microbial? Which anti-microbial? In what concentration? Is just washing with anti-microbial enough, or should it be a one-pass system with anti-microbial?

These are not just details. Decisions such as these are the essence of food safety.

#### **3) How Can We Make Audits Easy To Use?**

It is clear that for the produce industry, the optimal outcome would be that a passed audit would symbolize a lot more than conformance with industry standards. To do that, the comments would have to be moved into the body of the audit and scored against the company. Many more companies would get low scores or fail the audits. Is the industry prepared for this?

What about government? We would estimate that more than 80 percent of the packing houses in America would fail a "best practices" audit. Not only that, but most cannot meet the standard ever. This is because they involve things like building pre-cooling facilities. Is Washington D.C. going to be OK with putting so many people out of business?

#### **4) Frequency Of Audits Or Surprise Audits**

One of the likely reasons that the Primus audit showed the facility in a good light is that they knew Primus was coming and gussied up the place. There is nothing wrong with having a first audit on a scheduled basis. Then, intrinsic in every audit regime, has to be a follow-up audit to verify that the audit has been reviewed, non-conformities resolved, all comments addressed.

It is hard to do surprise audits, especially in foreign countries. Even domestically, word gets around quickly that the auditors are in town. Still, the possibility of putting on a show for auditors necessitates more frequent visits.

Auditors could visit more frequently, but quarterly visits would cost almost four times what an annual audit does. Is the world ready to pay this price?

Auditors didn't cause this problem. Yet it would be a great thing if any wholesaler on any terminal market could hit a button on a computer and say, "This is OK. It is audited to Best Practices."

The system now is obtuse. It is as if a teacher gives a student a 96 because on the curve of other students he is doing great — but then writes a lot of comments saying that the student can improve in many ways. Many won't even look at the comments because the grade is expected, in school, to speak for itself.

It doesn't in audits, and that is a big industry problem.

# Reggie Griffin's Exit Interview

Focusing On The Relevant

CONDUCTED BY OSCAR KATOV

**O**n the eve of his final hurrah with The Kroger Co., concluding the last stage of his 42-year career as head of all produce and floral operations, Reggie Griffin talked with industry consultant, Oscar Katov, about his work, the produce industry, and his own dream that came true.

Here are Reggie's observations:

## ***Biggest Changes In The Produce Industry?***

"In a word, it's consolidation. It will continue to be big, very big. And, there's still more change coming on the consumer side — new perspectives on personal health that relate to more interest in fresh products. And, there will be a more intensive focus on food safety — the industry's No. 1 priority. A crisis can cripple a company or a product's whole industry."

## ***Biggest Changes In Retailing?***

"We're learning more about consumer behavior, learning what's relevant and making smarter merchandising decisions — right down to matching a customer's zip code with purchases. Most importantly, we need to recognize that 'food makes trips' — and new destinations, such as a drug store, will always try to attract our customers. Competition always will challenge us to be more efficient, to offer consumers a better shopping experience."

## ***Trust: The Key Word In A Business Relationship***

"Notwithstanding the magic of computers to make our operations smoother and more efficient, let's not dismiss the human factor — how people deal with each other. Trust is the key word. A company's true strength is built on trust. That's evident in the histories of our industry's growers and shippers."

## ***New Role For Retailers As Direct Importers?***

"It's an interesting idea, but it means a different kind of infrastructure — for the retailer to become involved at every stage, beginning with the basics of seeding, growing and transport. For example, I'm thinking of what's involved with bananas — a very significant investment for a retailer. Only very big companies could make it work."

## ***What Store Concepts Might Define The Future?***

"When I started working in 1969, the concepts of supercenter, warehouse, club, or a natural foods store were unknown — but, the ideas for one, or all, probably were already stirring with some operators. New concepts find their way into the marketplace when there's a need, so don't be surprised when a fresh idea arrives. Our industry is dynamic — a new concept reflects doing something that better

serves the consumer. That's the bottom line — service to the consumer."

## ***United Fresh And PMA***

"I had the rare pleasure in serving both the United Fresh Produce Association and Produce Marketing Association, offering my experiences — and my enthusiasm — to support programs that benefit members. Both United and PMA are great organizations, with competent staffs and strong leadership. Each has a different business model with programs of significant value — also, both become unified in working together effectively on issues that impact their respective members, such as food safety and promotion of the health values of our products. Both organizations merit our support for their excep-

Reggie Griffin steps down from The Kroger Co. following an illustrious 42-year career as head of produce and floral operations.



tional contributions to the vitality of our industry.”

### **Learning From A Mistake**

“At one time during my years with the Houston stores, we designed a takeout plastic package that would contain all the ingredients to make great salads. We thought it was a unique package that would appeal to our customers. The customers thought otherwise — it simply didn’t catch on. Clearly, the package was a mistake. It would have been easy to call the venture a failure and walk away from it. But, we persisted in finding answers, until we solved the challenge. It was a life lesson — learning from a mistake.”

### **Career Opportunities For Young People**

“Our produce and retail industries welcome young people who are interested in developing careers. Several colleges offer exciting courses that our two associations can identify and provide additional information. And both associations offer leadership programs to encourage young women and men already working in the industries to reach out for new opportunities to strengthen and advance their careers. The lifeblood for both industries is in attracting young people leading to leadership opportunities.

“In my family, three of my four children worked as store clerks for short periods, then decided to take other career paths. I was pleased by their interest in getting a close-up look at the grocery business, other than what they heard from me.”

“In my own work, I tried to bring a passion to my responsibilities.

I loved my work. My job was a dream that came true.”

*A Note From Oscar Katov: I am taking the liberty to include the following portion of a letter that Reggie wrote to industry friends on his last day in the office. The letter speaks for itself in conveying Reggie’s wonderful spirit in reaching out to build relationships:*

*Today is my last day at the office. Tomorrow I will drive to our home near Hilton Head Island. This time is bittersweet. It’s sweet as I am excited about the next chapter in my life and all that it may bring. It’s bitter as I’m leaving the retail sector that I dearly love and the interaction with all our friends and partners in the produce and floral industry.*

*My parting thought to my friends is this: Several years ago, I chaired a project for Kroger to better understand how we can be more relevant to Hispanic and Latino customers. I was able to travel and meet many people during the couple years this project was occurring. As I learned more about the culture of these great people, four words always surfaced and those are the ones I leave with you today.*

*Faith  
Family  
Food  
Fun*

*So my wish for each of you is this. May your Faith keep you strong and focused. May you nurture and love your Family, and may they reciprocate these feelings. Food is your friend — enjoy it, and most importantly, share it (especially with wine) and in whatever you do, always have fun.*

**pb**

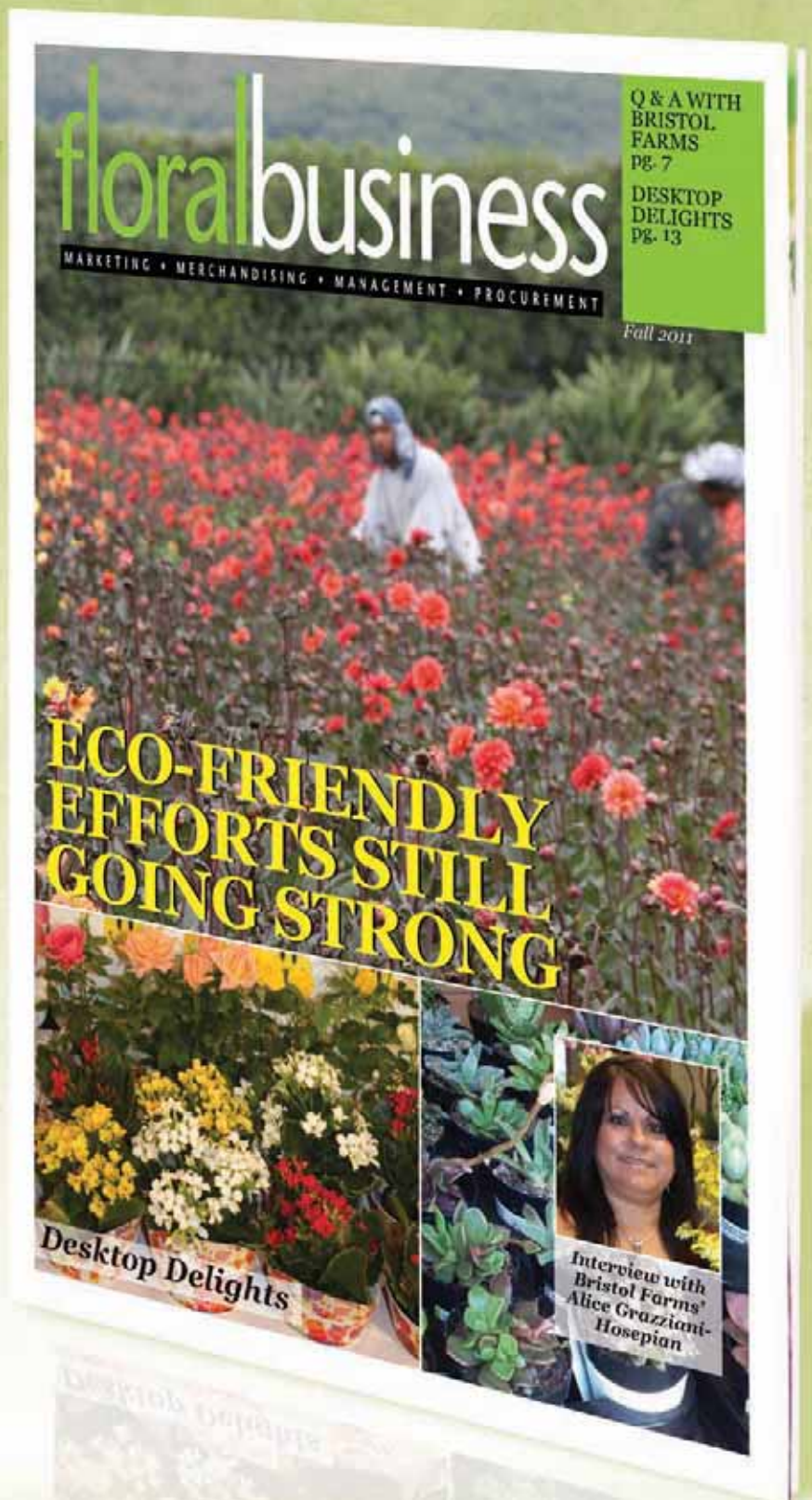
The advertisement features a green background with a white and yellow logo at the top center consisting of three stylized human figures. Below the logo, the text "United Fresh 2012" is written in white, with "2012" in a larger font. Underneath, "THE PRODUCE SHOW" is written in large, bold, white letters, with "THE" in a smaller font. To the right of "THE PRODUCE SHOW", "DALLAS" is written vertically in yellow, and "MAY 1-3" is written in large yellow letters. Below the text is a photograph of the Dallas skyline. At the bottom, there are logos for "United Fresh 2012 Co-location Partners" (including AMI INTERNATIONAL), "FMI2012" (with a barcode and website), and "2012 U.S. FOOD SHOWPLACE". The bottom of the advertisement has a dark green background with the text "Register Today at [www.unitedfresh2012.org](http://www.unitedfresh2012.org) or 202-303-3400" in white.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLLAND FRESH GROUP

# Holland's Relationship With The U.S. Produce Industry Goes Deep And Long

PRODUCE BUSINESS speaks with Holland Fresh Group to get an insider's look at the country's dynamic and influential agriculture industry.

BY OSCAR KATOV

If you ask a successful Fresh Summit international exhibitor for the formula that will open access to the North American market, the likely response will be succinct and direct – invest in a long-term commitment. A prime example of that recommendation is the Holland Fresh Group, which marked its 26th consecutive year as a Fresh Summit exhibitor this past October in Atlanta, GA.

“Ninety percent of what we grow in Holland is destined for export, so our sales objective is very clear – to aggressively target opportunities world wide,” remarks Ger van Burik, exhibition coordinator for Holland Fresh, describing the organization's basic marketing strategy. “We exhibit at Fresh Summit and three other international fresh produce expositions to stimulate interest in the products of our companies – to attract key buyers – and we build on these relationships year after year, as well as continuing to seek still more new

sales contacts.” Fresh Summit also draws buyers from 100 countries other than the United States and Canada, Burik reveals, delivering extra marketing benefits.

## HOLLAND'S HISTORIC FOOTPRINT

For Burik and his Group members, it's also interesting to look back at what he calls “the exciting history” of Holland's trading and exploration activity during America's colonial years. Some historians have suggested that the skills of today's Dutch foreign trade experts were probably also evident at an event in 1624 – described as “the real estate deal of all time” – when representatives of the Dutch West India Company negotiated with an Indian tribe to buy Manhattan Island for 60 Guilders, today valued roughly at \$35.

Four hundred years later, a broad variety of produce from the greenhouses and fields of the Netherlands is readily found in Manhattan

grocery stores and restaurants, throughout New York state, and elsewhere in the Northeast states, as well as all the way down the East Coast to Miami. “We are very pleased by the opportunity to offer American consumers the best produce in taste and quality, and also in maintaining the highest level of reliable service for our customers,” says Burik.

In the six years from 2005 to 2010, Group members sold nearly 40 million pounds of vegetables in the United States and Canada, including cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, shallots, chicory, leeks, and other items. Top sales leaders were peppers, with 80 percent being orange peppers.

While its 2012 participation in the number of international expositions will remain unchanged, Moscow will replace London as the fourth location – joining PMA Fresh Summit (Anaheim, CA), Fruit Logistica in Berlin, and the Asia Fruit Logistica in Hong Kong in promoting Dutch visibility for fresh produce.



colorful fresh produce as a celebration of all the senses. That makes them stand out and attract the attention of buyers year after year. We're indebted to them for raising the bar and showing the value of an ongoing presence at Fresh Summit for a quarter of a century."

### A DYNAMIC AG INDUSTRY

Exports drive the economic life of Holland. With a population of 16 million, the small country ranks sixth in the world table for exports and overseas investments, reflecting its historic roles in exploration and trading on all the continents. Fresh fruits and vegetables make a powerful impact on exports, with more than 12,000 growers annually delivering nearly 4.5 million tons of exported product.

Three familiar vegetables – onions, potatoes and mushrooms – rank high in the country's agriculture production levels. Perhaps to the surprise of American consumers, it's likely that Dutch onions may be in their shopping carts. Holland is the world's leading exporter of onions, with fertile soil and moderate climate particularly favorable for onion cultivation. More than 1 million tons of onions are grown annually on about 35,000 acres devoted to the product, with 90 percent of the volume destined for export.

For Dutch consumers, the potato is a diet favorite, with more than 250 available varieties. With volume responding to an extraordinary array of tastes, more than 11,000 companies grow potatoes for fresh consumption, related to an annual harvest of about 7 million tons.

And still, in another category, Holland ranks as Europe's leader in the production of



The presence in Berlin will grow significantly, reports Burik, to 32,000 square feet of exhibition space, with more than 100 participating companies. Exhibit space in Fresh Summit will grow, too, with companies from Belgium, its European neighbor, joining in the pavilion for the first time.

Holland's 26-year relationship with the Produce Marketing Association and its Fresh Summit has been rewarding for both organizations. Bryan Silbermann, president and CEO of PMA, enthusiastically says, "It always a delight to have Holland Fresh Group's vibrant presence on the show floor. They understand the need to market their high-quality, flavorful and

mushrooms, with an annual volume of nearly 600 hundred million pounds. According to *Holland Fresh Guide*, published by Boekhout Publishing and checked by HBAG Fruit and Vegetables, the organization for the fruit and vegetable industry, "abundant quantities are available because of strict cultivation controls, ideal growing conditions and the use of computer control in the cultivation rooms."

And, when growing conditions in Holland limit the use of available land, or there's a desire to increase the export volume of a crop – specifically bell peppers for the U.S. market – some Group members enlist the help of a partner in Mexico. The partner uses seeds provided by the Group member in Holland, and arranges direct shipment of the product to U.S. destinations.

Holland's effective, tested logistics capabilities, rooted in historic achievements of exploration and trade, powerfully add to its dynamic agriculture industry. Each year, the port of Rotterdam handles almost 350 million tons of goods, while the Schiphol airport at Amsterdam handles 150 million tons. Supplies of fresh fruits and vegetables move in huge volume, in and out at both locations, and within a radius of 300 miles, more than 170 million European consumers can be accessed easily by rail, highway and water.

Through the centuries, Holland has flourished as one of Europe's major marketplaces. Today, the impact of the country's fresh produce industry continues to grow in importance, strongly resonating around the world. **pb**





# What's Trending?

**PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke with produce industry leaders to bring you the Top Ten trends for 2012.**

1. Immigration Reform: The Need For Legal Farm Labor
2. Food Safety Commitment Continues
3. Locally Grown Moves From Trend To Norm
4. Boosting Consumption: The Focus Is On Future Generations
5. Health Remains A Hot Topic
6. Flavor And Innovation
7. Social Media Goes Viral
8. Convenience Remains Top Of Mind
9. The Need For Value
10. Sustainability

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**T**here has never been a better time to be in the fruit and vegetable business. At the same time, the fresh produce industry may never have faced so many complex challenges. How the industry moves forward into the future and either slows down or grows will depend on maximizing opportunities and minimizing obstacles.

"There are many positives that bode well for produce: the health insurance industry is becoming more focused on healthy eating; inexpensive social media can reach consumers directly; government feeding programs, and restaurants, are using more fruits and vegetables; and supermarket dietitians and community programs are talking about healthy eating more than ever before," says Elizabeth Pivonka, Ph.D., R.D., president and CEO for the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) in Hockessin, DE. "Yet, despite these positives, assuring that produce is safe, consistently tastes good, is a good value, and that it can, indeed, be harvested, are all issues that need to be

addressed to assure increased consumption."

PRODUCE BUSINESS asked over two dozen industry leaders their outlook on the year to come and the trends they see coming down the pipeline.

## 1. Immigration Reform: The Need For Legal Farm Labor

One of the hottest issues next year will continue to be immigration. Specifically, Mike Stuart, president of the Maitland-based Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), maintains, "Illegal immigrants make up an estimated 50 to 70 percent of harvest manpower. What we need is a program that allows the produce industry to have a legal workforce. While there has been a tremendous effort to create a viable guest worker program, Congress has not acted upon it, and this issue remains a dark cloud on the horizon."

Some states, such as Georgia, have become frustrated with this delay and have enacted legislation to mandate employment verification through an E-Verify system. This has already

resulted in a shortage of viable farm workers, says Reggie Griffin, former vice president of produce and floral for the Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co., and current United Fresh chairman. "E-Verify, without a viable guest worker program, can negatively impact all segments of the fresh produce industry."

Joe Pezzini, chief operating officer for Ocean Mist Farms, in Castroville, CA, adds, "Labor and immigration reform likely won't be resolved in 2012 due to it being an election year. However, I think this will be a hot topic and incur wide debate. If it's not eventually solved, I think we'll see a lot of unintended consequences."

One of these negative effects is already happening, and poised to get worse, points out Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), in Nogales, AZ. "The emphasis on immigration in the United States and the highly charged politics surrounding this issue has meant a lot more border patrols," he reveals. "As a result, manpower at the ports has suffered, and it can take five or six hours or more to cross a load of



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fresh produce from Mexico into the United States. This problem will be exacerbated when the new port opens unless there is adequate customs staffing. If the United States could solve its guest worker program, illegal crossings would be reduced and this would free up customs staff for the ports.”

The labor shortage has already caused several large farmers in New York to divert acreage away from fruits and vegetables to grain and dairy instead, says Dr. Ed McLaughlin, director of the Food Industry Management Program at Cornell University, in Ithaca, NY. “Ironically, 40 miles away, in Ontario, fresh produce production is booming, thanks to Canada’s successful guest worker program.”

Another irony, according to John McClung, president and CEO of the Mission-based Texas Produce Association (TPA), “is that as the population grows, people will need to eat and demand will be there. The question is where will the crops be grown? Not having immigration reform in place will drive production offshore and make the United States increasingly dependent on other nations for feeding its people.”

## 2. Food Safety Commitment Continues

Food safety will continue to be an integral issue in the product business. Richard Dachman, vice president of produce for Houston, TX-based Sysco Corp., and board chairman of the Produce Marketing Association, asserts, “The fresh produce industry needs to continue to work hard to decrease the risk of food safety outbreaks, increase consumer confidence and convince the public that we do have a safe food supply.”

David R. Parsley, senior vice president of supply chain management for Brinker International, in Dallas, TX, agrees, and adds, “Food safety issues seem to be more prevalent in the fresh produce industry than what we’re currently seeing in, for example, the beef industry. The onus is on the produce industry to develop controls and strengthen its safeguards across the entire produce supply chain. This will be non-negotiable going forward, as

restaurant and foodservice operators will seek vendor partners whose quality assurance standards exceed the status quo.”

“Food safety needs to be a living and breathing part of every produce operation,” says Matt McInerney, executive vice president of the Irvine, CA-based Western Growers Association (WGA). “It’s fundamental to business operations. The cantaloupe outbreak in Colorado this fall was an unfortunate reminder. No longer can we say ‘we don’t know’ or ‘we don’t think so.’ I think buying groups, both restaurants and retail, will increasingly look to partner with companies that are dedicated to and have made a substantial investment in food safety.”

The cost of food safety controls could be well worth the lost revenues. For example, Brian Coates, senior buyer and produce merchandiser for Meijer Inc., in Grand Rapids, MI, reports, “We’ve had a 30 to 40 percent drop in cantaloupe sales as a result of the recent outbreak. As we’ve seen from other items like spinach, it can take years to rebound. That’s why full traceability is so important. Pallet-level trace back is a step in the right direction. However, until the industry can trace back to an individual piece of fruit or vegetable, be it on a sticker, band or tag, there won’t be true traceability. I suspect this will take more than the next year to achieve,” he recognizes.

“The cantaloupe food safety outbreak has led to serious consideration by the buying community of the effectiveness of third-party food safety audits,” reveals Dr. Roberta Cook, cooperative extension marketing economist for the University of California (UC) at Davis. “I think this needs to be looked at as part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and especially what happens when the market is short. Will there still be a push to buy from the company with the best price and not necessarily with the best food safety track record?”

What exactly the FSMA will require is on many people’s radar screen for 2012. Ocean Mist’s Pezzini says, “The FDA is writing the rules now, and I think we could see them as early as spring 2012. The big question is what they will be and how they will need to be implemented.”

Importers, especially, are waiting to see what these rules mean for them. The FPA’s Jungmeyer says, “We believe that any burden, such as increased fees and level of compliance, should be shared across between importers and domestic producers.”

“At the same time, I think we’ll see more scrutiny here in Washington to make sure the new food safety law hits the mark,” muses Ray Gilmer, vice president of communications for the Washington, DC-based United Fresh Produce Association. “There is continued interest from lawmakers to prevent outbreaks and the industry remains committed to that goal.”

## 3. Locally Grown Moves From Trend To Norm

Locally grown was one of the biggest new trends last year, but this year, it has moved beyond a trend. Lorna Christie, executive vice president and COO of the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association, remarks, “Local has become another industry segment just like organics. It’s evolved the same way.”

Yet, consumers are still fascinated with finding out who grew their food, says the WGA’s McInerney. “As the desire for local and regional grows, matures and even extends beyond a certain geographic area, the face behind the product or sense of connectivity with the grower is something that will continue to resonate with consumers,” he expounds. “I think we’ll even see this extend to the virtual realm with consumers able to see their produce being grown or picked as easily as if they were at the local farmer’s market.”

Meijer’s Coates believes the economy is one reason why locally grown still resonates with customers. “If we can help the economy in our state by purchasing product from local farmers, this helps everyone,” he states.

Beyond this, Coates adds, locally grown will take on more of a practical nature driven by skyrocketing costs. “I think we’ll also see more California and Washington growers partner with farmers in the Midwest to grow certain items seasonally for them to either supply this market or send to the East Coast,” he says. “Trans-



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portation costs will prompt this. The cost of freight from the West Coast has become more than the cost of the produce in many cases. This affects our price and sales volume. For example, we get a huge lift on volume when we can sell grapes at 99-cents per pound. This plummets when the price goes up to \$1.29 or \$1.49 per pound. Consumers in this economy don't want to spend their discretionary income this way and will move to canned and frozen," he warns.

"In spite of the great attention given to locally grown," says Sysco's Dachman, "it's a relatively minor part of our overall food production. Local needs to be on the menu and in the grocery, but we can't misperceive that the goal of the industry depends on large growers who produce the majority of wholesome and safe food, and this isn't going to change."

There has been a small, but noticeable pushback against local stemming from concerns that small growers might not be as diligent in the food safety arena due to small scale and a lack of available resources. Cornell's McLaughlin points out, "One encouraging sign — and I think we'll see more of it going forward — is retailers partnering with small growers to help them achieve food safety certification. These types of true partnerships are encouraging for the whole produce industry."

#### 4. Boosting Consumption: The Focus Is On Future Generations

One of the produce industry's greatest puzzles is why consumption of fruits and vegetables isn't on the rise. McLaughlin says, "You can't pick up a magazine or newspaper and not see an article explaining why fruits and vegetables are good for us. Government agencies tell us this, and so do scientific institutes, medical associations and university studies. Yet the hard truth is that consumption has been flat for a long time. Some of the most recent data tells us that consumption has actually dropped in the past five to 10 years among teens. What is encouraging is that intake in children ages five to 12 is modestly up. Tried-and-true methods don't work, so we need to look for innovative ways and new approaches to increase consumption."

"The produce industry will have an opportunity to elevate produce into a bigger category by building on the growing trends toward healthier eating and related awareness," says Ron Lemaire, president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), in Ontario, Canada. "Providing consumers with the information and resources they crave, as

well as access to a consistent variety of fresh fruit and vegetable options, will ultimately lead to improved consumption and a step in the right direction toward overall better health."

"For example," Lemaire continues, "CPMA is taking action in this respect by offering the Freggie children's program, which is designed to teach kids the benefits of health and nutrition, to schools across Canada. The more comprehensive *Fruits and Veggies — Mix it up!* consumer outreach program, which is geared toward helping Canadians find easy ways to consume the fruits and vegetables they need each day for their overall better health, includes selection, storage, use and nutritional information about a wide range of fruits and vegetables."

"In the United States the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) is successfully helping to grow consumption of fresh produce among school children," says Kroger's Griffin. "According to a study issued in September, children at participating schools increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by 15 percent or ¼-cup per day. Interestingly, these children are coming home and influencing their parents. Retailers are hugely supportive and many have found ways to offer more fresh fruits and vegetables by making effective use of existing space and using more multi-deck cases."

"Going forward," adds United Fresh's Gilmer, "The latest proposed rule for nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast program calls for doubling of fresh produce servings and increased variety. This offers an opportunity for the industry to change children's eating habits both in the short-term and for a lifetime."

"The USDA's unveiling of its MyPlate icon is poised to have a positive impact on consumption in all age groups," contends Pivonka of PBH. "Having the government tell consumers that half their plate should be fruits and vegetables is an awesome proportionality message that many people didn't understand with the Pyramid. Since this symbol just launched in 2011, it's going to be big in 2012. We've been working through our website, Facebook and Twitter to let consumers know what half of a plate full of produce looks like, especially when it comes to mixed dishes like soups and casseroles."

Greg Drescher, vice president of strategic initiatives and industry leadership at the Culinary Institute of America, in Hyde Park, NY, believes, "For MyPlate to be successful, there needs to be new menu development that combines produce, meat and grains. It's not just about adding more produce to the plate."



Lorna Christie



Matt McInerney



Mike O'Brien



Reggie Griffin



John McClung



Lance Jungmeyer

There are many innovative ways foodservice operators are integrating more produce into their menus. Sysco's Dachman remarks, "What we're seeing is amazing. For example, Darden has a healthy children's menu. Subway has expanded to serving avocados on their sandwiches. Wendy's did a berry promotion this summer. McDonald's is experimenting with fresh fruit shakes, and the Cheesecake Factory just launched its 'SkinnyLicious' menu."

"In the future," says UC Davis' Cook, "we'll see more attention given on how to influence and motivate desired consumer behavior, for example, real world purchase incentives and disincentives. This is research that is just emerging and it's going to lead to more innovative marketing programs."

## 5. Health Remains A Hot Topic

The high cost of health care is one factor driving the desire for a healthy diet and lifestyle, says Michael Celani, executive vice president of sales, marketing and product innovation for Ready Pac Produce Inc., in Irwindale, CA. "Consumers are recognizing there's a dollar-for-dollar pack back from healthy eating and that starting good habits young is beneficial."

"Health is what the produce industry does best so we have to be front-and-center on the nation's desire to get healthy and combat the obesity epidemic," adds Steve Burnham, senior vice president of corporate produce, bakery and floral for Safeway Inc., based in Pleasanton, CA. "The USDA's new My Plate offers the produce industry the opportunity to provide half of every meal. That's a great challenge."

The FFVA's Stuart agrees. "There's considerable momentum on the notion of healthy eating, and it's a very encouraging opportunity for our industry," he says. "For example, we've seen commodity boards tap into this and connect with consumers to deliver information about the healthful nature of their products. This is a movement that should get even more aggressive in the coming year and target everyone from children to Baby Boomers."

"The time is indeed ripe to tap into nutrition marketing," acknowledges Jan DeLyser, vice

president of merchandising for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC). "We've seen the pendulum swing from avoidance, or no fat, no carb, no calorie diets, to an emphasis on what you should eat more of, not less of. Take avocados. We market their monounsaturated fat content as a reason, rather than a deterrent, to buy."

Nutrition information has become integral to the purchase decision for many shoppers, says Bill Bishop, chairman and president of Willard Bishop Consulting Ltd., in Barrington, IL. "We'll see more growers and retailers providing nutrition information in ways shoppers can really use. Because of the bulk nature of produce, this will be via scale labels, QR codes and other SmartPhone apps that can be used at point-of-purchase."

The desire for healthful choices extends to foodservice with a trend toward more produce and less meat on the menu. The CIA's Drescher remarks, "Our industry has sometimes taken an 'all-or-nothing' approach to this issue. Now, there is growing interest to leverage smaller amounts of meat with more produce such as mushrooms, rather than eliminating the meat entirely in a given application."

## 6. Flavor And Innovation

Few people will increase their produce consumption simply because they know they should. "What does get them to eat more is flavor," says Drescher. "This means high flavor produce and creative produce preparation. Just look at all the new Asian slaws popping up that get their kick from ginger, hot mustard or wasabi."

Flavor is a key trend. Robert Ondrus, director of category management for produce for U.S. Foods, in Rosemont, IL, reveals, "We spec USDA No. 1 and our specs also include color, texture, Brix and other factors that contribute to flavor and eating experience. Our customers, in turn, want to offer their customers an experience, something that keeps them coming back. Today, that might be a Campari or Heirloom rather than gas-green tomato or butter lettuce rather than iceberg."

"Varietal development in a number of cate-

gories is a trend in this direction," says Steve Lutz, the executive vice president of the West Dundee, IL-based Perishables Group. "We're seeing new items like small yellow snack size tomatoes, Honeycrisp apples, pluots and easy-peel citrus that have the potential to change the category. These all sell at a premium, and I think these products send a signal to retailers that there is a segment of consumers willing to pay for an outstandingly flavorful product."

According to Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce for Schnuck Markets Inc., in St. Louis, MO, "To sell more new produce items and grow produce consumption, we must first get trial. We do that by educating our customers with demos, recipes, signage and handling information."

"Innovation is key to keeping the consumer excited about produce," says Safeway's Burnham. "In addition to new varieties, we have to be creative thinkers and strategic in a few key areas. These include: packaging that keeps the product fresh longer and improves the eating experience and merchandising to showcase the product in unique, fun ways."

Regarding packaging, Ready Pac's Celani contends, "The trend of healthy snacking and more one- and two-person households is creating demand for portion-size packaging. This leads to innovation, such as our Ready Snax and Bistro bowls, which have really taken off with consumers."

As for merchandising, the positive aura of produce is opening the door to new merchandising and marketing opportunities. Jin Ju Wilder, president of Status Gro LLC, in South Pasadena, CA, remarks, "We're seeing big brands like Smuckers and Frito-Lay tying themselves in with fresh produce in advertising. This could be an opportunity for members of the produce industry to partner with these companies in creative ways and take advantage of the CPG companies' huge marketing budgets to promote fresh produce."

## 7. Social Media Goes Viral

Jim Lemke, vice president of produce for C. H.

*“Varietal development in a number of categories is a trend in this direction. We’re seeing new items like small yellow snack size tomatoes, Honeycrisp apples, pluots and easy-peel citrus that have the potential to change the category. These all sell at a premium, and I think these products send a signal to retailers that there is a segment of consumers willing to pay for an outstandingly flavorful product.”* — Steve Lutz, *The Perishables Group*



Roberta Cook



Steve Burnham



Mike Stuart



Joe Pezzini



Richard Dachman



Steve Lutz

Robinson Worldwide Inc., headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN, believes there will be an increase in consumer connectivity to the produce industry. “This means more cause marketing and use of social media,” he says. “Latching on to causes helps needy organizations, and at the same time, promotes produce. The companies that are good at sifting through social media will be the ones that are most successful in connecting with consumers. How well we connect with consumers will ultimately be a measure of our success.”

Facebook and Smartphones are changing how we market to our customers, agrees O’Brien. “Everyone is evaluating their marketing spend in terms of return on investment. Dwindling are the days of paper, radio and TV. Guerrilla marketing using Facebook, blogs and Smartphone apps is the way to create advocates. Customers don’t trust advertising but they will trust a ‘friend’ on Facebook.”

“Social media even has the potential to transform the traditional business-to-business model in a cost-effective way,” says PMA’s Christie. “For the first time, growers have an opportunity to connect directly with consumers. It’s an amazing opportunity to merchandise beyond the target to a whole new audience. We’ve seen some companies already utilize this to deliver information such as how to select ripe fruit, care and handling techniques and recipes. Foodservice has already embraced social media, such as sending out coupons via Foursquare. I foresee both foodservice and retail using this marketing medium even more in the coming year.”

## 8. Convenience Remains Top Of Mind

According to David Krause, president of Paramount Farms Inc., in Lost Hills, CA, “Conve-

nience is something consumers will continue to desire and to demand. We see this in the form of seedless, easy-to-peel citrus that is kid-friendly, and easy-to-eat.”

Schnuck’s O’Brien agrees the trend for convenience will continue. “Look at the packaging awards winners at this year’s Fresh Summit,” he points out. “In-store cut fruit and vegetable categories are growing. Everyone is in a hurry. Convenience is just another way to provide solutions.”

The days when produce was sold in bulk out of a big bin are dwindling, and United Fresh’s Gilmer adds, “Packaged produce for parties and holidays, work place or school lunches, or easy meal preparation at home continues to gain traction.”

Christie agrees, noting, “We’re seeing de-commoditization via the creation of packaging that supports quick convenient meal assembly. Examples include Dole’s new salad kits that come complete with tomatoes and Ocean Mist’s microwavable bagged artichokes.”

Value-added snack products will also grow, says Status Gro’s Wilder. “Examples are sugar snap peas, sliced apples and single-serve blueberries.”

“Along with the development of these products,” adds CH Robinson’s Lemke, “We’ll see a lot more interest and movement of fresh produce through alternative retail channels like C-stores, work places, office buildings, drug stores and gas stations. Everyone is looking for a niche to sell their products and today’s on-the-go consumers are looking for more options than a can of soda and bag of chips,” he explains.

## 9. The Need For Value

“Value-shopping has become the new normal,” says Bishop Consulting’s Bishop. “This puts a premium on retailers to get

pricing right. I think we’ll feel it throughout the supermarket to the point that consumers will take their business to another outlet in order to get a better price.”

Safeway’s Burnham agrees. “Value will remain a key component in 2012. The industry needs to work together — from field to fork — to find solutions to remove costs out of the system and operate in the most cost-effective way. This will result in competitive retailers.”

“Yet,” contends the Perishables Group’s Lutz, “Prices are on the rise after a fairly flat 2010. We’ve also seen promoted prices higher and not as deep of discounts. As prices push up, volumes will decline. It’s something we all need to watch.”

## 10. Sustainability

“Sustainability isn’t new, but I think we’ll see a greater look at what defines sustainable versus production agriculture,” notes Western Growers’ McInerney. “Some retailers have articulated a greater desire to look at sustainable farming practices, so there needs to be transparent and open dialogue on this issue. This should lead to a broader understanding.”

Ready Pac’s Celani agrees and adds, “We’re seeing more structure put on what it means to be sustainable. This pulls in social accountability, environment concern over packaging and footprint, and supporting local. In the future, I think being sustainable, at worst, will be defined as a neutral impact, and hopefully, as a positive impact with no net waste.”

“The over-arching trend driving sustainability,” says the CAC’s DeLyser, “whether it’s global warming, energy efficiency, renewable, reusable or chemical-free is that we want a whole and undamaged environment for future generations.”

**pb**



Potatoes and onions have many of the same care and handling techniques, making them natural merchandising partners.

# Give Your Potato And Onion Marketing Top Priority

New varieties help potatoes and onions remain major produce categories. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

**P**otatoes and onions, staples in retail produce departments for decades, are still important categories for any successful department today. In 2010, potatoes were the second largest volume contributor and the sixth largest dollar contributor to the entire produce department, according to Perishables Group Fresh Facts, powered by Neilson.

Onions represent the third largest fresh vegetable industry in the United States. The U.S. per-capita consumption of onions is about 20 pounds per year, which represents a 70 percent increase in consumption in the last two decades, according to the Greeley, CO-based National Onion Association (NOA).

## New Potato Colors, Sizes And Flavors Help Build Sales

There are many reasons onions and potatoes are so important to retail produce operations. One is the addition of newer potato varieties, with year-round availability. According to Perishables Group Fresh Facts, during the most recent 52-week period ending September 24th, potato volume sales of yellows were up 12.9 percent; fingerlings were up 18 percent; purples were up 77 percent and petites

were up an astounding 216 percent.

Kathleen Triou, vice president of domestic marketing for Denver, CO-based United States Potato Board, notes, "The USPB is driving the education of potato types. We recently introduced a new video series titled, *Potato Types and Tips*, hosted by celebrity nutritionist, Katie Cavuto Boyle, RD." The video series focuses on the seven most common potato types: russets, red, whites, yellows, purples, fingerlings and petites. In each video, Boyle goes shopping for potatoes, explaining what to look for and how one potato differs from another. In the segment on yellow potatoes, for instance, she clears up the confusion shoppers commonly have between yellow and white potatoes. She describes their appearance, differing taste profiles and popular ways of preparing them. "The video series is a large element in the overall Potato Types Marketing initiative," Triou comments. "At the core is information differentiating each potato type based on their unique attributes and characteristics. It's an opportunity to grow the category and increase sales by highlighting popular uses for each basic potato type."

According to Ryan Bybee, sales manager of GPOD of Idaho, in Shelley, ID, "The Russet

Burbank is the most versatile potato variety. It has the highest solids and works well for all types of cooking."

"Yukon Gold potatoes are difficult to grow and so are more limited in availability," says John Terwilliger, president of Huntsinger Farms Inc., a potato grower and repacker based in Hegins, PA. "Now many people often refer to all gold potatoes as Yukon Gold. We would like to see more marketing emphasis on specific varieties, so consumers would know the difference between the true Yukon Gold and other gold potatoes."

Potandon Produce LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID, has seen interest in non-traditional potato varieties for a few years, but now, many of these varieties have gained a solid consumer following. "Our Klondike Rose and Klondike Goldust varieties are doing well in both retail and foodservice," states David Wheeler, new product and marketing manager.

"The Dutch yellow potato is our best selling potato," reports Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Vernon, CA-based Melissa's/Worldwide Variety Produce Inc. "Sales of a newer cousin of that variety, the Ruby Gold, which is red on the outside with a yellow interior, have continued to increase. The finger-

ling potatoes are the trendiest, with the yellow Russian Banana variety being the most popular. Other fingerlings we market are Purple Peruvian, the silver-beige Ruby Crescent and the red-colored French, with a white interior. Mixed packs of the varieties are also available.”

“We are a gourmet market and our customers still like the russet potatoes, especially the Idaho ones, and the Klondike Rose is popular,” notes Fabrizio Casini, director of produce and floral for Hiller’s Markets, an 8-unit chain based in Southfield, MI. “They also

really like sweet onions. We carry the sweetest of whatever is in season. We handle the Vidalia, Oso, and also the Hawaiian sweet onions are very good. About 90 percent of our customers prefer bulk onions, and the large sweet onions are especially popular. The 3-lb. bags of small cooking onions also do well,” he says.

**Year-Round Sweet Onions Add To Consumer Choices**

Onions may not have seen as many variety additions as potatoes, but the category’s year-

**“Displaying the two categories together or adjacent to each other makes sense for several reasons. Neither product should be displayed in a wet area of the department; the categories are related and often used in the same dishes being prepared; and many companies market both potatoes and onions.”**

— Seth Pemsler, Idaho Potato Commission

round availability of sweet onions has been an important growth factor. Sweet onions have provided consumers with more onion choices, depending on how they plan to use them in their menus. “Sweet onions tend to be a big part of our offering throughout the year now, with that product being available 52 weeks of the year,” states Eric Blom, spokesman for Hannaford Supermarkets, headquartered in Scarborough, ME.

Vidalia onions from Georgia are probably the best known of the sweet onions. However, there are also other sweet onions that have established retail markets. “Sweet onions are doing well as the current driver and fastest growing segment of the onion category,” remarks Adam Brady, marketing director at Shuman Produce Inc., headquartered in Reidsville, GA.

“Research has shown that consumers consistently include onions in their shopping lists, and it’s the versatility of sweet onions that keep them coming back for more,” reports Matt Curry, president of Curry & Co. Inc., in Brooks, OR. “Our round sweet onion program has grown to meet retail and consumer demand. We also have a demand for our Hermiston Sweet Red Onion, a proprietary variety. Every year, sales gain and this year’s crop has been exceptionally nice.”

There has been more information available about sweet onions, and exposure on TV and the Internet has increased dramatically. Consumers are learning that U.S. sweet onions are more widely available and that they come in both globe and flat shapes. “We grow a unique, round sweet onion called Sweetie

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTHERN PLAINS POTATO GROWERS ASSOCIATION

**Nutritional information helps attract health-conscious consumers to the category.**

Sweet on our family farm in Nevada,” shares Teri Gibson, marketing and customer relations manager for Yerington, NV-based Peri & Sons Farms Inc. “It’s available from August through February and is Certified Sweet by National Onion Lab in Collins, GA.”

With the increased popularity of sweet onions, Peri & Sons is concerned over intentional mislabeling of Spanish yellow onions as sweet onions when they are anything but sweet. “Intentionally mislabeling onions erodes consumer trust, and will have a profound negative impact on the category if this practice continues,” adds Gibson. “We want produce buyers and consumers to purchase with confidence.”

Pearl onions and white, red and gold boiler onions are especially popular during the holiday period, according to Schueller of Melissa’s. “Now that sweet onions are available year-round, demand for them has increased, especially during the holidays,” he says. “We also have seen increased interest in flat Italian cipollini onions and shallots, a cousin of the onion. Recent cooking magazines and TV food shows have been featuring shallots quite a bit.”

**Displays Crucial For Potato And Onion Marketing Success**

Retail displays are, of course, a major factor in successful potato and onion marketing. Many suppliers believe because consumers are used to seeing the two displayed together, separating them to change traffic patterns will confuse or even anger them. According to Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail and international, for the Eagle-based Idaho Potato Commission, “Displaying the two categories

together or adjacent to each other makes sense for several reasons. Neither product should be displayed in a wet area of the department; the categories are related and often used in the same dishes being prepared; and many companies market both potatoes and onions. The important thing is to be sure to stock potatoes that meet consumers’ needs for quality, specific sizes and varieties.”

“It used to be that retailers took potato and onion sales for granted,” states Mac Johnson, president and CEO of Category Partners LLC based in Aurora, CO. “Now many are trying to make the two vegetables more than just commodities. They are working on category management promotional schedules, doing a better job of cross promotions and providing more variety, usage and nutritional information for consumers.”

**Potato Displays:** The USBP has a Resource Center, with a Best Practices section. This provides complete information on fresh potatoes, covering the areas of assortment, merchandising, pricing, promotion, packaging and associate training. Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), in East Grand Forks, MN, suggests that baking-size red potatoes are often overlooked in retail displays. “Some retailers only stock B-size reds. Larger reds have many applications and should be displayed along with baker russets,” he says.

“Quality of the potatoes can deteriorate if displayed in too much light,” warns Terwilliger of Huntsinger Farms. “They start to turn green, and while they are fine to eat, consumers worry about the safety of usage. Therefore, it is

**“To do well with sweet onions it is important that retailers pay a premium price and stock only true sweet onions rather than using storage onions. By taking advantage of seasonality and using onions from different regions, it provides changes in the displays and increases consumers’ interest.”**

— Brian Kastick, *Oso Sweet Onions*

important to keep potato display sizes at a reasonable level with good rotation.”

**Onions Display:** The NOA provides retail information on its website, including storage, handling and merchandising tips. Produce personnel should be familiar with onion seasonality and what are the best uses for the various types of onions. It is important to maintain proper signage when multiple colors, types and sources of onions — domestic and imports — are offered, especially when seasons overlap. Kim Reddin, director of public and industry relations for the NOA reveals, “We have been conducting retailer research on what information they find most helpful. As a result, we will be adding to our web pages. One important item is education on the various onion varieties — their seasonality, growing sources, characteristics and usages.”

“To do well with sweet onions, it is important that retailers pay a premium price and stock only true sweet onions rather than using storage onions. By taking advantage of seasonality and using onions from different regions, it provides changes in the displays and increases consumers’ interest,” states Brian Kastick, president and general manager of Oso Sweet Onions, based in Charleston, WV.

“We believe there should be more defined merchandising for robust cooking onions versus sweet raw use onions. Consumers want to quickly and easily be able to make their choices. Individualizing the display helps make more satisfied shoppers by providing what they want, and the retailer makes two onion sales rather than one,” suggests Judy Queale-

Dunsmoor, co-owner of New York Bold LLC, in Oswego, NY.

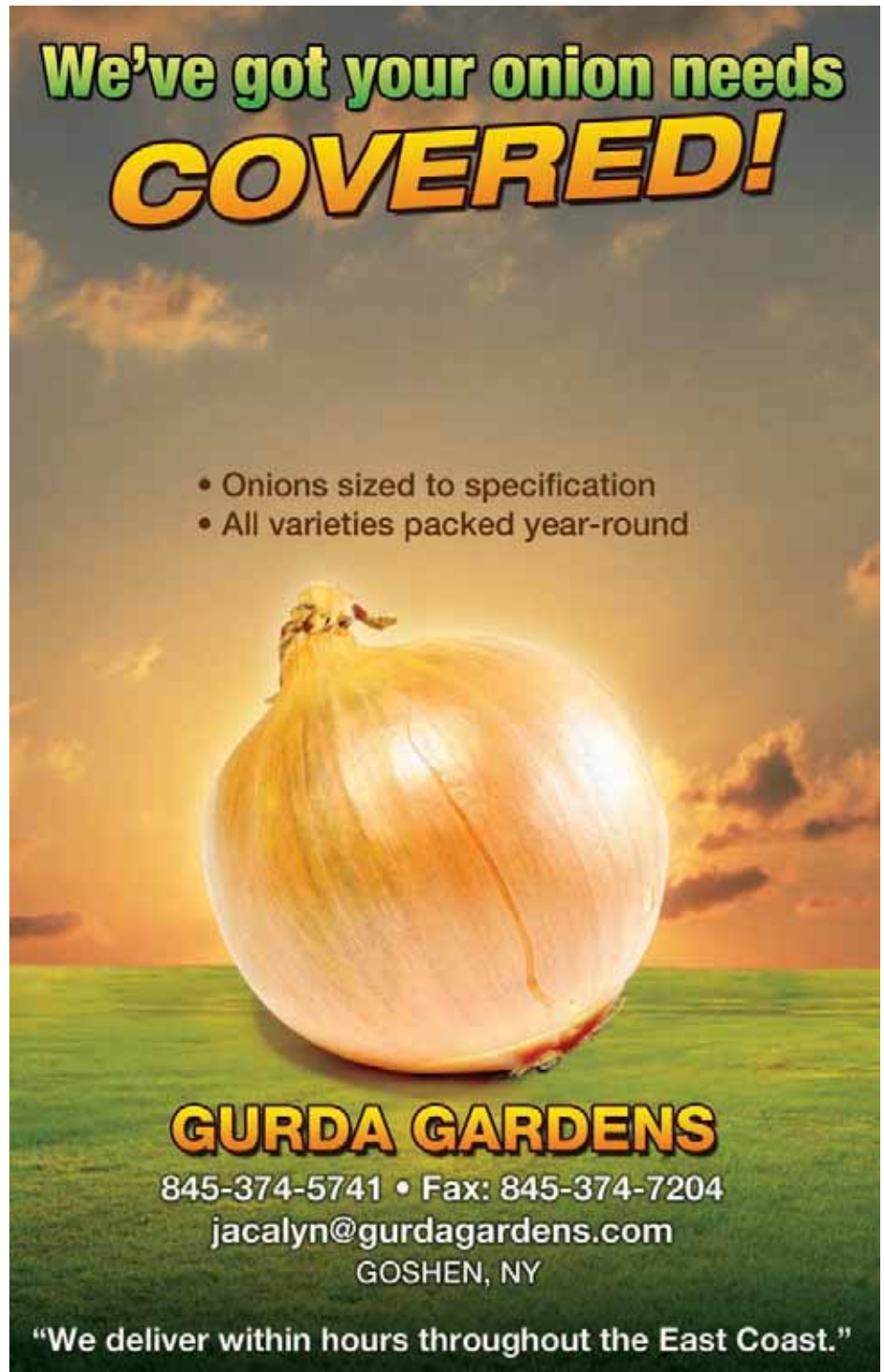
#### Potato Packaging Adds New Dimension

Packaging and how it is incorporated into retail displays has an impact on the movement of both potatoes and onions. USPB recommends merchandising the entire potato category together for better impact, creating the ultimate potato destination. It found that when the category is split up — bagged on tables, bulk on wet rack, steamables in value-added

— the consumer is not presented with the full assortment to select from when buying at the potato table. Therefore, incremental retail sales opportunities are lost.

“We do like the information, such as nutritional values, on the packaging,” acknowledges David Merjimekyan, produce director for Jons International Markets, a 14-store chain in Los Angeles, CA. “However, our customers feel that packaging costs more, so most still prefer to buy potatoes and onions in bulk.”

Ken Gray, vice president of sales and



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**“We’re seeing more poly-mesh bags used for potatoes. They allow the potato to breathe better; they display well; consumers see more of the potato; and shelf-life is extended.”**

— Ken Gray, *Bushwick Commission Co. Inc.*

marketing at Bushwick Commission Co. Inc., in Farmingdale, NY, remarks, “We’re seeing more poly-mesh bags used for potatoes. They allow the potato to breathe better; they display well; consumers see more of the potato; and shelf-life is extended. There’s an increased trend to use smaller potatoes in 3- to 5-lb. bags, which seem to fit better into today’s lifestyles. At the same time, more 8- and 15-lb. jumbo packs are being used, especially in the Southeast, which offers another choice to a particular customer base.”

“For A-size red and yellow potatoes, the 5-lb. bag is the predominant pack, and 3-lb. and smaller are for B- and C-size potatoes,” states Paul Dolan, general manager for Associated Potato Growers Inc., in Grand Forks, ND. “In regard to packaging trends, the private labels continue to grow.”

“Steamer bags are gaining popularity, along with the small mesh bags of creamers and fingerlings,” reports Kreis of NPPGA. He recommends that 5-lb. bags of reds, russets and yellow varieties should all have equal shelf space. When one is on sale, the space should be expanded, but the non-promoted bags should be close by as an option for the customer.

Potandon Produce works with packaging manufacturers and suppliers, testing new packaging that fits better either functionally, economically, visually or is more eco-friendly. This is incorporated into existing or new packaging. “As an example, we have a microwave potato in sauce that uses a state-of-the-art bag, which provides much more even cooking than other bags, plus it helps prolong the shelf-life of the product,” states the company’s Wheeler.

### Onion Packaging Provides Consumer Options

According to the NOA, packaging trends differ from place to place across the country. Some of the common trends are: loose, with small stickers on each bulb; smaller mesh bags with a header or wine glass label and carry-fresh bags; packaging that showcases a product’s quality and/or has space for product tips and recipes.

The onion industry offers a variety of sizes and types of packaging, but also is using more high-graphic labels to entice the consumer.

Recipe suggestions, storage and handling tips and nutritional information are being included on more packages. “We encourage our customers to stock a variety of bagged and bulk products to fulfill the needs of their customer base,” asserts Brady of Shuman Produce. “New to our consumer packaging this year is a QR code, allowing consumers to interact with the RealSweet brand through specially created online content. We’re proud to be the first sweet onion grower/shipper to utilize the technology to better connect consumers to our product.”

Most consumers seem to like bulk onions, according to Interfresh Inc., an Orange, CA-based onion marketer. However, interest in the 3-lb. bags has been growing, according to Steve Stieffel, sales representative.

Curry & Company has seen a surprising difference among the chains on the popularity of the 3- and 5-lb. bags. “Sometimes it’s best to offer one or the other, but it can also work to have both options available,” suggests the company’s Curry. “It boils down to understanding your customer and their onion needs.”

New York Bold has found that consumers buying the jumbo sized onions usually expect to buy them individually. “We offer a Euro-style package for our Baby Bold onions that features recipes specifically created for that size onion,” remarks Queale-Dunsmoor. “It gives the shopper a reason to buy something additional. A savvy produce buyer will cater to both shoppers. We also pack medium Bolds and are fortunate that Oswego County did not get a lot of rain this year, so quality is excellent.”

### Consumer Information Builds Potato Sales

Recipes, usage ideas and nutritional information can play an important role in building potato and onion sales. This is especially true of the newer varieties, with which many consumers are less familiar. In USPB’s video series, *Potato Types and Tips*, the consumer is offered usage ideas and recipes to help dispel the mystery surrounding potato types, thus increasing the likelihood that the selection of potatoes will be expanded.

“We do call out the health benefits of

potatoes in our marketing, such as putting an overline on an advertisement that mentions the specific ingredients the item offers,” explains Hannaford’s Blom “Starting in the fall, we’ll highlight locally produced products through our Close to Home Program. We continue to do that with potatoes through March or April each year. In the winter, we stress that potatoes are a value offering for customers.”

Cliff C. Corwin, marketing and sales manager for Skagit Valley’s Best Produce Inc., located in Mount Vernon, WA, points out, “Potatoes tie in so well with the ‘meal solutions’ approach, whether it’s within the produce department itself or tied in with other store areas, such as meat, seafood or dairy. The USPB can provide lots of good information and merchandising assistance to help retailers cross-merchandise.”

“Retailers are doing a better job of providing their customers with potato variety information, nutritional values and usage ideas,” acknowledges Category Partner’s Johnson. “There are many good suggestions for using russets during the holidays. For example, promoting red potatoes with rotisserie chicken, grilled and picnic foods, or with cabbage and brisket for St. Patrick’s Day are some good seasonal ideas.”

Hiller’s Casini remarks, “Our POS materials contain more than just price. We keep our customers informed about the source of the potatoes and onions, as well as the nutritional values and ways to use the items in their menus. We also educate our employees about the varieties, how to store and use them.”

### Knowing Your Onions Can Increase Register Rings

“Regular onions, which hold up in heat, can heighten the taste of many cooked dishes and sweet onions add appeal to salads and menu items calling for raw onions,” states Reddin of the NOA. “We can provide retailers with recipes and serving suggestions for a multitude of onion usages.”

“Fresh produce plays a huge part in many consumers’ New Year’s resolutions to eat healthier during the coming year,” comments John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce. Sweet onions are fat- and cholesterol-free, low in sodium and an excellent source of antioxidants. These features allow consumers to add a uniquely sweet flavor to a variety of dishes while maintaining a healthy diet.”

The Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, based in Parma, ID, has embarked on a new promotional campaign to encourage



buying onions produced in the United States, according to marketing director Sherise Jones. The “All American” campaign features POS materials showing kids from onion industry families enjoying onions at mealtime and in the fields. A new website features weekly drawings for fun giveaways, downloadable kids’ games and fun onion facts. The Committee also is sponsoring an “Onion Lover’s Month” retail display contest, which encourages retailers to build displays for one full week during the month of January to receive cash prizes. Details of the contest will be announced this month.

This year, Peri & Sons Farms launched a special promotion to support the National Breast Cancer Foundation. The company created a bright-pink labeled mesh bag packed-to-order with various onion combinations. The bags featured special recipes and a free pink wristband offer. “October Breast Cancer Awareness Month is widely recognized and so our promotion generated sales and supported an important cause,” reports the company’s Gibson.

The Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), headquartered in Vidalia, GA, will continue a successful display contest they conducted in 2011. The national display contest centered on the country music theme, “Sweet Vidalias and Country Music,” in collaboration with Universal Music Group. “The displays were enticing to consumers and the contest was appropriate for any size retail operation, regardless of budget,” reports Wendy Brannen, executive director of the VOC. “We also are using a new QR code for a national

jingle contest, with free downloads of over 10,000 songs. New recipes will be available around each theme. Next year, we plan to bolster the promotional use of social media.” she adds.

### Price Helps Complete Marketing Success

Price is an important part of the equation for a successful potato or onion marketing program, and while it is certainly the retailer’s decision, the potato industry does have some recommendations based on extensive research. The IPC suggests creating a strategy to reach the market’s diverse consumer base by establishing and maintaining pricing gaps between potato offerings. Also, consistently use that pricing strategy throughout the year and do not change it for cost reasons. Costs can change but just not the price gap. “Potatoes are heavily purchased during the holidays, so discounting makes no sense then,” asserts Pemsler. “Discounting in January, when sales are lower, is a better idea. Of course, we also believe commanding a premium price for Idaho potatoes is good business for the retailer.”

When it comes to pricing onions, Curry & Co. suggests the retailer be aware of the marketplace and make sure onions are competitively priced because shoppers will visit another produce department if they can find onions of similar quality at a lower price. “Sweet onions are typically higher priced than storage onions, so be sure the produce team has the prices clearly marked, and ideally work with a company that has clear and distinctive labels that allow cashiers to capture all the sweet onion sales,” Curry adds. **pb**



Promoting the locale of Florida strawberries, as well as complementary items, helps boost sales.

# Winter Strawberries: It's A Florida Time Of Year

Heavy snow and frigid temperatures in the North signal strawberry time in Florida. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

**W**hen the Northeast and upper Midwest are buried in snow, it's a sign that Florida strawberries are ready to hit the market. The Florida strawberry industry has worked hard to produce varieties that taste better and hold their quality when shipped longer distances. The result of their efforts? Along with the robust California industry and the Mexican strawberry production, Florida strawberries are on the rise.

"Acreage is certainly increasing for numerous reasons, and we expect to see about a 10 percent increase in Florida this season," reports Ted Campbell, executive director of the Plant City-based Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA). "The primary driver is consumer demand. Berries have shown consistent retail growth, with strawberries representing about 50 percent of the berry category. National producers need year-round brand presence at retail, so there has been increasing Florida production to bridge the winter season."

The heavy volumes that make promotion possible are available the first two months of

the year, and this year, the crop figures to be larger than ever. According to Valerie Lott, director of strawberry business management at Driscoll's, in Watsonville, CA, "Retailers should think big when it comes to the impending winter strawberry season. Industry volumes are projected to be up considerably year-over-year, creating more opportunity for retailers to cash in on winter strawberry profits. Florida plants specifically look to be well-established and healthy overall," she adds, "an early indicator of the strong season and quality to come."

Winter sales are also riding the wave of steadily increasing strawberry consumption nationwide, as research shows that this sweet treat is actually good for you. "I'd say demand has been increasing, and it's probably rooted in consumers' health-consciousness," says Bob Hinton, sales manager at Hinton Farms Produce Inc., in Plant City, FL.

## Florida Time Of Year

It goes without saying that major retailers strive to offer a plethora of high quality fruits and vegetables every day of the year. That means there is a window of opportunity in the

dead of winter when Florida strawberries fill an essential slot for retailers up the Eastern Seaboard, into Canada, and over into the Midwest. "Our customers expect produce availability year-round, and thus may not remember the seasonality of each produce item," acknowledges Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Supermarkets Inc., in Lakeland, FL. "Our At Season's Peak promotion reminds customers of the exact time when the strawberries are ripe, at their sweetest and in peak season."

The Publix At Season's Peak program involves a wide-ranging promotional campaign for peak-season produce that includes ads, in-store information and an internet site with nutritional information, recipes and even a little bit of history on the current peak item. "We run ads in our weekly flyer, have billboards in our geographic service areas, have in-store signage, recipes and an entire site devoted to information on that particular fruit or vegetable," details Brous. "We offer At Season's Peak for a variety of items including strawberries, berries, apples and honeydews."

For Florida strawberries, the peak season

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— Daniel Whittles, Rosemont Farms

comes at the beginning of the year, when most of the consumers up the Eastern Seaboard are digging out from under the snow. Keith Mixon, president of Sunnyridge Farm Inc., headquartered in Winter Haven, FL, notes, “There is about an eight-week window starting the second or third week in January. We have fruit

earlier than that, but it’s not in great enough volume to promote.”

These early weeks of the year are the hay-days for Florida strawberry producers. “There’s a small window when nothing is coming out of California or Mexico and we can ship pretty much anywhere,” says Steve O’Brien, vice president of C & D Fruit & Vegetable Co. Inc., in Bradenton, FL. “But mostly we go to the Midwest and the Northeast.”

Florida strawberries predominate in the Eastern half of the country during that two-month window, but they remain significant over a longer period of time. There should even be promotional opportunities this season for Florida strawberries during the Holiday season. “We expect high volume by mid-December, continuing right into April,” reports the FGSA’s Campbell. “Retailers have a great marketing opportunity during the week between Christmas and New Year to promote Florida strawberries as a super-healthy and convenient snack while watching Bowl games and eating holiday leftovers. They are a great retail draw during a normally soft week. Don’t wait until after New Year’s to start marketing

healthy eating,” he adds.

According to Peggy Parke, vice president of Dover, FL-based Parkesdale Farms Packing & Cooling Inc., this year, there should still be strong strawberry production well into the spring. “The strawberries are going to be spread out this year. There will be a few around Thanksgiving or a little before, but I think it will be mid-April before we finish up,” she estimates. “We picked until the 5th or 6th of April this year, but it depends on the weather in Mexico and California. If California comes on strong, we stop picking.”

Florida strawberries have such an essential slot in year-round supply that the largest producers based in Watsonville, CA, have expanded their production in Florida. Dole, for example, closed on its acquisition of Sunny Ridge Farms in October, and Well-Pict Berries of Watsonville grows and ships out of Florida until California production reaches a peak in the spring.

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**“New patented varieties are in the works, but it takes about 10 years to develop a variety up to commercial volume. Strawberry breeding is a slow and tedious process. The University of Florida makes 20,000 crosses a year, and that culls down to about 10 by the second or third year of evaluations.”**

— Ted Campbell, Florida Strawberry Growers Association

coast,” remarks Dan Crowley, sales manager at Well-Pict Inc., Watsonville, CA. “To effectively market, we always encourage keeping berries on front displays, as they truly are a regular buy for many health-conscious customers. Cross-merchandising with the season is also effective as the red color contrasts greatly with not only dessert items, but also salads, and even celebratory champagne.”

Driscoll maintains its ability to supply strawberries year-round by augmenting its California operation with production in both Florida and Mexico. “We continue to increase our winter production to fulfill the increasing demands of our customers,” notes Lott. “Fulfilling this demand potential, while providing great customer service, is one of our primary goals. Today, consumers demand great-tasting strawberries in all months of the year, as strawberries have evolved from principally a summer seasonal fruit to a truly year-round category.”

### Long Distance Made Local

Florida strawberries can be marketed for their locality of origin, and this can be done effectively over a larger area than one might think. C&D’s O’Brien believes retailers can “absolutely merchandise the Florida name. The Florida berry deal has grown significantly in quality and volume beginning several years ago. It used to be that people would just stop shipping when California started, but that’s no longer the case,” he says.

The Florida name has impact with consumers as far away as Canada. Hinton of Hinton Farms notes, “We go to the Eastern U.S. and into Canada. With all of our berries, it makes sense to market them as from Florida,” Hinton says.

Sunny Ridge also ships to Canada and the Midwest, as well as the South and the Eastern Seaboard. Echoing Hinton’s thoughts, Mixon believes the Florida name can be promoted everywhere the strawberries are shipped, even as far north as Canada. “A lot of visitors come to Florida from Canada and they have a good

association,” he explains.

Florida growers have worked extensively to establish their brand, and have benefited from the extraordinary growth in demand for strawberries. Campbell of the FSGA notes, “We have spent the last few years building strong consumer outreach. We have used social media to deliver the message and have established many followers in a very cost-effective manner. Our great response to recipe contests in magazines has also led us to stronger relationships with the foodservice community. Chefs are the rock stars of food, and we use a panel of them to develop new uses and recipes, which consumers love,” he continues. “We’ve used our cartoon character, Jammer, for outreach in teaching schoolchildren the attributes of strawberries, as well as in clever in-store video loops. Strawberries are a marketer’s dream — very popular, nutritious, and easy to consume. Some of our shippers have even implemented QR scannable labels, which can link customers back to the grower, pinpoint the variety, provide nutritional data and give storage and handling tips. Technology is opening incredible opportunities,” Campbell says.

The creative use of wireless technology to tell the berries’ story could be a sign of times to come. “Wish Farms is launching a mobile website that is linked by variable printed QR codes,” notes Gary Wishnatzki, president and CEO of Plant City, FL-based Wish Farms. “We were nominated for an Impact Award at the PMA for this new program. This is one of the first — if not the first — QR Code campaigns that is variably printed. The QR code is different on each box and it ties back to the picker, field, date, time and variety. When a consumer scans a package of berries, they will be linked to our optimized mobile website, where there will have buttons for ‘Meet Your Grower video’, recipes, variety information and nutrition information. Consumers will also be able to leave feedback that will be received by the grower and picker. We are currently seeking companies to partner with to offer tie-in product coupons on the site,” he adds.



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But nothing promotes strawberries — from Florida or elsewhere — like the old-fashioned technique of creating a display that includes the complementary items that make strawberries an event. “It helps to have ready-to-use peripheral items like pound cakes and the whipped cream — things that help to create an event mentality around strawberries, which will drive sales,” explains Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development at Rosemont Farms, based in Boca Raton, FL. “The increase can be double-digits.”

### Growing ... and Growing Better

Florida strawberries are growing in acreage, in large part because they are growing in quality. “Florida acreage is up this season,” says Wishnatzki. “I would not attribute that to California marketers though. While it is true that most of the major California berry companies now have some acreage in Florida, most of it was existing acreage that was taken over by them,” he points out. Wish Farms has more than 2,000 acres of Florida strawberries this season, including approximately 140 acres of organic strawberries.”

Acreage is up because there is more demand than ever for Florida strawberries. “Demand has been increasing for Florida strawberries and we expect it to continue to grow,” notes Sunnyridge’s Mixon. “Our varieties have improved the past four or five years and we’re able to ship farther and still maintain quality.”

C&D’s O’Brien similarly notes, “We have improved varieties and packaging. The Radiant variety came out three or four years ago, and the Festival variety came out in 1994. They have better yield, quality and taste now.”

The relatively new Radiance variety continues to gain favor with both growers and consumers. According to Wishnatzki, “The Radiance is gaining some in popularity this

year. It is Florida-bred and produces conically shaped berries most of the season. Wish Farms is marketing 150 acres of Radiance that was propagated in cells to give them a quick start. That acreage will produce the first berries by Thanksgiving.”

The largest of the producers breed and grow their own proprietary strawberry varieties. “Well-Pict ships 100-percent proprietary varieties that we have developed for flavor, color, shape, size and aroma,” Crowley details.

But most commercial strawberry varieties grown in the state are the result of painstaking research at the University of Florida. “New patented varieties are in the works, but it takes about 10 years to develop a variety up to commercial volume,” notes the FSGA’s Campbell. “Strawberry breeding is a slow and tedious process. The University of Florida makes 20,000 crosses a year, and that culls down to about 10 by the second or third year of evaluations.”

There will already be at least a few acres this year, however, of what could turn out to be the next great Florida strawberry. “The University of Florida has a new numbered variety,” reports Parke of Parkesdale Packing & Cooling. “It’s supposed to be a step up from the Festival. They’re hoping it replaces Festival and produces more. It’s a better berry and has better production. We have 5,000 plants, which will be about one-third of an acre. It looks like Festival and will be put in the store next to them or with them,” she details.

While the jury is still out, Florida growers are hopeful that this next generation variety will make their berries better than ever. Hinton Farm’s Hinton says, “The newer varieties were developed to be adapted to Florida conditions. The new experimental one is supposed to be an improvement over the parent varieties, which we’ve been using for several years.”

**pb**

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Avocados and bananas are two of the many items imported from Mexico.

# Key Promotional Tips To Increase Sales Of Mexico-Sourced Products

A little investment in promotion can go a long way to increasing sales of products from Mexico. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

**T**hough Mexico has long been established as a reliable and quality source of product, opportunity for increasing sales still remains. “Opportunity always exists for increased sales,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for the 24-unit chain, Kings Super Markets, based in Parsippany, NJ. “Promotion should be geared on the freshness of product, the quality and the flavor. That’s what sells. The goal of Mexico is to be known as a quality purveyor of produce, and advertising should be linked with that goal.”

Mexico’s proximity makes for consistent and quality product on the shelf. “Mexico is a close source of produce during times when there is little grown in most areas of the United States,” says Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president of Organics Unlimited Inc., in San Diego, CA. “For bananas, bringing them from Mexico versus Central or South America means they can be trucked. They arrive much quicker and provide a much smaller carbon footprint than those that travel by boat.”

“Mexico has been exporting to the United

States for over 100 years,” says Allison Moore, communications director for the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “Retailers understand how produce from Mexico is an integral part of ensuring consistent supplies all year long. Additionally, Mexico is leading the world in cutting-edge greenhouse and protected agriculture technology, which means consistent quality and supplies for retail customers.”

Having consistent supply translates into promotable product. “Products available from Mexico during the winter months at a reasonable price enable retailers not only to have a 12-month supply of preferred items, but it also makes promotions possible at virtually any time of year,” says Aaron Quon, greenhouse category director for The Oppenheimer Group in Coquitlam, B.C., Canada.

“With Mexican produce accounting for almost 70 percent of total winter produce consumption and valued at more than \$8 billion, buyers care a lot about supply from this region,” maintains Stephen Yubeta, vice president of sales for Farmers Best International

LLC, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ. “Produce from Mexico provides the seamless sourcing retailers want today and the year-round assortment consumers demand.”

By reviewing a few key opportunities, stores can pump up promotions and sales for Mexican produce.

## Ensure Proper Care And Display

Handling and storing all items according to the optimum temperature forms the base of any successful sales. Moore states, “From pre-harvesting to delivery, care is taken in maintaining the cold chain for produce, and that should carry over into the handling practices at retail distribution centers and individual stores. This makes for the best buying experience for the consumer and helps continue to drive demand. In addition, Mexican produce displays, like all produce in a supermarket, should be well-tended and culled on a regular basis to continue to drive the visual appeal for consumers.”

“Retailers can have a huge impact on mango sales and quality by improving their

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**"With an item like avocados, we ensure our supply is Mexican. California and Chilean avocados can also be available, so we ensure the supply is coordinated with our promotion. The Mexican avocado gets not only ad exposure, but also 100 percent procurement from our buyers."**

— Alfonso Cano, Northgate Gonzalez LLC

handling practices at the warehouse and at the store level," says Wendy McManus, retail marketing and promotions program manager for the National Mango Board (NMB), located in Orlando, FL. "NMB has a back room training poster and other tools to help retailers improve practices."

"Big, bold and abundant end displays are always helpful," adds Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. "Retailers should rotate product well and communicate with their produce suppliers to ensure they are following proper handling and storage practices. The key is to feature product that looks fresh and appealing so customers have a positive experience and come back for return purchases."

Though Mexican growers boast high-level

food safety practices, improper handling and display at store level can fuel misperceptions. "Fair or not, some consumers are wary of the quality of Mexican product," says Quon. "Helping the product speak for itself by way of appearance and taste experience, and providing consumers with useful information about food value and recipe ideas will allow Mexican items to deliver solid margins."

"The excellent food safety of Mexican growers and the traceability programs in place allow retailers to help assure consumers that Mexican fruits and vegetables are as safe and fresh as what they might grow in their own backyard," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the FPAA.

### Focus On Flavor

Taste sells, and savvy stores focus on promoting this attribute. "Promote the quality of the products," advises Kings' Kneeland. "For products like avocados, bring them in ripe and ready to eat. Flavor sells repeatedly."

"Ripe avocados can outsell unripe avocados by two to one," adds Emiliano Escobedo, marketing director for APEAM, the Mexican avocado association, based in Michoacán, México. "To help consumers find what they want, identify ripe avocados with stickers or signage and display firm avocados on a separate display," he suggests. "This will also prevent customers from squeezing the fruit, which causes internal bruising and shortens the shelf-life."

Giving consumers options will also increase sales of products like avocados, bananas and plantains. "Use multiple display stations to promote large and small sizes, different price points, levels of ripeness and bagged fruit," suggests Escobedo.

For many products, Mexico means high quality and good taste. "Mexico has the consistency in quality that retailers are looking for," maintains Jungmeyer. "Because more and more Mexican produce is grown in greenhouses, buyers have access to uniformly sized fruits and vegetables, with lower rates of blemishes."

"With an item like avocados, we ensure our supply is Mexican," says Alfonso Cano, assistant

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## PROMOTING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Retailers can utilize social responsibility and sustainability programs as a promotional tool. Fair Trade is perhaps the best known of these programs and is active in Mexico.

“Fair Trade certification helps socially responsible growers get recognition for the good work they’re doing and also engages consumers in supporting that work,” says Hannah Freeman, director of produce and floral business development for Fair Trade USA in Oakland, CA. “A portion of each purchase goes directly to workers to fund community development projects like scholarships for kids, community clinics and small businesses for women.”

Oppenheimer offers Fair Trade Certified organic and conventional peppers from Divemex. “Because this is a very special program. It lends itself well to creating consumer awareness and interest on the shelf,” says Aaron Quon, greenhouse category director for The Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. “Conscientious consumers recognize the Fair Trade label as a symbol that strict social, economic and environmental standards have been met. For each 11-lb. box of Fair Trade Certified Divemex peppers sold in the U.S. and Canada, 50 cents will be delivered directly into a bank account owned and managed by the Divemex workers. The workers decide how to use the funds to support the greatest needs in their community. Last year, this Fair Trade premium was used to fund scholarships for workers’ children. Fair Trade Certified Divemex peppers are available January through May.”

The Fair Trade label enjoys wide recognition amongst consumers, who view it as a credible mark that conveys a commitment to people and planet. “Fair Trade Certification can be a compelling differentiator at retail,” says Quon. “By displaying signage featuring the Fair Trade label and telling the growers’ stories, retailers help their shoppers readily understand the positive difference they can make by choosing this product. And by stocking it, retailers can be part of a larger solution for people and planet and enjoy the positive associations the label creates.”

Fair Trade USA organizes two main promotional opportunities each year, and they’ll be piloting a third in 2012. “For many years, we’ve been helping our partners promote Fair Trade Certified prod-

ucts for World Fair Trade Day in May and again for Fair Trade Month in October,” explains Freeman. “In January 2012, we’ll be piloting a promotion that’s focused on Fair Trade Fresh Produce and how that ties in with people’s New Year’s Resolution to eat healthy and make a difference in the world.”

Past Fair Trade promotions have offered a variety of tools. Freeman reports, “We have free POS materials, social media, celebrity chef satellite media tours, community events run by Fair Trade Towns & Universities supporters, music concerts, sampling and farmer appearances in-store, coupons and giveaways, and public relations with mass media. More information on all the happenings is at the Fair Trade Month website.”

The banana-industry offers its own socially oriented program. “The GROW program promotes the lives of workers and communities in Mexico through the sale of Mexican bananas,” explains Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president of Organics Unlimited in San Diego, CA. “Because the Organics Unlimited/GROW programs are unique in the banana industry, it really helps the retailer differentiate. We feel the organic consumer also has a great focus on social responsibility, so display information on the GROW program along with GROW banana displays is advantageous in increased sales of bananas for the retailers.”

Farmers Best, in Nogales, AZ, is another example of a company long committed to sustainability and social responsibility. “We have been practicing sustainable agriculture since the 1970s, long before it became an industry buzz-word,” says Stephen Yubeta vice president of sales for Farmers Best. “Our long-time social responsibility efforts ensure our employees and workers are well-taken care of.

The Farmers Best’s comprehensive focus includes consideration in the areas of clean water, protected species, recycling, controlled and protected environments, self-produced fertilizer, alternative pest management, worker housing and services. “Our company was recently recognized as the most socially responsible in Mexico, competing against growers across the nation,” says Yubeta. “With our tens of thousands of workers, we were compared to any and all companies, even small ones with just 10 employees, and still garnered this recognition.”

**pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP

duce director for Northgate Gonzalez LLC, a 29-store chain in Anaheim, CA. “California and Chilean avocados can also be available, so we ensure the supply is coordinated with our promotion. The Mexican avocado gets not only ad exposure, but also 100 percent procurement from our buyers.”

While most stores advocate a seamless transition between seasons so shoppers are not discouraged by a sudden difference in supply, some exceptions may prove fruitful. Yubeta of Farmers Best explains, “During peak winter months, we play up the ‘sunshine’ aspect of the



PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS LLC

region and the freshness of the product since shoppers are looking for nutritional options during cold and flu season. In the Eastern U.S. especially, retailers have told us that consumers crave the idea of warmth and fresh-crop benefits Mexican produce represents.”

### Widen Your Scope

Retailers can increase sales of a variety of Mexican products by widening the scope of their merchandising and promotion. “Peppers work well in promotions,” says King’s Kneeland. “Increasingly, they are used in sauces and



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MEXICO

- Mexico is a powerhouse fresh fruit and vegetable exporter. In 2010 export fruit value (worldwide) was \$2.3 billion and export vegetable value was \$4.3 billion for a total of \$6.6 billion in produce exports.
- In 2010 Mexico supplied 68% of U.S. fresh vegetable and 27% of fresh fruit imports.
- The U.S. is the predominant export market for Mexican fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, accounting for about 83% of fruit exports and 91% of vegetable exports from Mexico.
- Only about 26% of Mexico's production of fresh produce is estimated to be exported. Mexico's producers still rely on the domestic Mexican market as the majority of their demand.
- Mexico continues to develop protected agricultural key export crops including tomatoes, sweet peppers, and cucumbers. Investment in this capital and technology intensive sectors is growing.
- Mexico's berry sector is exploding and currently includes significant export volume of strawberries, blackberries and raspberries. Growing investment in blueberry production promises promotable export volume as well.
- Mexico continues to develop new areas of production in order to attain year-round supply of certain crops, like guava and chayote.

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## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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Trade shows and missions play an important role in the toolbox of any company or organization involved with international commerce or programs. Buyers and business partners can reap great benefits from attending a variety of trade shows held in Mexico. Following is a list of principal shows to consider:

<i>Show</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>
Expo Agro Sinaloa	Culiacan	February 15-17
ANTAD (Grocery Industry Show)	Guadalajara	March 14-16
ExpoRestaurantes (Foodservice)	Mexico City	To be announced
Expo Alimentaria	Mexico City	June 5-7
Abastur	Mexico City	August 28-30
ExpoOrganicos (Organic Products)	Mexico City	To be announced
Gourmet Show	Mexico City	To be announced
Alimentaria Guanajuato	Guanajuato	To be announced

Trade missions planned and arranged by the Ministry of Agriculture of Mexico (SAGARPA) and supported by chambers of commerce in the host states provide another constructive way to meet Mexican suppliers. For 2012, SAGARPA is organizing three trade missions. The missions typically last from five to eight days, and consist of a constructive program including briefings, one-on-one business meetings, growing area tours, packing houses visits, official receptions and dinners, cultural events and some sightseeing. The briefings and one-on-one meetings are tailored and prearranged to match individual delegate's business interests. Any mission can be tailored to accommodate the need of a particular company. Contact us today to and we can put together a mission for you.



as a cooking ingredient. We make big displays when they have good promotable quantities. Tomatoes are also always a good item to promote. Retailers shouldn't let up on tomato promotions in the winter, especially since the greenhouse varieties are so popular."

Varying options in packs can also stimulate sales. Oppenheimer's Quon explains, "By offering an appealing assortment, like the choice of Divemex sweet bell peppers in bulk and bagged options, Oppenheimer can help retailers provide more alternatives to their shoppers."

"Some products, like green and yellow squash, can be sliced and offered as value-added," says Kneeland. "This is very popular in our stores."

As retailers expand their scope, they should consider organics as well. Organics Unlimited supplies organic bananas, plantains, red bananas and coconuts on a year-round basis. Velazquez de Leon notes, "Bananas are the top-selling item in most produce departments, and sales of organic bananas continue to grow by double digits annually. The winter months are the most important months, because imported supplies are plentiful, while locally produced fruits are minimal, so bananas become a staple in the diet."

### Use Industry Programs

In many cases, retailers don't need to invent



PHOTO COURTESY OF INTEGRATED MARKETING

## "Tomatoes are also always a good item to promote. Retailers shouldn't let up on tomato promotions in the winter, especially since the greenhouse varieties are so popular."

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Super Markets

promotion from scratch, and can take advantage of commodity programs like Avocados from Mexico, the National Mango Board and the the National Watermelon Promotion Board. To help drive the product category and build brand momentum, Avocados from Mexico is once again offering strong advertising support and monthly consumer promotions to help retailers further drive demand in-store. Additionally, Avocados from Mexico is expanding its program this winter to include the market of Denver, CO.

"Our integrated promotional programs include advertising, online marketing, public relations, and social media components," says Escobedo. "Avocados from Mexico has a wide variety of POS materials available to retailers year-round so they can display and profit by generating impulse sales in-store. Materials can be ordered online and include secondary displays, POS signage, posters and more."

Additionally, Avocados from Mexico offers a training program for retailers featuring the S.M.A.R.T. (Storing Merchandising Arranging Ripening Training) Kit to train produce managers about the latest in Best Practices for handling and merchandising avocados. Escobedo explains, "This invaluable hands-on training is available to retailers and includes a training DVD in Spanish and English on handling and merchandising, backroom posters in Spanish and English, a training brochure and even an opportunity for produce managers to earn the 'S.M.A.R.T.' certificate."

The Orlando, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) promotes any watermelon in the United States equally, including product from Mexico when in season. "We offer retailers POS, recipe cards, and posters," says Stephanie Simek, director of public relations and social media for the NWPB. "Additionally, we offer consumers coloring books, healthy eating guides and a new



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piece perfect for Mexico exports called *Wishing for Watermelon in the Import Season.*”

The National Mango Board (NMB) offers header cards and tear pads to help educate shoppers about how to cut, ripen and use mangos in their kitchens. “NMB research shows that lack of knowledge about mangos is one of the major barriers to purchasing,” says McManus. “Retailers can also use the NMB’s photo library, key marketing messages and recipe database when developing ad story boxes or newsletter articles. All of these tools are easy to access on our brand new website.”

Smaller retailers with up to 50 stores can participate in the NMB’s Mango Mania Display Contest with more than \$10,000 in prizes available. “This contest launched in 2011 and will take place again in July 2011,” says McManus. “Visitors to the retailer section of our site can find a wealth of information about mango category sales and volume trends by season, region and market.”

Retailers who utilize these programs report success. “We work with Avocados from Mexico program,” says King’s Kneeland. “The demos



are key for retailers to educate consumers on nutritional content or preparation ideas and boost sales,” says Ciruli’s Aguilar.

“Consumers are accustomed to using specific items in specific ways,” states Organics Unlimited’s Velazquez de Leon. “POS tools help to expand consumers’ thinking about using bananas in a variety of ways, and a variety of times in the day.”

“We have seen a rise in interest in POP and

make the ingredients easy to pick up, so much the better.”

Consumers are increasingly interested in the story of where their products come from,” says Hannah Freeman, business development director of produce and floral business development for Fair Trade USA, a non-profit organization in Oakland, CA, that acts as a third-party certifier of Fair Trade products in the United States. “We’ve had fantastic sales results when retailers have hung signage over Fair Trade items. Since consumers see the Fair Trade label in other departments, like coffee, tea, ice cream and floral, Fair Trade products bring this same recognition and buying power to the produce department as well.”

The high volume and reasonable pricing on most Mexican items lends itself to ads. “Don’t hesitate to advertise,” advises King’s Kneeland. “Ads draw people in and draw their attention to the product.”

“Retailers can run ads to promote products and merchandise in plentiful supplies,” adds Ciruli’s Aguilar. “However, it is extremely important to keep consistent supplies and quality. Proper inventory rotation plays a key role in merchandising and, consequently, sales.”

Cross-merchandising is another great tool. “Cross-merchandising can really help boost sales in the produce department, and brings up center-of-store items pairing well with Mexican produce, such as chips and tortillas,” says FPAA’s Jungmeyer. “Look for opportunities beyond the typical. Promote sampling of watermelon pico de gallo or suggest salsa made with fresh mango.”

“Stores can showcase complementary products like grilling skewers or seasonings next to vegetables or croutons for salads next to tomatoes or lettuce,” adds Aguilar.

APEAM’s Escobedo suggests, “Display avocados next to items they partner with in meals and recipes — for example, near the deli or bread aisle to promote their use in sandwiches.” **pb**

## **“Cross-merchandising can really help boost sales in the produce department, and brings up center-of-store items pairing well with Mexican produce, such as chips and tortillas. Look for opportunities beyond the typical. Promote sampling of watermelon pico de gallo or suggest salsa made with fresh mango.”**

— Lance Jungmeyer, Fresh Produce Association of the Americas

yield results. People get to taste the avocado and understand it’s not just about guacamole. This really promotes purchases because people buy with their taste buds.”

“We have run sales contests with Avocados from Mexico and they provide POS and prizes for our store level high performers,” reports Northgate’s Cano. “We feature their logo on our ads. Part of the promotion includes secondary displays and a tear-off card to be redeemed for a coloring book for kids. This motivates and inspires our retail guys because they are rewarded for doing what they were going to do anyway — sell as many avocados as possible.”

### **Reach The Consumer**

Consumers are increasingly seeking information, and even commonly known products like many of the Mexican winter vegetables can get a boost from POS materials. “POS materials

other educational materials in-store in the past year,” reports Yubeta of Farmers Best. “With around 70 percent of the purchasing decisions being made in-store, it’s important to grab the shopper immediately with relevant and useful information. For example, we have introduced header cards available directly from us or that retailers can download themselves. We focused on providing tools to help our customers stand apart from the competition and sell more, for more. To that end, we have released a Retail Toolbox one-sheet outlining options for retailers. We also have a third-party merchandising agency dedicated to meeting their needs.”

POS and signage can help provide solutions for busy consumers. “We recommend using signage focusing on nutrition and usage,” says Oppenheimer’s Quon. “We can relate to the world of time-starved shoppers. If we can give them an idea for a meal solution or recipe and

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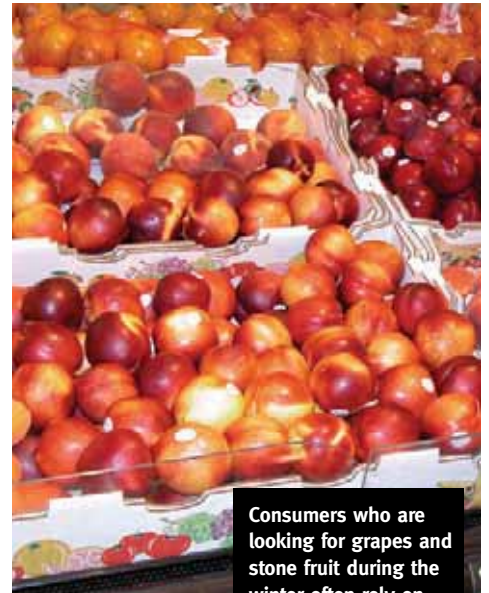
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Consumers who are looking for grapes and stone fruit during the winter often rely on Chilean product to fill their needs.

# Expand Profits With Expanding Chilean Fruit Options

New developments in items, packaging and organics will help retailers boost profits in Chilean winter fruit. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

**C**hile continues to be one of the most important winter players in the produce department. According to the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association, Chile is the No. 1 fresh fruit exporter from the Southern Hemisphere and accounts for over 60 percent of Southern Hemisphere fruit exports. Products include grapes, apples, kiwis, avocados, plums, nectarines, peaches and pears.

“The Chilean fresh fruit industry exports more than 75 different varieties to more than 100 different countries around the world,” says Tom Tjerandsen, managing director, North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) in Sonoma, CA. “Chile is proud to be ranked among both the Southern Hemisphere’s and the world’s top fresh fruit exporters in a number of product categories, including table grapes and plums. In 2010, Chile’s agricultural exports reached \$10.8 billion, and fresh fruit is the largest food exporting sector, representing 31 percent.”

Chilean fruit benefits produce departments immensely by giving customers the opportunity to buy summer fruit in winter. “Chile’s summer season takes place during the North

American winter,” explains Craig Uchizono, vice president, Southern Hemisphere for The Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles, CA. “Consumers who like to buy grapes, stone fruit, berries, etc., can still buy these during winter, and oftentimes at competitive pricing, thanks to Chile’s agricultural abundance.”

“Often, the Chilean products offer the only way to carry that commodity during the winter,” maintains Victor Savanello, produce category manager for Allegiance Retail Services LLC, headquartered in Iselin, NJ, a co-op with 81 stores under the Foodtown and D’Agostino names. “Chile allows us to expand our offering of many products, including stone fruit, cherries and blueberries.”

## Expanding Product Interest

Chilean exports have successfully developed a wide portfolio of export quality fresh produce products. “Chile has a wealth of produce commodities to choose from and is the No. 1 exporter of grapes in the world,” says Steve Monson, produce manager for the Western produce region at the Plano, TX, location of C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc., headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN. “Chile

exports a number of produce commodities such as grapes, stone fruit, citrus, cherries, blueberries and avocados.”

Brad Cantwell, vice president of North American sales with Dole Deciduous in Philadelphia, PA, adds, “Chilean exports have enhanced the produce department with many opportunities for the consumers in the winter and include grapes, cherries, peaches, plums, nectarines, avocados, apples, pears and citrus.”

Exporters continue to push development of production for new items. “Our imports include apples, avocados, peaches, cherries, pears, plums, grapes, nectarines and pluums,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing of Del Monte Fresh Produce North America Inc., based in Coral Gables, FL. “New imports on the horizon include citrus, pomegranates and baby kiwi.”

“New varieties of grapes and stone fruit continue to be analyzed as a way to better provide top quality fruit to the consumer,” says Cantwell. “Pomegranates will become more available and grow in the near future.”

Karin Gardner, marketing communications manager for The Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Coquitlam, B.C., Canada, reports,

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# “Often, the Chilean products offer the only way to carry that commodity during the winter. Chile allows us to expand our offering of many products including stone fruit, cherries and blueberries.”

— Victor Savanello, Allegiance Retail Services LLC

“The newest Chilean item to join our repertoire is the fresh pomegranate. Available March through May, pomegranates are an exciting option that adds interest to the produce department in the springtime.”

“There has been a real push on the pomegranate crop out of Chile,” adds Savanello. “Chile also has avocados, and while it’s not as big a window for them, there is a niche.”

Blueberries and cherries are experiencing greater popularity. Jim Pandol, president of Pandol Associates Marketing Inc., located in Delano, CA, says, “More recently, we are seeing items like blueberries and cherries increase greatly. In the upcoming years you will see significant amounts of nuts — primarily walnuts — coming out of Chile.”

“Blueberries alone have been extremely worthwhile the past two seasons,” states Matt Landi, produce director for New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA, with six stores. “Last winter in particular, the price of organically grown Chilean blueberries under the Awe Sum Organics label was conducive to some great promotions. The highest volumes came on during the months of January and February, although the season runs November through March.”

## Organic Growth

Chile continues to make advances in organic supply. “Quality and availability of organic products has greatly increased over the past three years,” reports Landi.

Two strong, high-volume organic items out of Chile are organic blueberries and organic apples. David Posner, president and CEO of Awe Sum Organics Inc., located in Capitola, CA, explains, “These are really the only two organic items exported in serious volumes. Currently, the Chilean organic blueberry season is getting off to a bit of a late start due to weather, but in December, we will import decent volumes, then move into peak volumes in January and February, finishing with good imported volumes through March. Once we get into April we will start receiving the organic Chilean apple exports, with strong volumes throughout the season.”

Chile’s climate favors organic blueberry growth. “Organic blueberries are a fantastic

product to get from Chile since the country has the perfect climate for growing them,” explains Posner. “The climate in Chile is particularly great for growing organically, which is a great benefit to retailers, as they can provide their customers with a healthy, clean and sustainable product.”

## New Packaging Developments

Chilean exporters seek continuous advantage through new packaging options. “Chile remains competitive in terms of its ability to match receivers’ packaging requirements,” says Tjerandsen of the CFFA. “Zip locks, clamshells and breathable packaging are all certainly options available to receivers as Chile offers a full range of packaging options.”

“We are continuously researching and introducing innovative packaging for our products that not only allows us to keep up with the changing consumer demands and preferences, but that is also sustainable and helps retailers reduce shrink,” says Del Monte’s Christou. “One new development is our modified atmosphere bags for cherries. This increases shelf-life by slowing down the ripening process of the fruit.”

Packaging trends depend on the product. Giumarra’s Uchizono explains, “We offer bagged avocados that are excellent to highlight during football season because they offer consumers the one-stop convenience of buying several high quality avocados packaged together. Bags and clamshells are still very popular for grapes. For berries, consumers are interested in larger clamshell sizes priced competitively.”

Packaging options in certain items have allowed retailers to be more competitive. “Imported organic blueberries used to be 4.4-oz. clamshells only and very expensive,” says New Leaf’s Landi. “Now the price has come down, and we’re seeing them in 6-oz. containers and even pints.”

New developments will assist in in-store merchandising. “We have some exciting things in packaging to share,” says Jim Pandol. “The first innovation is the gusseted stand-up bag, being used both randomly and fixed-weight in a variety of products, including small citrus and grapes. We’re seeing them as a possible challenge to the clamshell. Retailers like them

because they stack better, and since they stand up, employees can’t pile them on top of each other and crush the product below. Some of the bags are utilizing high graphics, so it’s an appealing pack as well.”

The “clear” stand-up style polypropylene grape bags are garnering more attention recently. “They do a great job of visually showcasing product quality,” says Oppenheimer’s Gardner. “As well, cherry producers are extending quality by using View Fresh modified atmosphere technology in fresh bags bound for exports to Asia.”

Pandol of Pandol Associates adds, “The big question with these is if they hold up through the whole supply chain.”

Another major factor is the trend toward repacking in fruit at destination. “The traditional model is to pack it at origin and ship it to the market as packed,” explains Pandol. “We’re seeing more repacking now in citrus, avocados, cherries and a little more in grapes. It is shipped in bulk and then packed once it arrives. There is an increasing cottage industry catering to repacking product near the port facilities. This repacking allows more custom packing and labeling because you’re doing it fairly close to the market.”

## High Commitment

Chile’s success in fruit exporting is backed by a hard-earned commitment to quality and safety. “The Chileans are at the forefront of food safety and other issues with their ChileGAP program,” says Alliance’s Savanello. “This program is aimed at improving the quality of fruit and ensuring a product free of contaminants, as well as considering environmental protection and corporate responsibility to the workers of Chile. It’s impressive.”

“ChileGAP is still a hallmark of excellence that many shipping countries around the world are striving to match,” says CFFA’s Tjerandsen. “ChileGAP is an umbrella program covering virtually all aspects of the growing, harvesting and shipping of fresh fruit. It sets a high standard across the board in important areas for achieving food safety, traceability, sustainability, labor reform and product quality. All of these are clearly outlined, mandated and accepted by the growers, who agree to adhere to the rigorous ChileGAP standards. It is voluntary, but a significantly large percentage of exporters have agreed to it.”

Importers and exporters continue to work together to achieve the highest standards. “Chilean fruit has a reputation of being the Best of the Off-Shore season, in terms of traceability,” says Christou.





# Thank You

As the year comes to an end, Produce for Better Health Foundation thanks you for your ongoing support of the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters health initiative and *America's More Matters Pledge* campaign. PBH looks forward to continuing our work with you in 2012 to encourage and motivate Americans to eat more fruits and vegetables.

*The staff of PBH wishes you Happy Holidays and a healthy, prosperous, and bountiful 2012!*



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## “When you’re talking about purchasing produce from Chile, you have to take into consideration how weather conditions will affect the supply three to four weeks later in the United States.”

— Steve Monson, C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc.

“Oppenheimer and our Chilean grower family are committed to food safety through GlobalGap certification and routine audits,” says Oppenheimer’s Gardner. “With respect to traceability, we are forging ahead with the industry-wide Produce Traceability Initiative.”

The Chilean government and industry as a whole persist in initiating innovative improvements for the industry. “They have installed radar along the coast so they can alert the shipping companies as to the optimum window for arrival based on loading times,” explains CFFA’s Tjerandsen. “They also recently opened a dedicated 8-lane highway for trucks to speed the fruit from the growing areas to the port. It includes a new USDA inspection station.”

A number of U.S. mid-level ports are working to be able to receive shipments from Chile. Tjerandsen explains, “Ports like Baton Rouge, LA; Houston, TX; and the port of Stockton, CA, are

all working on completing infrastructure to allow direct shipments of Chilean fruit. Part of the need is to get the fruit more quickly and efficiently into the hands of receivers. As well, the cost of gasoline is driving the desire to land the fruit closer to consumption.”

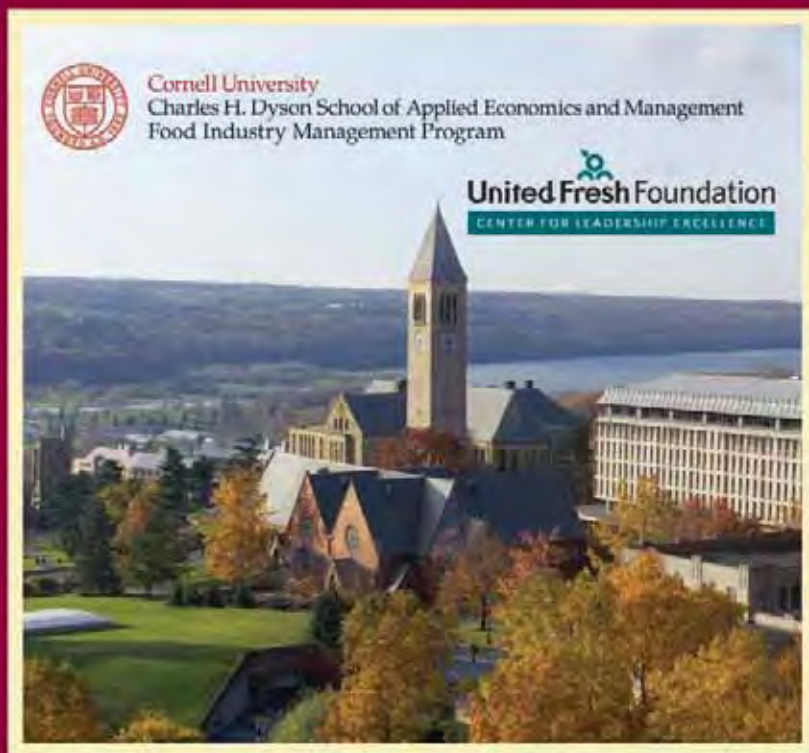
### Partnering For Success

Successful business revolves around relationships and communication. “Open communication is the key to any relationship,” says Monson of C.H. Robinson. “When you’re talking about purchasing produce from Chile, you have to take into consideration how weather conditions will affect the supply three to four weeks later in the United States. So when buyers work closely with suppliers to understand the supply and price of a specific commodity, they then understand the best times to promote that commodity.”

“The buyer-seller relationship is a partnership, and the more precise the information, the better the result,” advises Tjerandsen. “A clear description of the buyer’s requirements will help ensure that the shipper meets or exceeds those requirements. As I trace through problems with shippers and receivers, often communication problems stem from the details — for example, specifying Brix, size, etc. A clear understanding of the requirements leads to the most successful transaction.”

“While it is important to keep things fluid, we have experienced good performance with retailers who undertake programmed sales for at least a portion of the volume,” says Gardner of Oppenheimer. “This way, they are assured of steady supplies and can plan promotions accordingly.”

Working together, buyers and suppliers can optimize timing for promotions and know when flexibility is needed. “Buyers can benefit from beginning discussions with suppliers early, in order to lock in orders,” says Del Monte’s Christou. “If buyers are flexible in sizing of fruit, and purchase as many products from the same supplier as possible, good returns can be expected for all parties. It is important to coordinate ads for when availability of fruit peaks.” **pb**



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In reflection of the events that transpired on November 7-9, 2011, in New York City, the song "Firework" by Katy Perry rings in one's head. (If you don't know it, perhaps your son, daughter, grandchild, nephew or niece can sing you a few bars — *"Baby you're a firework. Come on let your colors burst."*)

The song is uplifting and the energy is contagious — *"You just gotta ignite the light and let it shine. Just own the night like the 4th of July."* You listen to the entire song and you will keep humming it long after...

... the same is true of The New York Produce Show experience.

From the opening day's Global Trade Symposium, with international traders gathered from around the globe, to the resplendent Cocktail Reception that evening... to the next morning's regal breakfast and general session and on to the trade show... to the final day's tours and IDEATION FRESH Foodservice Forum, the energy and positive vibes throughout the three days seemed to gather momentum. Post-show airplane conversations, phone calls and emails attest to the buzz that continued long after the events took place.

"Celebrating Fresh" was the theme of The New York Produce Show and Conference, and with most celebrations there is usually a party atmosphere. It's hard to feel sad at a party. Like a firework display punctuated by booms and cluster sounds, the events of the three days kept lighting the sky. The photos on the following pages show the excitement.



THE NEW YORK  
PRODUCE SHOW  
AND CONFERENCE

**DAY 1:  
GLOBAL TRADE  
SYMPOSIUM**



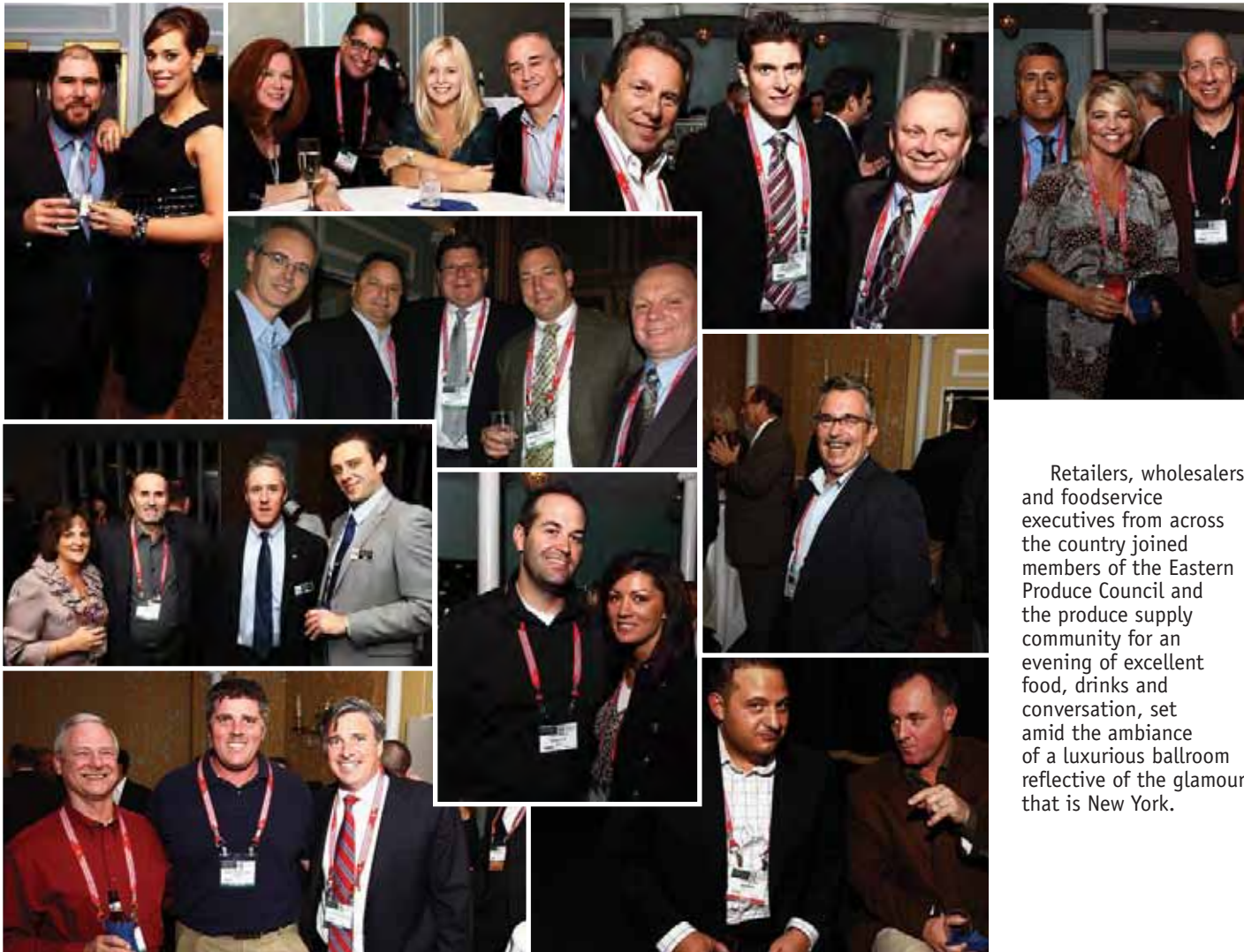
International traders, retailers, government officials, distinguished professors and special guests gathered to hear topics of worldwide importance, ranging from the changing power shift of global trade as a result of the flux in oceanic vessels; aligned supply chains and a case study of the Grapery's Cotton Candy grape variety exported to Sainbury's; economic trends that lead to marketing success; retailing in Australia; the future of Pan-American trade; and the challenges of direct retail importing.

Mary Anastasia O'Grady from *The Wall Street Journal* delivered the keynote address.






**DAY 1:  
COCKTAIL  
RECEPTION**



Retailers, wholesalers and foodservice executives from across the country joined members of the Eastern Produce Council and the produce supply community for an evening of excellent food, drinks and conversation, set amid the ambiance of a luxurious ballroom reflective of the glamour that is New York.



THE NEW YORK  
PRODUCE SHOW  
AND CONFERENCE

**DAY 1:  
COCKTAIL  
RECEPTION**





## DAY 2: KEYNOTE BREAKFAST



The trade show morning was met with industry members gathered in the elegant ballroom, where, true to New York fashion, bagels and lox awaited them. Ken Whitacre, publisher of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, greeted the attendees and introduced the singing of the National Anthem by Karen Melendez, lead soloist of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association, delivered a patriotic invocation.

After introductions of this year's Culinary Innovation Student Program — where students and faculty members from the Providence, RI, campus of Johnson & Wales, Chicago's Le Cordon Bleu and New York City's Institute of Culinary Education were recognized for their participation in a unique program where they would be preparing dishes during the trade show as well as taking part in the IDEATION FRESH Foodservice Forum — Jim Prevor, editor-in-chief of *PRODUCE BUSINESS* and the PERISHABLE PUNDIT, presented the JOE NUCCI AWARD FOR PRODUCT INNOVATION to Matt Curry, president of Brooks, OR-based Curry and Company, for the company's introduction of Vidalia Sweet Carrots.

Following the award presentation was a speech by Theresa Nolan, who talked about the James and Theresa Nolan Fund



for Ethical Leadership.

The keynote breakfast featured nine retailers discussing issues such as the local movement, food safety and the role of flavor in building consumption. The retailers included:

**Eric Beelitz**, Director of Produce and Floral, A & P

**Joe DeLorenzo**, Director of Produce Merchandising & Operations, Krasdale Foods

**Reggie Griffin**, formerly Corporate Vice President of Produce & Floral, The Kroger Company

**Dean Holmquist**, Director of Produce & Floral, Foodtown Supermarkets

**Paul Kneeland**, Vice President of Produce & Floral, Kings Super Markets

**Terry Murphy**, Produce Procurement Manager, Wakefern Food Corporation

**Carmine Napolitano, Sr.** Vice President Perishables - Produce Director, Gristedes Supermarkets

**Bill Pool**, Manager of Agricultural Production and Research, Wegmans Food Markets

**Peter Pokorny**, Formerly General Manager of Fresh Foods, Woolworths, Australia

Capping off the morning session was recognition given to Chandler Copps for his service to the industry. A posthumous award was presented to Chandler, and accepted by his wife, Elaine Copps, who was met on stage by a group of retailers and wholesalers who worked with Chandler for many years.

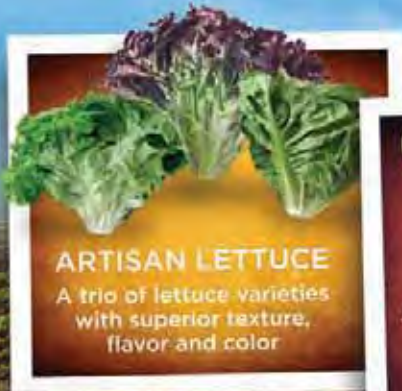






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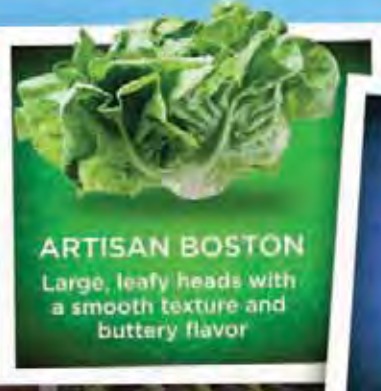
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**Field-Packed for Freshness**



At 10 am on Tuesday, November 8, more than 300 exhibitors greeted produce buyers from the region and beyond. The ribbon-cutting ceremony, hosted by PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine's Jim Prevor and the Eastern Produce Council's John McAleavey, was celebrated by New York's Ag Commissioner, Darrel Aubertine, New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture, Douglas Fisher, as well as television personality and Hunts Point Market frontman, Tony Tantillo.

The three expo halls of the New York Hilton saw non-stop action. Two celebrity athletes, Dwight Gooden and Charles Oakley, had lines going down the aisles as their autographs were a valued possession. Charles, a budding chef and restaurateur, even put on a cooking demonstration (more on that later).



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## DAY 2: TRADE SHOW WITH EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS & SPOUSE PROGRAM



Concurrent to the trade show activities, five educational micro-sessions and continuous culinary demonstrations kept conferees on the cutting edge of the latest research, technology and cooking trends. Five university professors and one Australian retailer shared their research and knowledge with attendees. These speakers were:

**Thomas Bjorkman, PhD.**, Associate Professor, Cornell University  
**Miguel I. Gómez, PhD.**, Assistant Professor, Cornell University  
**Ramu Govindasamy, PhD.**, Professor, Rutgers University  
**Neal Hooker, PhD.**, Professor, St. Joseph's University  
**Brad Rickard, PhD.**, Assistant Professor, Cornell University  
**Peter Pokorny**, formerly General Manager of Fresh Foods, Woolworths, Australia.

There are certain things that one must do in New York City. The spouse/companion program had high tea at the famous Plaza Hotel, took a site seeing tour to the city's landmarks and much more. Participants started off their day with "mani-pedis" in the Presidential Suite of the New York Hilton and then headed off to shop, sip tea and site-see.

The spouse/companion program was capped off with a visit to the 9/11 Memorial.



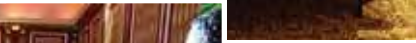


**DAY 2:  
TRADE SHOW WITH  
STUDENT PROGRAM  
AND PRESS OUTREACH**

Students from Cornell, St. Joseph's and Rutgers were also treated to an educational experience by touring the expo halls, meeting industry leaders, attending micro-sessions and being invited to a special seminar conducted by Jim Prevor, Bruce Peterson and Frieda Caplan.

In addition to the U.S. schools represented, a group from the Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche in Bra, Italy, marveled at the scale and scope of the U.S. produce industry as they explored the trade show floor.

Down the hall from the trade show expo areas, dozens of consumer influencers and new media editors were treated to a "Lettuce 101" educational session sponsored by Dole Fresh Vegetables and lunch sponsored by Dole Fresh Fruit. Sara Moulton stopped by for a brief appearance, and then it was on to a tour of the trade show. Many of these editors had never seen a trade show like this and were excited to write more stories about the fresh produce industry in the future.





**THE NEW YORK  
PRODUCE SHOW  
AND CONFERENCE**

**DAY 2:  
TRADE SHOW  
WITH CULINARY  
&  
CHEF DEMOS**



Meanwhile, brothers Ted and Matt Lee, cookbook authors and television personalities, started the day off with a cooking demo on the main chef demo stage. James Asaro, executive chef from Manhattan's Palms West restaurant, followed up. The culinary activities heated up when famed Food Network star, Sara Moulton, took center stage and started bringing convention attendees up on stage to assist. The afternoon's main chef cooking demo was concluded by NBA All Star, Charles Oakley.

On the America's Hall II Expo area, culinary students from Le Cordon Bleu and Johnson & Wales were given lists of produce items to forage and bring back to the Culinary Innovation Center. Led by their faculty advisers, the students created dishes that had hungry produce professionals lining up for samples.



## DAY 3: TOURS




Scores of conferees stuck around on Wednesday for tours to the two wholesale terminal markets in the region, as well as to Baldor's distribution center in the Bronx and retail operations in New York City, Long Island and in suburban New Jersey. In addition to retailers in New Jersey, the new Auerbach facility was also toured.

The Hunts Point Produce Market tour was a short jaunt to the Bronx, whereas the Baldor tour included trips to Stew Leonard's in Yonkers and Mario Batali's Eataly concept in lower Manhattan. It took a bit longer to arrive at the new Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market, but the trip was worth the industry glimpse of the new state-of-the-art market. The return trip made a stop at a Wegmans store in New Jersey, where guests were treated to lunch.

On the New York City tour, Manhattan Fruit Exchange, Fairway, Whole Foods and Westside Market were among the supermarkets visited, while a rooftop farming operation, Bright Farms Rooftop Greenhouse, was added to the mix. On Long Island, Shoprite, Fairway, Giunta's, Waldbaums, Stop & Shop and Kings were visited.

The suburban New Jersey tour consisted of a Foodtown store, ShopRite, Fresh Market, King's Super Market and an A&P Fresh, as well as a visit to the new Maurice Auerbach headquarters.



**DAY 3:  
IDEATION FRESH  
FOODSERVICE  
FORUM**



Chefs, foodservice distributors, produce suppliers, students and faculty members from the nation's leading culinary schools spent the day learning about the uniqueness of New York's restaurant scene and developed menu ideas after being presented with USDA's MyPlate initiative.

First up was Chandra Ram, editor of *Plate* magazine, who gave an overview of New York's cutting edge restaurants that are offering unique presentations of produce. New York executive chef, Ben Pollinger, of Oceania, and New York pastry chef, Ralph Perrazzo, followed up with presentations of dishes using fresh produce.

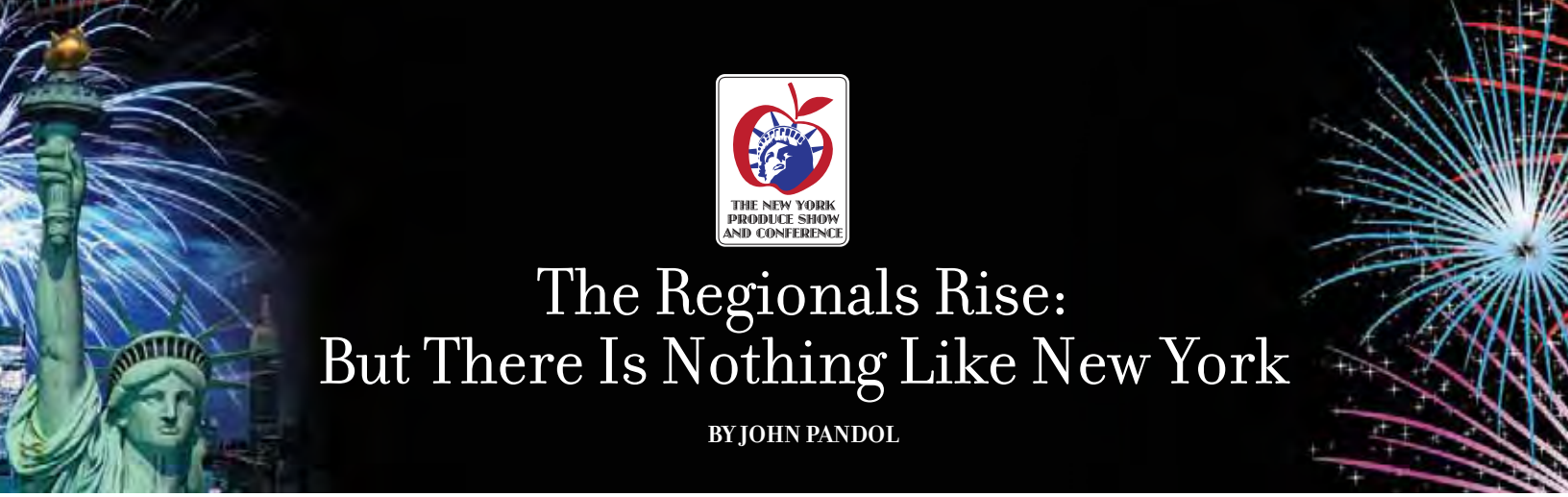
From there, Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, program director for strategic initiatives at the Culinary Institute of America, spoke about some of the dietary challenges restaurants will be faced with in the future.

Led by Greg Drescher, vice president of strategic initiatives and industry leadership at the CIA, groups returned from Ideation sessions to present their concepts of menu challenges presented to them.

The final segment of the Foodservice Forum was a keynote address by Farmer Lee Jones, whose inspirational story of his family business left everyone smiling.







# The Regionals Rise: But There Is Nothing Like New York

BY JOHN PANDOL

**T**en years ago, no one at my company had ever attended a regional produce event. These events certainly must have existed back in the day. Some of the regional organizations date back to the 60s. Surely they held luncheons, golf tournaments or dinner dances, but I never remember hearing about it. It was always about the national events.

Times are changing, or maybe my company is. In a seven-day period, I attended three regional events — a good week for the name badge collection. I attend 10 or 12 events during the year, plus a few national and private shows. They all have their character. Some are just networking. Others are just trade show. The speakers can be educational, motivational, irritating or just plain entertaining. Workshops, general sessions, bus tours, golf tournaments, opening receptions, and closing parties may or may not be included in the event.

As an incurable conference junkie who takes great pride in being up on such things, I was really caught off guard by the new kid on the block in regional event calendar, The New York Produce Show and Conference. At first glance, it looks like a regional association — in this case, the Eastern Produce Council — is adding a fall trade show to its roster of events.

The similarities stop there. Firstly, it is presented jointly by the Eastern Produce Council and PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. Leverage a strong local core with a thought leader of national and international reach. Brilliant. Maybe that explains how the New York Produce Show got so big so fast. At over 3,000 attendees, this show is twice the size of the next largest regional show. It's larger than CPMA and is not that much smaller than the United convention. A good mix of attendees is enough of a draw, but I feel the infomercial urge to say, "But don't order just yet."

**New York is a restaurant town.** Trends start



here. What a great place to hold a Foodservice Forum. Chef demonstrations throughout the trade show and a full-day food service forum the next day were included in the roster of events. What question was on the mind of food service operators? "Just how do we fill 'MyPlate' with the 50 percent produce the UDSA says we're supposed to eat at every meal?"

**New York is a tourist town.** Many conventions have a retail or production area tour. Note: Tour. Singular. Not here. A large group of conventioners gathered in the Hilton lobby early on a Wednesday morning to check in, pick up the box lunch and head out the door to load up on the six buses. Not six buses going to the same place, six buses each heading in a different direction: Supermarkets, the Hunts Point market, the new Philadelphia market, foodservice operators and specialty retailers like Eatly.

**New York is a business town.** The produce crowd of 3,000-plus showed up to do business. The trade show floor was busy from the get-go and stayed busy all day. The 300-plus exhibitors were largely produce suppliers. The focus was produce trading, retail, wholesale and foodservice.

**New York is the capital of the world.** Many thought leaders live in New York, and thought leadership was on display at The New York Produce Show. The Global Trade Symposium

lived up to the name. Attendees hailed from six continents and presenters from nearly as many. The speakers gave thoughtful presentations, not the self-serving infomercials one sees far too often.

Many of us think the academic world doesn't know the produce business even exists. University researchers from Rutgers, Cornell and St. Joseph's presented during the expo and proved that wrong. But the best was the retail panel during the opening breakfast. Were there nine retailers on the panel? I've been to events where there weren't nine retailers attending, let alone agreeing to publicly speak on a panel. Brilliant.

There is no other regional produce event quite like The New York Produce Show and Conference. Its scale and intellectual ambition is unparalleled. To be honest, I'm not sure it's really a regional event. It has the feel of the large national and international convention. Is it a small national convention? Perhaps. Will it grow bigger and better? No doubt. Will I be there next year? Absolutely.



*John Pandol is in charge of special projects and Mexican sourcing for Pandol Brothers Co., in Delano, CA*

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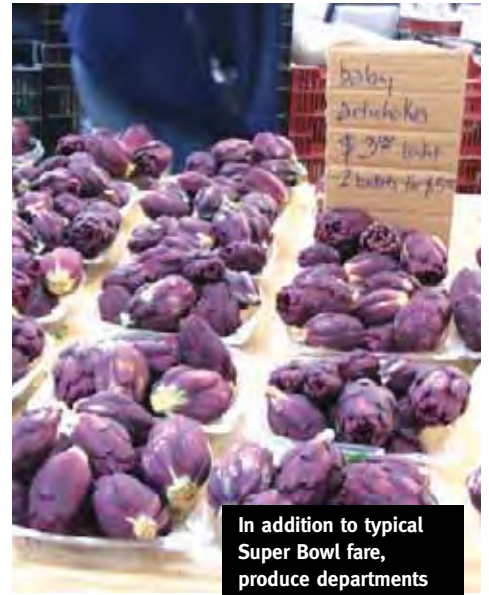


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In addition to typical Super Bowl fare, produce departments can merchandise items like artichokes, popular for their dipping ability.

# Six Ways To Score A Touchdown With Super Bowl Produce Sales

Avocados and guacamole are always winners, but bulk veggies, artichokes, pistachios and apples are taking their turn in the spotlight. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

**S**uper Bowl weekend is one of the biggest food-focused holidays of the year. Nine out of 10 U.S. households surveyed said they watch the Super Bowl at home or at a friend or relative's house, according to a February 1, 2010, survey by the Nielsen Company. This same survey showed that 69.5 percent of spending goes toward food and beverages, making Super Bowl Sunday the most important snack-purchasing day of the entire year, followed by the day before the big game. What's more, according to 2009 National Eating Trends data from the Chicago, IL-based NPD Group, the top food consumed at lunch and dinner on Super Bowl Sunday is vegetables.

Paul Dziejczak, director of produce and floral merchandising at Scolari's Food & Drug Co., a 16-store chain based in Reno, NV, says, "For produce, Super Bowl means the opportunity to sell more snack items such as party trays, dips and dressings, nuts, and of course, avocados and all the fixings for guacamole."

## 1. Stock Up Pre-Game On Avocados

Football fans consumed 69.6 million

pounds of avocados during the 2011 Super Bowl, according to the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board. This amount could easily be surpassed for the February 5, 2012 game due to increased supplies forecasted from all three major growing areas: California, Chile and Mexico. Mexico, specifically, will ship 10 percent more Hass avocados to the United States this season with 214.5 million pounds projected for its peak volume period during the first quarter of 2012.

Dziejczak acknowledges, "Avocados are a real powerhouse for the winter holidays. We'll sell 50 percent of our total annual fruit sales between Christmas and Super Bowl. That's 45 days of avocado bliss, especially when we can merchandise the fruit at a good price point such as 3-for-99 cents for small avocados."

Pricing, assortment and ripeness are three key factors to increasing avocado sales during this time. On pricing, offer small avocados at a lower price point and adjust the gap to more than 40 cents between small and large avocados to stimulate trial, according to research by the Perishables Group on behalf of the Avocado Producers and Exporting Packers

Association of Michoacán (APEAM). In addition, price-package avocados as a value when compared to bulk.

Small, large and 4-count bagged avocados are offered to customers at Scolari's, and Dziejczak notes, "We have success selling all three, especially the bags at the check-out stands."

Lowest performing avocado retailers, according to the Perishables Group research, carry two or less SKUs of avocados on average. Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales and marketing for Calavo Growers Inc., in Santa Paula, CA, says, "Bags need to be promoted to perform. They are a good way to increase category sales and volume, but they don't work on their own. Hang them in the chip aisle and put a price special on them."

Some stores also carry a pre-made guacamole and dry guacamole mix. Jay Alley, vice president of sales for Saginaw, TX-based Fresherized Foods, the makers of Wholly Guacamole, contends, "Super Bowl is the time to merchandise larger sizes such as the 14- or 28-oz. club pack because people are gathering together for parties. Classic is the Number One flavor followed by spicy."

# “Avocados are a real powerhouse for the winter holidays. We’ll sell 50 percent of our total annual fruit sales between Christmas and Super Bowl.”

— Paul Dziedzic, Scolari’s Food & Drug Co.

The basket correlation between customers who pick up a 1.1-oz. packet of dry guacamole seasoning mix and fresh avocados is 90 percent, reveals Charles Olins, vice president of sales and marketing for Concord Foods, in Brockton, MA. “Each packet of mix calls for two avocados,” he notes.

Ripe avocados are the only form of the fruit offered at Tony’s Finer Foods, an 8-store chain based in Itasca, IL, says produce buyer, Jesse Soto. “This capitalizes on impulse sales. Customers shopping for the Super Bowl want to buy avocados they can eat or make into guacamole right away.”

## 2. Think Outside The Avocado Box

According to Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., in Vernon, CA, “Beyond avocados, other produce items that are excellent to merchandise include salsa fixings and

salsa kits, jalapeno chiles for cheese poppers, key limes for salsa and beer, hummus and edamame for snacking.”

Sales of vegetable trays as well as cut fruit trays, such as sliced apples and caramel, significantly increase in the run up to the Super Bowl, reports Scolari’s Dziedzic. “Bulk veggies, along with dips, sell well, too for those customers who want to make their own trays. This includes broccoli, cauliflower and carrots. Artichokes are also a great Super Bowl item because of their snacking and dipping appeal.”

“Fruit and vegetable platters offer consumers a healthy alternative,” says Tristan Kieva, director of marketing for Irwindale, CA-based Ready Pac Produce Inc., “and have experienced approximately a 60 percent lift in dollar sales during this time frame.”

Elena Hernandez, marketing and communications specialist for Mann Packing Co. Inc, in Salinas, CA, says, “Our meat and cheese

platter is the ideal party tray for football fans. It has several holiday labels that change during the year, including the popular football favorite, The Tailgater, which is on pack from late December to the beginning of February.”

Sales data shows that occasion-based merchandising works, Hernandez adds. “Seasonally themed labels, such as Super Bowl, spur purchases, resulting in higher velocity and a 70 percent increase in sales. Sales data also shows that consumers spend more during peak holiday periods; and a higher percentage of men purchase party trays, compared to other produce items that are designed for both men and women shoppers are most appealing.”

In addition to its football-themed beef, cheese and veggie tray and a variety of Super Bowl-ideal vegetable trays, Apio Inc., of Guadalupe, CA, offers a number of bagged fresh vegetables that jump-start preparation of hors d’oeuvres and finger snacks, remarks Cali Tanguay, director of marketing and technology. “One of our favorites is a broccoli slaw wrap. Consumers can find the recipe for this and other easy solutions on our website.”

Unshelled peanuts use to be the Big Game favorite, recalls Scolari’s Dziedzic. “Now, pistachios are the giant in the nut category.”



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Marc Seguin, senior director of marketing at Paramount Farms, headquartered in Lost Hills, CA, reports, "Our pistachios rank fourth in the \$12 billion 'salty snack' category and we're the only item in produce out of the Top 15. It's clear consumers are looking for healthier choices for snacking."

Paramount Farm's 7-oz. bag of pistachios is the best-selling SKU. Flavors represent 20 to 25 percent of sales, notes Seguin, who details, "There are four flavors in the Everybody's Nuts line. We're phasing out chili and lime in favor

of the new sweet chili in the next year."

Michael Swiatkowski, vice president of sales for Hickory Harvest Foods, a packer of nuts, dried fruit and other bulk snacks, headquartered in Akron, OH, notes, "Pistachios and cashews are popular at Super Bowl, both plain and flavored."

### 3. Create A One-Stop Shop In Produce

Mann's Hernandez recommends creating a one-stop-shop for Super Bowl party hosts. "Position the produce department as a party

**"There are hundreds of guacamole recipes that feature sweet, spicy and savory flavors. Retailers could promote a mango guacamole one week, then a seafood guacamole for the next week and provide creative usage ideas."**

— Emiliano Escobedo, APEAM

destination," she says. "Cross-merchandise fresh snacking items with dips and chips, serving items and beverages."

Play on the excitement of football's multi-week season to gradually increase stocks and display size in the run up to the Super Bowl. Calavo's Wedin says, "There's a party spirit for about four weeks prior to the game. Since avocado sales increase an average of 50 percent or more over usual for the Super Bowl, it's important to start building toward this amount at least one to two weeks out," he explains.

Expanding shelf space for avocados from 6.6 square feet to 11 square feet could increase avocado contribution to total produce sales from an average of 1.3 to 2.3 percent, according to Perishables Group research on behalf of APEAM. Top-tier retailers devote 14 square feet to avocados.

Triple sales of dry packets of guacamole mix by displaying them adjacent to the fresh avocados, recommends Concord Food's Olins. "Retailers can dangle clip strips down the side of a bin. Or, we offer pre-filled shippers with 144 units with a football theme header card for placing next to bulk displays of avocados," he says.

According to Seguin, Paramount Farms placed 20,000 shippers of its pistachios in-store for Super Bowl last year and will nearly double this placement this year. "Pistachios are an impulse snack decision, so place the shipper in a high-traffic area in the produce department or in the store's lobby or at the check stand."

Guacamole and salsa fixings are cross-merchandised together in the produce departments at Tony's Finer Food. Soto details, "Tomatoes, tomatillos, jalapenos, cilantro and onions will all be in one display to make it

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# “We do manned demos in-store so that we can talk with consumers about usage ideas. It’s been very effective, and over the last four years grown avocado sales to No. 1 in the produce department.”

— Jesse Soto, Tony’s Finer Foods

easier for customers to find what they need.”

For cold items such as pre-made guacamole, Fresherized Food’s Alley advises, “Expand the number of facings so that out-of-stocks don’t get out of control. Retailers that are most successful display our guacamole in a refrigerated end-cap along with party trays, dips, dressings and fresh-cut vegetables.”

## 4. Tie In To The Whole Store

Score big sales on produce for Super Bowl and also boost the total store ring by cross-merchandising. “At Scolari’s, we’ll merchandise veggie trays in the meat department, avocados in the chip aisle, and limes in the beer case,” details Dziedzic. “You can always find a little unused space to make this work.”

Cross-merchandising can help gain traffic across departments, says Ready Pac’s Kieva. For example, this could be “through an IRC (instant redeemable coupon) with complementary deli items or secondary placement in the deli department to drive cross-department purchases.”

Capitalize on the guacamole theme in cross-merchandising, recommends Emiliano Escobedo, the Los Angeles, CA-based marketing director for APEAM. “There are hundreds of guacamole recipes that feature sweet, spicy and savory flavors. Retailers could promote a mango guacamole one week, then a seafood guacamole for the next week and provide creative usage ideas.”

“Since guacamole and the Super Bowl are well established, retailers have an opportunity to suggest new usage ideas to their customers,” points out Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission. “For example, avocados can be used as toppers for salads, sandwiches and pizza.”

## 5. Create Winning Ads

Excellent availability of avocados this winter should make for attractive ads and price points that sell. Multiple pricing is a good way

to sell more avocados and other Super Bowl party ingredients. For example, “At Scolari’s, we like to put avocados on ad for 2-for-\$1 or 5-for-\$5 for the large fruit,” says Dziedzic.

“Selling 7-oz. bags of premium pistachios at 2-for-\$6 or \$7 is compelling,” says Paramount Farm’s Seguin, “and it also encourages a light buyer to trade up.”

“For vegetable trays,” adds Apio’s Tanguay, “buy-one-get-one at a certain price does well.”

Eighty major supermarket chains ran Super Bowl ads for party platters, including vegetable trays, according to *Promotional Reflections: The Other side of Super Bowl Promotions*, published by ECRM MarketGate Ad Comparisons in



February, 2011, underscoring the popularity and promotability of this item.

Multi-item themed ads are also great sales tools. “On the Wednesday before Super Bowl, avocados are the main featured item and we also group price promotions on artichokes, small, medium and large veggie trays, limes, grilling items such as peppers and zucchini, and Caesar salad kits in the same ad,” says Dziedzic. “It’s really a big veggie holiday ad.”

## 6. Jump On Promotional Opportunities

Retailers will find a full array of promotional opportunities for Super Bowl merchandising from the national avocado

commissions as well as private companies. CAIA, for example, offers several promotions including retailer-specific display contests with all new ‘Grab Some For The Game’ POS materials. These materials include a football-themed bin with QR code that takes consumers to a featured recipe. Customers that don’t have a Smart Phone can access the same recipes via the web address printed on the bin. Retailers who enter a photo of their avocado display can win gift cards in amounts from \$25 up to \$500 via a virtual coin scratch that they can redeem online.

Scolari’s is one retailer that partners annually with CAIA on a display contest. “We ran last year’s contest from December 24 to February 6 and saw an average 25 percent increase in avocado sales,” reveals Dziedzic.

APEAM will run its Guac Off social media promotion from January 2 to February 5. This promotion consists of a guacamole recipe contest on Facebook where consumers can win iPads and \$100 grocery gift cards. Escobedo adds, “Retailers can cross-promote in-stores by merchandising avocados next to other ingredients used to make guacamole such as tomatoes or onions.”

Tony’s Finer Foods partners with APEAM on a number of promotional activities around the Super Bowl including sampling. Soto details, “We do manned demos in-store so that we can talk with consumers about usage ideas. It’s been very effective, and over the last four years grown avocado sales to No. 1 in the produce department.”

Finally, apples might not be top of mind in football-themed promotion. However, Chelan Fresh Marketing, headquartered in Chelan, WA, is test-marketing a promotion that utilizes poly bags of apples, display bins, price cards and posters that tie in with the Fuel Up to Play 60 program childhood obesity

prevention program. Mac Riggan, vice president of marketing, explains, “We have partnered with the National Football League and the National Dairy Council in this program to help point children in the right direction regarding healthful eating. There are currently 63,000 participating schools across the United States, which translates to a target audience of 36 million youth. We invite retailers to jump on board by using our tie-in POS material to invest in their future customers.” Chelan Fresh’s third test marketing period will take place from January 7 to February 15 in the markets of Jacksonville, FL; Denver, CO; and Seattle, WA. **pb**



# Avocados from Mexico launches fall campaign in Times Square

*Avocados from Mexico* rolled out its ground-breaking fall marketing campaign August 17th on the CBS Jumbotron in bustling Times Square. Fifteen-second spots will run twice per hour through New Year's Day 2012, delivering 1.5 million impressions daily.

The Times Square advertising is just one event in MHAIA's fully-integrated marketing campaign to drive the category. MHAIA, the Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association, is a marketing organization that promotes the *Avocados from Mexico* brand as well as overall category growth. The fall campaign alone will deliver 535 million impressions.



## National Holiday marketing extends down to local store and kitchen



To capitalize on the growing popularity of celebrity chefs, *Avocados from Mexico* has launched the Personal Holiday Chef Sweepstakes. Three winners will receive an authentic Mexican holiday dinner, served in their homes and prepared by a celebrity chef—Roberto Santibañez on December 1st, Iliana de la Vega on December 2nd and Rick Bayless on December 3rd. Each party will be filmed and featured as a mini "webisode" at [www.theamazingavocado.com](http://www.theamazingavocado.com).

The sweepstakes will be heavily promoted across marketing disciplines. Magazine ads, interactive media and in-store POS will teach shoppers how to find delicious holiday food ideas, with health benefits, in their local produce department. Social media promotions will include a mommy-blogger Twitter party, in conjunction with a media tour featuring Chef Santibañez.

National *Avocados from Mexico* holiday ads and promotions are being featured in magazines such as *Cooking Light*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Food Network Magazine*, *Real Simple*, *Weight Watchers*, *Eating Well* and *Better Homes & Garden*.



Rick Bayless



Iliana de la Vega



Roberto Santibañez

## Taste the Wow tour logs thousands of miles

*Avocados from Mexico* have hit the road! The *Taste the Wow* tour is putting recipe samples in consumers' hands at major events throughout the U.S., including baseball stadiums where fans are tailgating and gathering around food. As a result, millions of people are walking away with a new take on avocados as well as recipes to take home. The baseball stops were part of the fully-integrated Big Hit promotion event in October.



## Coming up next: the 2012 Big Game event

A major opportunity for avocado sales is the Big Game event on February 5, 2012. To help push sales, *Avocados from Mexico* will offer retailers a 360-degree avocado display which includes tear-off Big Game Recipes, as well as additional recipes on the website.



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Texas is the No. 3 supplier of fresh produce to the United States.

# Texas Produce Is Big Business

From Rio Red grapefruit to super sweet onions, Texas supplies unparalleled produce. **BY PAULA HENDRICKSON**

**T**exas may be famous for Ruby Red grapefruit and Texas 1015 sweet onions, but the fact is, most Texas growers have long since upgraded to better varieties. “Ruby Red has been supplanted over the years by Rio Red, which is just a little redder,” says John McClung, president of the Mission-based Texas Produce Association (TPA). As for onions, he notes the classic Texas 1015 onion proved so popular that it still overshadows newer varieties. “The reality is, in recent years, we’ve produced very few 1015s,” he admits, “but in marketing terms, they’re still 1015s. We do produce a superior onion, a very mild onion, but people at the sales desk refuse to give up telling buyers they’re 1015 onions.”

Mike Martin, president of Rio Queen Citrus Inc., located in Mission, TX, concurs. “Even though we’ve been shipping Rio Reds under the marketing name Rio Star for almost 25 years, people — even produce buyers — still refer to them as Ruby Red,” he acknowledges. “That term has been around for decades. It’s still a good, descriptive term, but Ruby Red is a specific variety that we don’t grow.”

Confusion aside, it’s clear that Texas is renowned for producing superior produce, and not just grapefruit and onions. Pecans, potatoes, watermelon, cabbage, cucumbers,

chili peppers, peaches and oranges round the Top 10 Texas-grown commodities of the past five years, according to the Austin-based Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). “The strength of Texas — what makes our state such a dominant player in agriculture — is our diversity,” says Bryan Black, TDA’s director of communications.

While 2010 was a strong year for Texas crops, with produce production valued at \$845 million, Black reports the average annual production over the past five years is about \$670 million. He reveals the five-year average was down 8 percent from the previous half-decade for vegetables and melons, but up 36 percent for fruits and nuts.

J & D Produce Inc., located in Edinburg, TX, grows and imports a wide selection of products, including limes, carrots, eggplant, peppers, greens and melons, and hasn’t experienced any big shifts in consumer habits. “Demand for our produce has stayed consistent with the vegetables,” says Matthew Bradley III, sales manager, “but there is greater demand for our sweet onion.”

Retailers and consumers know what they want, and shoppers at Texas-based retailers are especially focused on local produce. “When guests know something is grown in Texas, they know it’s in our stores fresh, and more directly,

from the field,” says Darvel Kirby, business director of produce for United Supermarkets LLC, based in Lubbock, TX, which operates 50 stores in north and west Texas. “Throughout the summer, Texas-grown watermelons are probably the most popular item, similar to grapefruit and onions.” According to Kirby, other Texas-grown produce favored by United customers include cantaloupe, blueberries, peaches, tomatoes, okra, green beans, potatoes, corn, pumpkins, greens, cabbage and squash.

“With so many different growing regions in the state, we pride ourselves in our range of production,” says Black of the TDA. “Each year Texas harvests the first spring onions, first fresh peaches and first fresh apples in the nation. We have an excellent climate and rich soil, plus universities that produce insightful research to assist our growers to maximize production. Texas is a powerhouse of production.”

## Supplying Homegrown And Imported Produce To The Nation, And Beyond

The TPA’s McClung maintains that historically, Texas has been the No. 3 supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables to the nation, close behind California and Florida, and a status the state still maintains.

Texas’ distinction, at least in the citrus category, is that Texas crops are produced primarily

**“When guests know something is grown in Texas, they know it’s in our stores fresh, and more directly, from the field. Throughout the summer, Texas-grown watermelons are probably the most popular item, similar to grapefruit and onions.”**

— Darvel Kirby, United Supermarkets LLC

for the fresh market, while much of Florida citrus is grown for processing. California produces for both markets. “Florida has over 600,000 acres of [commercial] citrus compared to our 25,000 or so acres, but we still sell one-in-three fresh grapefruit in this country because we have the reputation for the best grapefruit,” McClung says.

Imports also play a role in the Texas produce industry. Each year, a tremendous volume of limes are imported to round out the citrus category. Numerous tropical fruits cross the border into Texas as well, and many of the state’s produce suppliers import onions from Mexico to prolong the season.

“Our onion season in Texas is roughly March 1 through early June in the Valley, and then if you go up to Uvalde it runs through

mid-July,” McClung details. “But during the January-February period, we import a lot of onions through Mexico. The difference [between today and a decade or two ago] is that we used to be very domestic, with the only exception being some of the tropicals like mangos and papayas. Now we’re at 60 percent produce that’s grown in Mexico — generally with U.S. dollars and intended for export to the United States, but it is nonetheless grown south of the river.”

While some produce is imported through Texas from Central and South America, Chris Eddy, general manager and director of sales for Frontera Produce Ltd, in Edinburg, TX, says the bulk of imports come from Mexico. “The reason is geographic proximity.

Mexican pineapples that are grown in Veracruz, Mexico, are shipped by truck to the closest port of entry, which would be south Texas. Mexico has a large list of fruits and vegetables that it produces and crosses through Texas.”

Texas may be on the southern border of the United States, but it also happens to be located midway between the East and West Coasts, offering an edge that attracts retailers in many centrally located markets. “To appeal to retailers, I think Texas has to focus on its geographic location,” says Rio Queen’s Martin. “We’re kind of in the middle. For Florida grapefruit to compete against Texas is tough because we have a transportation advantage — a logistic advantage.”

Indeed, Black says the TDA is actively marketing to retailers in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, and even as far east as Pennsylvania with retail demonstrations.

Paula Fouchek, marketing director for Edinburg Citrus Association, headquartered in Edinburg, TX, says when its produce enters a new market — domestically or abroad — demand soars. Why? “Taste,” she says. “When consumers have the opportunity to try our

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**"The TPA has many programs that are tremendously beneficial to us. Their efforts provides us with great visibility, both individually as a company with booth space, and collectively as an industry as our Texas Town and Texas flag overhead."**

— Paula Fouчек, Edinburg Citrus Association

uniquely sweet red grapefruit and oranges, sales grow."

### Texas Sun And Soil

This year, Texas was in the news for sustained triple-digit heat waves and a devastating drought. Over the decades, the state has also seen its fair share of hurricanes and even some tree killing freezes. "This past year was an ideal growing season for us here in Texas," says Martin. "We had an excellent fruit crop — very good quality and high tonnage." However, 2011 proved to be a tougher year. "It's been very, very dry and hot in Texas, so it's been challenging for the citrus. Our crop is off a little. We had some very cold temperatures in February, which I think affected the bloom, and the drought on top of that and the hot summer have continued to impact the crop."

Edinburg Citrus Association has experienced Mother Nature's wrath several times. "There's no doubt that weather issues continue to be a challenge, but the growers of Edinburg Citrus have been able to meet those challenges throughout the company's 80-year history," Fouчек says.

Every region of Texas is unique. "Texas is a large state with several different climates, and each has its own strengths and appeal for various items," Frontera's Eddy notes. "For example, South Texas is the primary production area for fresh-crop onions in March and April, due to the area's growing conditions."

"The weather, the mean temperatures and the soil conditions in the Valley are conducive to many fruit and vegetable crops," the TPA's McClung says. "We've been in a drought in the Rio Grande Valley for some years now, but we also have had ample irrigation water because we filled the major reservoirs a couple years ago when we had heavy rainy seasons."

Those same extremes seem to be part of what makes Texas produce so much sweeter, be it onions or grapefruit. "We compete head-to-head with Florida [when it comes to citrus]. We have the same growing season and the same harvesting season," Rio Queen's Martin says. "Florida has great quality fruit, but we

tend to have a darker color with our grapefruit, and most have a little bit sweeter flavor. It's not necessarily that there's more sugar; there's just less acid in the fruit, and it's the acid that gives citrus its tang. It's the climate and the soils that give us that sweeter flavor."

Texas has been known for producing red grapefruit since the 1929 introduction of Ruby Red; Fouчек says the current standard bearer, the Rio Star, is 7 to 10 times redder than the original Ruby Reds. "This special fruit was developed specifically for the rich alluvial soils of the Rio Grande River and our semi-tropical area located near the Gulf of Mexico," Fouчек describes.

### Economical Promotion For Future Success

While some growers promote directly to buyers, few have the resources to advertise to end-users. That's why collaborative promotions are crucial. "We are working with TexasSweet, the Texas Watermelon Association, the Texas Vegetable Association, the Texas Pecan Board, and many other commodity groups to conduct joint marketing and promotion events in retail stores, restaurants, farmers markets and hotels," says Black of the TDA. "We work with growers to label fruits and vegetables with the Go Texan mark." He says the group also coordinates seasonal TV ads with some grower organizations to promote produce during peak harvest seasons.

According to United Supermarket's Kirby, the Texas Grown and Go Texan labels are extremely important. "We use them in our advertising, and our marketing department has made Texas Grown signs for the stores to use on displays of Texas-grown produce."

Those labels alone boost sales, but Kirby adds that United has also had tremendous success the past couple of years with its "Best of Texas" expos. "We have those in our Market Street stores one weekend during the summer," he explains. Texas items are featured throughout the stores, but he says Texas produce is the highlight. Positioning might play a role, too, since shoppers are greeted by Texas produce displays when entering the store.

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The TPA's McClung says his group is an active participant in the TDA's Texas Grown program. "On occasion, our shippers will engage in advertising programs, but for the most part we let the quality of the fruit — or vegetables — sell itself."

"That said," J & D's Bradley states, "The TPA plays a pivotal role in our industry." Edinburg's Fouchek agrees, adding that the power of group efforts makes such organizations a valuable asset for growers.

United Supermarkets likes to highlight Texas growers, often focusing on family-run companies and farms. "We have posters featuring some of them displayed in our produce departments," Kirby says. "Some even make store appearances — especially during

our Texas expos — to visit with our guests and team members."

"The TPA has many programs that are tremendously beneficial to us," Fouchek says. She singles out the annual coordination of the Texas Town pavilion at PMA as an example. "Their efforts provides us with great visibility, both individually as a company with booth space, and collectively as an industry as our Texas Town and Texas flag overhead."

Summing up why such collaborations are so important, Frontera's Eddy says, "One advantage is that a collective voice is louder than an individual one."

Black and McClung appreciate how Texas growers keep experimenting with new crops. McClung knows of growers testing artichokes

and tangerine-type fruits, but personally hopes Meyer Lemons will find a home in Texas. "It's a good niche market we haven't really capitalized on," he says. "And there are some other fruit types we might be able to grow in the Valley — neo-tropical things that might be lucrative."

Black says he wouldn't be surprised to see olives breaking onto Texas' Top 10 list in the next five to 10 years, but doesn't expect the popularity of Texas' current top crops to diminish anytime soon.

"Texas has worked hard to earn the reputation it has with grapefruit, onions and watermelons, and we will continue to develop these crops," asserts McClung. "We're shipping more now to the nation than we ever have, and I don't see any reason that trend will change." **pb**

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## CATEGORY: SALADS

### Interview with Jennifer Grossman, Senior Vice President, Dole Nutrition Institute

Dole Food Company, Inc. is the world's largest producer and marketer of fresh fruit and vegetables. Chairman David H. Murdock started the Dole Nutrition Institute nearly nine years ago to "feed the world with knowledge" through publications, such as the award-winning *Dole Nutrition News* (2.5 million circulation) and the *Dole Nutrition Handbook*. The Institute's main mission is to educate the public about the benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Q:** With all of the competing nutrition information out there, how can you distinguish your product from the pack?

**A:** Simply put, eating our products — fruit, vegetables, salads — will help solve the obesity epidemic. Fruit and vegetables have low-energy density, a fancy way of saying they have very few calories compared to other foods, pound for pound. Compare a pound of spinach (104 kcals) to a pound of potato chips (2247 kcals) and you'll see what we mean. Not only does the spinach have fewer calories, but it also has a much higher water and fiber content, which helps fill you up so you eat less of other, more fattening foods. Moreover, leading scientists are exploring the link between obesity and nutrition deficiencies — junk food leaves you literally starved for nutrients, contributing to cravings that promote weight gain. On the other hand, when you start your meal with a salad, researchers have shown you consume fewer calories overall.

DOLE Salads are distinguished with our own nutrition focus. In fact, each of our two new All Natural Salad Kits received awards for their nutritious values. Our Endless Summer Kit was named one of the "Best 125 New Packaged Foods for Women" by *Women's Health Magazine*, and our Spinach Cherry Almond Bleu Kit was one of the products selected for the *Health Magazine* 2011 Food Awards editorial feature. In addition to our focus on nutrition, we continue to take deliberate steps to differentiate our products from the competition in other ways. Take our new Extra Veggie line for example — three baby salad blends that each come with a revolutionary stay-fresh pouch of veggies. Not only is this line an industry first, it also delivers 100 percent of the USDA Recommended Daily Intake of vegetables in every bag. These efforts, when combined with equally compelling promotional and social media programs, are making it easier and more enjoyable for Americans to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables and live healthier lives.

**Q:** What are the best strategies to encourage consumers to buy more healthy and nutritious products?

**A:** Dole takes a great deal of pride in our efforts to help people live healthier lifestyles. We are constantly thinking of the best ways to further educate our consumers on how to improve their eating habits, but more importantly, how to encourage the enjoyment of salad. In 2010, we relaunched our salad website, complete with new recipes and pairing ideas, to help consumers re-think salad. Salad is no longer just a boring side — it can inspire a complete meal. Add it to soups and wraps, sauté it and add to pasta or top it with all of your favorite ingredients — the possibilities are endless. By providing new and exciting ways to eat salad our goal is to inspire and entice consumers to incorporate it into their daily diet. We are also very active on our Facebook page, regularly offering our fans fun seasonal tips and new recipes. The more consumers see how easy and delicious it can be to get their daily dose of fruits and veggies, the more likely they'll be to make healthy choices at the supermarket.

**Q:** Do you target any specific demographics or age groups with your product due to notable health reasons?

**A:** Yes! Adolescents ages 14 to 18, as a group, are failing to get the key nutrients needed for development and health maintenance. For example, 97 percent of adolescents do not get enough fiber, which DOLE Salads provide. Then there are baby boomers: Harvard researchers found middle-aged women who ate the most leafy greens and/or cruciferous veggies boosted their odds of maintaining mental sharpness in later years, and those who ate at least three servings of spinach and broccoli actually did better on cognitive tests than those who ate less.

**Q:** Are there any myths or confusing nutrition information about your product that you'd like to clarify?

**A:** Sure, some supposed "nutrition zeroes" are actually "nutrition heroes." A serving of iceberg lettuce actually provides nearly a quarter of your daily needs for vitamin K, higher intakes of which are linked to a 65 percent lower risk of fractures among the elderly.

Celery is also hugely underrated. It is an excellent source of vitamin K and a good source of folate, potassium and vitamin C. Scientists from Case Western Reserve University just found the celery phytonutrient apigenin may slow prostate tumor growth.

**Q:** We all know it's a struggle to get kids to eat healthy foods. What do you think can be done to promote increased fruit and vegetable consumption among children?

**A:** It's incredibly important that fresh fruits and veggies are made easily accessible to children, which is why Dole is donating salad bars to schools in low-income areas across the country. Research shows that access to salad bars increases overall nutrient intake. In 2011, Dole donated seven salad bars with plans to donate another 10 in 2012.

Education and making fruits and veggies fun is also important — at the Dole Nutrition Institute we have a variety of ways to help children learn about nutrition. For example, we have our *Dole Counting Book*, a brand new Dole kids' cookbook, and perhaps most exciting of all, we've introduced the Dole Garden Kit. This provides everything kids need to start their own vegetable garden — and in the process of growing their own food, feed their brains as well.





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## CATEGORY: ARTICHOKES

### Interview with Kori Tuggle, Director of Marketing & Business Development, Ocean Mist Farms

Located in Castroville, CA, Ocean Mist Farms grows over 30 fresh vegetable commodities along with its signature crop, artichokes. Ocean Mist is the largest producer of fresh artichokes in the North America with more than 87 years of industry leadership.

**Q:** What are some simple messages retailers can use to promote the health aspect of your product?

**A:** 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 is the most important health attribute retailers can promote for your product?

**A:** Fiber! The USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services' Dietary Guidelines recommend men consume 30 to 38 grams per day and women consume 21 to 25 grams per day of dietary fiber. However, most Americans consume about half that amount, according to the American Dietetic Association. The solution is simple: Eat artichokes. One artichoke (120 grams) contains 10.3 grams of dietary fiber, providing a significant contribution to the daily requirement.

**Q:** What is a good usage retailers can suggest to consumers that links your product to health benefit?

**A:** 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. Steaming or baking the artichokes helps retain these nutrients instead of the common boiling method.

**Q:** Tell us something that consumers may not realize about how your product can improve their health and well-being?

**A:** A 2006 study in the *American Journal of Nutrition* found that artichokes have the highest antioxidant level of all vegetables. In fact, even after being cooked, artichokes are higher in antioxidants per serving than many foods commonly touted as "rich in antioxidants," including cranberries, blueberries, wine and chocolate.

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

**A:** Artichokes offer health benefits to all age groups: 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.

For younger-diet and beauty-conscious consumers: the fiber-rich artichokes improve digestive health and aids with weight loss by helping one feel fuller faster and helps rid the body of waste. Eating artichokes has also been promoted in consumer magazines such as *InStyle* to boost immunity, promote clear skin, reduce wrinkles and enhance hair.



**Q:** How does your product deliver a powerful punch of nutrition? Can you point to studies that 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:** How do you communicate the health message about fresh artichokes to consumers?

**A:** We communicate on our website, to our 33,000-plus Artichoke Aficionado club members, through social media, on packaging and on trade communications.

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

**A:** Ocean Mist Farms has a variety of new POS material to help share artichoke recipes and nutrition benefits with shoppers. The point-of-sale materials are available online at [Oceanmist.com](http://Oceanmist.com); users can visit the site, fill out the form and the order is fulfilled within two to three business days.



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# One Two Of A Kind



Boston's twin markets break the mold, providing produce for both chains and independents.

BY JAN FIALKOW

**T**he produce terminal markets serving the greater Boston area sit side by side, straddling the dividing line between the cities of Chelsea and Everett. On the Chelsea side is the New England Produce Center (NEPC); on the Everett side is the Boston Terminal Market (BTM). The vendors on the two markets recognize the importance of working together to provide the best produce to the widest array of retailers and foodservice operators.

In addition to being two separate entities functioning under a banner of collegiality, the Boston area terminal markets enjoy a position once considered essential, but now deemed unique — the local chains buy on the market every day. The chains may be buying because

of shorts or for fill-ins, but they are buying. “The chains are here everyday,” says Bruce Strock, vice president of S. Strock & Co. Inc. on the NEPC. “They don’t buy everything, but they’re always here. I guess I just took it for granted that they do that on every market.

“All the chains are here looking for weekend values,” maintains Steven Piazza, president of Community Suffolk Inc. at the BTM. “All the chains are pursuing values here. Competition is so tough out there that they want the best values they can get. And they’re walking the market — some through their own guys, some through brokers.”

According to Rich Travers, principal at the NEPC’s Travers Fruit Co., “We do business with the major chains on a consistent basis. Shaw’s and



Tommy and Steven Piazza of Community Suffolk Inc.



Jorge Diaz and Will Piantini of WP Distributors



Bruce Strock of S. Strock & Co. Inc.



Anthony Sharrino of Eaton & Eustis Co.



Sean Murdock and Dave Patnaude of Coast To Coast Produce



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**Seldon Borodkin** of Mutual Produce



**Adam Strock** of S. Strock & Co. Inc.



**Ralph DiGiacomo and John DiGiacomo** of S. Strock & Co. Inc.

Hannaford come en masse to walk this market. A new buyer with Shaw's said he was impressed with the quality. He said he saw consistently good quality throughout the market."

The local chains, both big and small, view the markets as a source for produce that may not be available elsewhere. "The chains come to us everyday. There are commodities we can get that no one else can," asserts Kevin Maher, vice president of Coosemans Boston, Inc., at the NEPC. "When local heirloom tomatoes became big, the farmers came to us. In addition, there are short markets. Buyers make mistakes, so they need some place to go."

"Everyone in the area relies on the market," says Ken Cavallaro, treasurer of John Cerasuolo Co.Inc., located at the NEPC. "All the

major chains are in here everyday to some extent and to differing degrees. The same can be said for all the major wholesalers."

Anthony Sharrino, owner, president and director of NEPC's Eaton & Eustis, asserts, "Nothing beats brick-and-mortar, hands-on, face-to-face relationships — and we've been building those for years."

**Why Terminal Markets Are Important**

The indispensable role terminal markets play is rooted in tradition. "Historically, the coasts were where product went. When the country expanded inland, they didn't bring terminal markets with them," relates Gene Fabio, president of NEPC's J. Bonafede Co. Inc. "There wouldn't be terminals inland. Many

areas don't have terminal markets. If they did, the industry would be better served. Those folks don't know what they're missing."

Peter John Condakes, president of Peter Condakes Co. Inc., at the NEPC, notes, "Terminal markets still matter in overall distribution throughout the nation."

In a time of economic uncertainty, terminal markets have an even higher profile than in the good times. "On a rising market, retailers may buy a whole truck; on an unstable market, they don't want to do that," says Tom Piazza, a sales associate with Community Suffolk. "They'd rather go the wholesale market. Relationships of 40 years or more have value."

Speaking generally, terminal markets — wherever they're located — offer retailers,

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**Richie Travers and Paul Travers of Travers Fruit Company**

distributors and foodservice operators a wide range of convenient shopping. “Terminal markets present a physical storefront where businesses in the region can shop, as opposed to buying at a long distance,” notes Adam Strock, food safety director of S. Strock. “In the market, you can find the best deals and the best quality — and those are tangible because you can see the people and products in person. The convenience of the market makes economic sense for most local buyers, as their needs are likely to fluctuate rapidly.”

“The produce market is vital to fill the needs of all — some complete supply, others a major portion, and many a small portion,” explains Sam Strock, president of S. Strock. “It helps all to prevent undersupply and reduce spoilage.”

“Buyers can buy exactly the amounts they need as they need it, which isn’t easily done buying FOB,” notes Bruce Strock. “Buyers can also adjust to market conditions much more quickly because they’re not buying five to seven days out.”

The advantage of a terminal market is also evident on the shipper side of the equation. “From the shippers’ perspective, we’re a flexible outlet that can absorb what isn’t pre-sold to chains or other large contractors,” explains Butch Fabio, treasurer of J. Bonafede.

According to Stephen Silk, president at NEPC’s Arthur G. Silk Inc., “Not everything can be Grade A No. 1. There are customers for No. 2s. When shippers are packing, they pack everything and they want someone who can

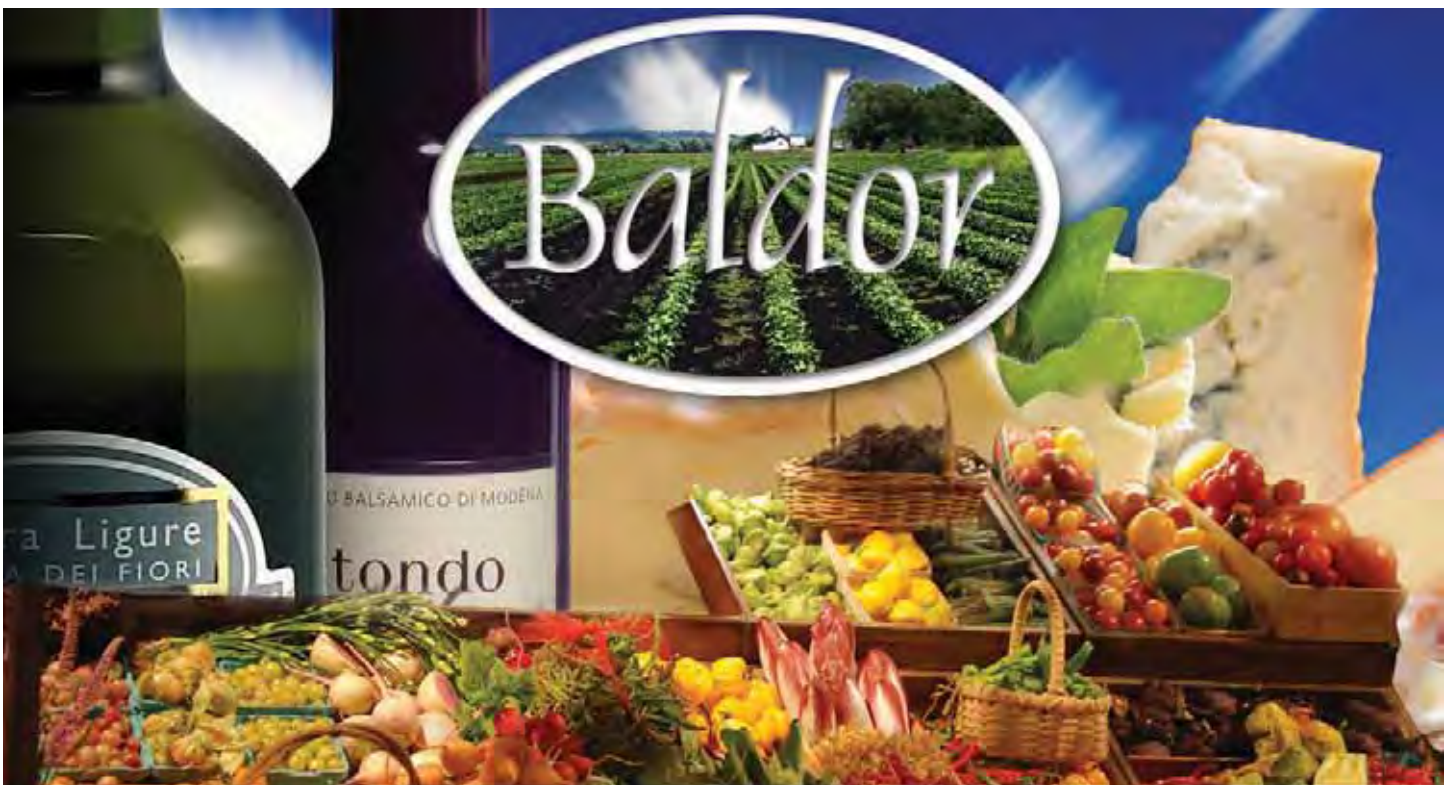
take some of all of it. We have many kinds of retail and foodservice customers.”

The terminal markets are indispensable to the success of independent retailers. “Terminal markets supply all the independents,” explains Peter Bonafede, director of J. Bonafede. “They can’t survive without terminal markets.”

Kevin Maher, vice president of Coosemans Boston, sums up the importance of terminal markets with a question. “Where else would be available to consolidate so much variety — worldwide produce — in one place?”

**Boston’s Location And Bounty**

The two produce terminal markets in the Boston area have carved out an important niche within the region’s food supply chain.



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One aspect of the niche is the huge geographic area they service. "This market serves almost 10 million people. It covers the largest geographic area of any market in the country," notes John Bonafede, director of J. Bonafede. "We supply as far away as Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Montreal, upstate New York and all of New England except south of Hartford.

Baldor Boston, a division of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc., in the Bronx, NY, has set up shop in Chelsea, MA, just off the New England Produce Center. "We go south to Newport, RI, west to Worcester, MA, and north to New Hampshire six days a week and to Boston all seven days. We're running 18 trucks a day here — 18 full trucks," says Glenn Messenger, general manager.

The combination of supply and location heightens the markets' value. "We offer a system of fill-ins for the large chains and a source of product for the small chains," says Patrick Burke, buyer of Garden Fresh Salad Co., located on the NEPC. "And we allow growers to reach more people than they could without us. We service all of New England and some of Canada. There are some regional markets, but we're the main one here. We even service some of New York."

Location is also a financial determinant for freight. "Part of the reason Boston is so important is that trucks bring products here and they don't have to go back empty," explains John Bonafede. "Anyone here can get a great price on shipping. It can cost \$3,000 to get a truck here, but only \$1,000 to go back. There are a lot of Canadian trucks here."

Efficiency is another strong selling point. "The Boston terminal market offers buyers a transparent view into the local supply-and-demand structure. It's more efficient for local buyers to follow the price and supply changes of terminal market businesses, and adjust their business to that model, than to follow the national and international big picture," Adam Strock of S. Strock notes.

### Providing Unmatched Value

According to Gene Fabio of J. Bonafede, "This market is one of the more vibrant in the United States. It's pretty large in terms of the number of companies on the market, and those we supply. We serve an irreplaceable role," he asserts. "We provide independent stores and fill-ins with chains and we are a conduit for growers with excess supply. In addition, we promote on-the-spot pricing and offer the chains unrivaled flexibility."

There's no question about the role the

Boston terminal markets play. According to Stephen Piazza, president and sales director of Community Suffolk, "First, the market is where all excess supplies go; second the market is a great melting pot. Anyone with a few dollars who comes to this country, from Vietnam, Cambodia, Russia — they go into the business.

"Shopping the market is imperative, even for the largest institutional buyers," maintains Mike Strock, director of business development for S. Strock. "Doing so minimizes the risks associated with over-buying and the losses

that ensue. By complementing FOB buys with daily market buys, buyers can achieve greater product rotations. Furthermore, the market allows one to shop the best quality versus price for margin-enhancing spot market deals. Daily arrivals in the market ensure freshness and a superior quality product that keeps the end-consumer coming back for more."

The ability to provide fill-ins and alleviate shorts while still offering value is crucial. "There are always going to be shorts. We're a backstop. There's always an on-site vendor to buy from,"

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**Chris Rodes** of Community Suffolk and **Amy Fimocchiario**, buyer for F&P

says Dave Patnaude, sales manager of Coast to Coast Produce LLC, located at the BTM.

"We're important because of the deals and the values we have," says Jackie Piazza of Community Suffolk. "We have guys that come from New York and New Jersey — our prices are worth the drive."

**An Ally To The Industry**

The Boston markets offer consolidation, a release valve, service and freshness to the retailers and foodservice operators in the area, while making it possible for shippers to reach buyers that are too small to buy direct.

"We're important to the grower-shippers," says Baldor's Messinger. "We buy a lot and we pay our bills. We've been building relation-

ships with local growers. We distribute to retailers and even went on ad with local product. We've been able to put local product into colleges and other large feeders. We're supporting local growers. Even with the bad weather, this was a great year. They give us great product and we give them an outlet. The farmers know their product is pre-sold to New York and that helps us, too."

"I think we're vital for shippers — to showcase for the chains and to offer fill-ins," echoes Travers of Travers Fruit. "We're vital for food-service and small retailers — that's why the wholesale market still exists."

"We act as a release valve for all people who need extra produce," says Peter Bonafede. "If supermarkets run short, they come here. They

can't call growers if they run out. They call us and get the merchandise within hours."

According to Bruce Strock of S. Strock, "It's difficult to access many items buying only at shipping point. It's even more difficult to load everything that is needed and for it to arrive when it's needed, and in perfect shape."

The independents that rely on the market can actually be tougher in their demands than the chain buyers. "The independent buyers in here are harder buyers than the chains. They're in here. They see the product. They know what they want," explains Condakes of Peter Condakes, a major re-packer of tomatoes. "Shippers wouldn't be able to ship to the chains if the market weren't around to take the rejects — and move them," he adds.

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Stephen Condakes of  
Peter Condakes Co. Inc.



Ken Cavallaro, Debbie Cavallaro, Gabriella Ruolo, Kara and  
Francesca Ruolo, Skip Cavallaro, Dominic Cavallaro III, Dana  
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Wholesalers in the area look to the markets for produce for their customers. “We buy off the market rather than doing much direct buying,” says Jim Ruma, president of Ruma Fruit, located off the market in Chelsea, MA. “We provide a service and our relationships go back 20 years or more. We do direct store delivery as well as shorts and fill-ins for the chains.

Silk of Arthur G. Silk stresses the importance of variety and choice. “For our customers, the question is where else can you have the choice of merchandise, brands, varieties. They’re getting what they want.”

And then there’s the matter of personal relationships and trust. “I have relationships with some shippers that go back 40 years,” says Sharrino of Eaton & Eustis. “I stay with labels and don’t jump around. There’s a continuity of supply, no matter what the price or volume. And I can move excess when necessary. As generic as bulk produce looks to consumers, there are labels in this industry. I think Boston gets the best labels. Most receivers in Boston are brand loyal to their shippers.

“Retailers need to ask themselves, ‘Where can I go everyday and take advantage of the best that 60 vendors have to offer?’” he continues. “Al Wilson [of Wilson Family Farms, Concord, MA] said that to me years ago. It sums it all up.”

Amy Fimocchiaro, a buyer for F&B Produce in Chelsea, MA, shares her family’s loyalty with the market vendors. “My cousin [the owner of F&B] has been in business for 30 years,” she says. “He has a great relationship with everyone on the

market. They grew up in the business together.”

### Economic Realities

In rough economic times, providing value to local growers, retailers and consumers is paramount. “Supporting people in the area should be the goal, rather than going to super-regional suppliers,” contends Condakes of Peter Condakes. “When you procure locally, you put money into the hands of the people who shop your stores. And you support local farmers.”

According to Jackie Piazza of Community Suffolk, “The market is important because of the jobs we support and the products we supply.”

Some on the markets see produce as somewhat immune to the economic vagaries. “The economy doesn’t affect produce,” believes Cerasuolo’s Cavallaro. “People have to eat. When the economy is good, people go out and the foodservice sector is strong. When it’s not, people eat at home so retail is good.”

Others see the markets as reflecting current economic conditions. According to Adam Strock of S. Strock, “It’s clear that the economy is having an effect on the produce industry in this region. “Now more than ever, the faster you pay your bills, the more important your relationship is to whomever you are paying. As always in a hard economy, if you’re a company with a long-term outlook, you can make up for any short-term pitfalls along the way.

“The role of the terminal market wholesaler in the supply chain isn’t likely to change much,” he continues. “In the wholesale business, your goal is to be flexible and to not put

all your eggs in one basket, whether you are talking about customers, suppliers, products, or anything else. We’re always striving to meet and adapt to our customers’ changing needs. No matter what happens, wholesalers will remain an asset to local businesses.”

“We’re getting new customers,” notes Tom Piazza of Community Suffolk. “As the economy gets tougher, people have to micromanage how they spend. A broker has to make lots of stops, buy lots of stuff and make money on everything. Here, they get what they want at a good price.”

He sees a buying pattern that reflects a growing consumer dependence on the government safety net. “There’s an overall surge of business when government checks come out — Social Security, pensions, welfare. It’s noticeable in the ethnic trade that caters to a lower socio-economic demographic.”

That growing ethnic trade may well be a harbinger of the future. “The market will remain vibrant because of the ethnic groups and smaller niche stores,” says Coast to Coast’s Patnaude. “Their prices can be as competitive — even more so — than the supermarkets’. They can take advantage of whatever’s available.”

According to Butch Fabio of J. Bonafede, “The ethnic trade continues to grow. We’re expanding lines to keep the dollars up. Many ethnic items have good margins but low volumes.”

“There’s new blood on the market,” says Coosemans Maher. “We’re looking at immigrants — people who want to work hard and are willing to get up at 3am. You’ll always have

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Kevin Reardon, Brian Scolaro and Danny Reardon of S. Strock & Co. Inc.

people coming in. It's always been immigrants and it always will be."

Will Piantini, owner of W P Distributor LLC, at the BPM, specializes in ethnic items. "My business is good. Sales are up and I have new customers and a new truck," he says proudly. "I do direct-delivery to my customers. If a customer asks for something unusual, we'll get it, but we're basically staples."

#### The Future of the Markets

Building a career on a terminal market takes dedication. The long hours that run contrary to those most people keep, and the hard work, winnow out all but the most devoted. "Attracting young people to the market is tough," admits Steven Piazza of Community Suffolk. "It's hard to get people outside the family. The hours are tough and long. Most of the sales staff started doing manual stuff — loading, etc. They see the potential and move up."

"Family coming in is the way for the business to keep propagating," recognizes Kevin Maher of Coosemans. "The hours are long and hard. It's an opportunity that requires street smarts and common sense. It's basic economics — supply and demand."

Dominic Cavallaro III, a sales associate at Cerasuolo and a member of the next generation on the market, says, "The family is important in this business. I'm learning the business from the ground up — hands on. If you can't do everything, you can't be a manager, so I'm trying to learn everything."

Melissa D'Alleva, office administration at Garden Fresh Salad, is another member of the up-and-coming generation intent on carrying on the family business. "I've been working in the business for two years. I'm updating the computer systems to keep the operation viable. Everything around us is changing and we have to keep up." And she adds, "I'd love to be able to pass this on to my grandchildren." **pb**

# Bondir



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BONDIR

Finding a bit of the countryside in a bustling city.

BY JAN FIALKOW

From the city street outside, it's difficult to tell that walking into Bondir will transport you to a warm and cozy farmhouse. The creation of owner and chef Jason Bond, this small neighborhood restaurant that opened in November 2010 was chosen one of *Bon Appetit* magazine's Best New Restaurants of 2011.

Prior to opening Bondir, Bond was the chef at Boston's Beacon Hill Bistro. "I've wanted a bistro since I saw Jack Tripper on *Three's Company*," he recalls. "I remember him making pasta on the show."

Bond, who grew up in Wyoming and Kansas, is dedicated to serving locally sourced, sustainable foods in a comforting and comfortable atmosphere. "What gives me joy is cooking the best meal you can have. My grandmother would go into the garden, pick fresh vegetables, cook them and serve them — that's what I want to do. I want to showcase the vegetable's character."

The restaurant is small by design. "I want a personal relationship with the guests," he explains. "That's why it seats only 26. There are nine tables. With this size, I can cook everything myself. That being said, there are two or three people cooking on any given day, and I hope to get it up to four."

Unlike the raft of 'celebrity' chefs bent on building restaurant empires, Bond has a much simpler ambition. "I just want one restaurant. Having a neighborhood restaurant is a good thing to aspire to. We're establishing our systems and identity. I want to give back to the community, so I support local charities," he says.

Produce determines the menu at Bondir. "I buy everyday and the menu changes depending on the produce that's available," emphasizes Bond. "I get texts or emails everyday. The farmers tell me what they have and what they're harvesting and the fishermen tell me what they've caught. Then I decide what I want. Most of my produce comes directly from farmers, but I do use local distributors, mostly for products that aren't grown in the Boston area — such as citrus and tropical fruits.

"I try to find the best products I can," he continues. "I buy most of my items directly from the producers, but I didn't set out to be 'local.' In season, I buy lots of flats of local tomatoes. We preserve and Cryovac them and use them over the year. That's what my grandparents did. Some things we pickle; some things we preserve.

No one cuisine predominates. "I try to showcase the product. The menu is all over the map — it's really global cuisine. The restaurant is an expression of my experiences and my travels," he explains. "I want to eat something that was cooked with love and care. You have to respect the product."

The menu may be small, but it has something to appeal to carnivores, herbivores and omnivores alike.

The meal starts with a basket of homemade breads. On the October night *PRODUCE BUSINESS* dined at Bondir, they included a chewy 9 Grain, nori-studded slices of a bread called The Sea, and slices of intense and creative Corn Flour and Duck Crackling bread.

Two starters were on the menu — roasted butternut squash soup with spiced marshmallow, bee pollen and caramelized shallots finished with pumpkin seed oil; and spice-poached Forono beet salad with baby lettuce and fine herbs, pistachios and buttermilk vinaigrette.

One of the most diner-friendly aspects of Bondir is offering all the entrées in half and full portions. It's easy on the wallet, easy on the waistline and makes it possible to try almost everything on the menu. With only six entrées on any given night, a party of two can easily explore two-thirds of the menu without feeling stuffed or profligate.

Entrées for the evening included vegetarian specials such as Matsuzaki mushrooms served with periwinkles, dragon beans — an unusual bean pod with a wonderful flavor and texture — shaved vegetable salad and chili vinaigrette. Diners could also choose from herbed fusilli pasta with braised chicken, locally foraged mushrooms, red Russian kale, Long Pie pumpkin and Scarmoza cheese; Rhode Island Skate with Fairytale eggplant, baby leeks, fresh dug potatoes, hazelnuts and smoked sea salt froth, and other delectable dishes.

## Bondir

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# Calareso's Farm Stand



A classic American success story.

BY JAN FIALKOW



Lisa Gibbs, a devoted customer, and Joe Musgrave, Calareso's manager and buyer.

Calareso's in Reading, MA, is a quintessential small-town independent retailer. The community loves it, the customers love it, the employees love it and the suppliers love it. Playing at that exalted level doesn't come easy, but this family-owned and -operated business has been honing its craft for more than six decades.

"Calareso's has been in business for over 60 years," says Joe Musgrave, manager and buyer. "My great-grandfather, Joe Calareso, was a wholesaler with a spot in the North End [of Boston]. He moved the company — still as a wholesaler — to Reading. He changed to retail, but still operated the company the way he did in the North End. That means you couldn't touch anything. You stood in the door, said what you wanted and he would bring it to you.

"His son — my great uncle, Joe Calareso II — persuaded him to loosen up and make the business more self-service. My great uncle is 82 and still comes in every day. My cousin, Joe Calareso III, took the business over 17 years ago. He rebuilt what had been an old oil station with roll-up doors and push carts out front. When he moved inside, he added the flowers, primarily for curb appeal."

Musgrave, who smiles when he points out that Joe is a very popular name in the family, is related on his mother's side. "I started working here in high school a few days a week at Christmas, selling trees for extra money," he remembers. "When I went to college at Framingham State, I still worked here. After I graduated, I came back full time."

The flowers and plants are sourced all over Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey, but all the produce in the store comes from the New England Produce Center and the Boston Terminal

Market, and, indeed, the vendors on the markets speak of Calareso's in glowing terms.

"My brother-in-law, Mike Comeau, walks the terminal markets four times a week," Musgrave continues. "I go in to the market on Thursday, when we buy for the weekend, to make sure everything is OK. We offer fresh produce every day. And we're open every day except Christmas and New Year's."

He tries to explain the strong bond that propels him. "I love the customers. I love that every day is different — even when it's the same. I love the logistics. I love building the displays and seeing the customers' reactions. I don't know why I love it — I just do. You can't explain why you love your children and you can't explain this love."

Calareso's has become a shopping destination for the locals. Many of the customers who live in the surrounding communities — Stoneham, Reading and Wakefield — visit the store two or three times a week for fresh produce, baked goods and meats. "Our 'mission' statement is we offer the best quality at the best price," says Musgrave. "We're always looking to do better. We have a good reputation for moving volume. People know we have good stuff at good prices."

As we walk around the store, Musgrave greets shopper Lisa Gibbs by name. "I've been shopping here for 18 years," she says. "It's all about the people and the service. Everyone smiles and is friendly. Everyone knows everyone."

After laughingly denying she's been paid by Musgrave to sing Calareso's praises, Gibbs talks about her history with the store. "Everything is so fresh. I made my kids' baby food from the produce

here. These guys are visionaries. They're pillars of the community," she adds. "They never say no to causes. They run these customer appreciation weekends with pony rides, lots of vendors and free samples. You feel you're with your own family. And you should see this place at Christmas — it looks like a wonderland."

Customer appreciation is a major factor in the loyalty shown by patrons. According to Musgrave, "Six to eight times a year, we send out a customer appreciation flyer. It lets our customers know what's in and what's new and has coupons for the garden center, cut flowers, produce and meat."

The garden center is staged to reflect the season. In the fall, it's laden with Halloween ornaments, pumpkins, ornamental cabbages and kale, and one of the most impressive displays of potted mums in the area. Awash in color and texture, the front of the store is enticing enough to make people driving by pull in and get out of their cars. And as Gibbs says, the Christmas display is a showstopper.

Over the years, Calareso's has grown from an idiosyncratic produce stand into a neighborhood Mecca. "We started with produce, then expanded to produce and flowers and then added other items to keep up with the times," notes Musgrave. "The marinated meat program began seven or eight years ago with one display case. Within a year, we had to buy more cases because the business just took off. The cheese and dairy evolved one item at a time."

The meat program started with sausages from Dom's Sausages in Malden, MA. "Domenic Botticelli is the local purveyor," adds Musgrave. "He now provides us with private-label marinated Cryovac meats. This allows us to offer great quality without maintaining a full-service department."

Inside the store, the seductive aroma of brownies baking fills the air. Calareso's makes many of its pastries in-store, and Jessica's Brick Oven, a local artisan bakery, bakes fresh bread in the store's small bakery room under the stairs.

Supporting local businesses and organizations is part and parcel of Calareso's DNA. "We try to buy as local as we can, but we don't have a lot of great farm connections," explains Musgrave. "We get a taste of it, but many of them go into CSAs [Community Supported Agriculture] and then our relationship ends.

"We support local charities and organizations," he continues. "We do sponsorship

**"I love the customers. I love that every day is different — even when it's the same. I love the logistics. I love building the displays and seeing the customers' reactions. I don't know why I love it — I just do. You can't explain why you love your children and you can't explain this love."**

— Joe Musgrave

ads, product donations to races, plants for events, etc. We offer schools and scouting groups a percentage off program."

The community obviously appreciates all these efforts because the business is expanding. "We're building a new location just up the block," he says. "There will be 8,000 feet of retail space — we now have 2,300. We're looking to open in March, 2012. We now have four managers and over 50 employees and we're hiring for the new store."

Building this business has taken a long time, but it's always operated under a simple credo, according to Musgrave. "We

have a positive outlook — every day will get better. This is a classic American success story."

**pb**

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# Almonds Ring Up Year Round Sales

As consumers focus on healthful snacking, it's a prime time to promote almonds in produce. **BY MELINDA GOODMAN**



Almonds, sold in a variety of ways and pack sizes, are growing in popularity, thanks to the nut's positive health message.

**W**ith healthy snacking front of mind and consumers looking for portion-controlled, natural foods, almonds have earned an A+ with consumers, and are ringing up sales for growers and retailers.

What's more, this year's crop is ready to meet the needs of eager consumers. Robert Rocha, sales manager of Clovis, CA-based P-R Farms Inc., reports this year's harvest looks promising, despite some challenging weather early in the season. "California volume continues to grow to meet demand, and this season's harvest, although slightly later than normal, is excellent quality and size," Rocha details.

And demand is high. In fact, the USDA notes an increase in per-capita consumption every year for the past five years, and the marketing boards, shippers and retailers are doing their part to maintain the trend.

Both Innova Market Research and Mintel report that almonds are the No. 1 ingredient nut, and products containing almonds have increased by 30 percent.

The produce department is making sure they get their fair share of sales, too. In fact, Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral at Carson, CA-based Bristol Farms with

13 units, reports that almonds are a Top Five item, thanks to both packaged and bulk displays, as well as active cross-merchandising with other partner items like wine and cheese.

So why the overwhelming popularity? It seems that almonds possess a quadruple threat of attributes including flavor, health benefits, availability and affordability. Jared Smith, sales and marketing manager at Fisher Nut Co. of Modesto, CA, remarks, "With the price of competing tree nuts at an all-time high, almonds remain the most attractively priced tree nut in the category. This, along with compelling health messages, and a variety of new products featuring almonds, helps raise consumer awareness and interest in the product to create strong demand."

## Healthy Snacking

Packaged Facts reports that the snack food industry does over \$70 billion in sales annually and continues to grow. At Snaxpo 2011, which took place in Orlando, FL, earlier this year, Symphony IRI Group presented findings that health and wellness was one of five key trends driving the snack food industry, with over 71 percent of consumers reporting that they are trying to eat healthier. The Modesto-based Almond Board of California has worked tire-

lessly to spread the message about the health benefits of almonds and promote this "superfood" to the masses. Just one trip to the commodity's website provides an array of information about the healthy benefits of almonds.

Kristine Lorusso, category manager for Roundy's Supermarkets Inc., in Milwaukee, WI, comments, "Almonds are a truly year-round snacking option. We build both large stair-step displays and smaller splash displays that include health-focused POS materials." Lorusso adds, "The reinforcement of health messages while consumer shop the produce department helps encourage impulse sales."

## New Flavors And New Products

As the snack industry grows, it is driven by new products and flavors, and the nut industry is no different. Blue Diamond Growers of Sacramento, CA, has long been a leader in the development of new products. The company contends that identifying new flavors is key to continued growth. This is witnessed in its Blue Diamond Bold line of products, which include a variety of ethnic flavors such as Wasabi, Habanero and Lime & Chili. Blue Diamonds' director of consumer retail marketing for North America, Al Greenlee, remarks, "At retail, we are seeing consumers shift toward

bolder, spicier flavors, while maintaining their concern for healthy foods that are simple, unprocessed and taste good.”

However, flavors alone don't drive the category. Identification of new products through consumer segmentation and packaging is also key to category growth. To that end, Bakersfield CA-based Paramount Farms has adopted a sophisticated approach to sizing that allows the company to focus more on the right products for the right markets at the right price. One of its newest products is the grab-and-go, bite-size Wonderful Mini Almonds in roasted salted, roasted unsalted and raw.

### Every Season Is Almond Season

Both shippers and retailers acknowledge that the fall and winter holidays have typically been the busiest promotional time period for almonds, but times are changing. With almonds gaining additional usage as snacks and finding even greater use in day-to-day recipes, they are less dependent on holiday entertaining and baking.

Marc Seguin, Paramount's senior marketing director for North America comments, "Our goal is to focus on the macro trend of healthy snackers and build a year-round strategy that smoothes out the promotional highs and lows. Our test marketing with branded campaigns and off-season advertising has proven that almond seasonality is a myth easily dismissed by creating year-round sales opportunities."

David Smith, assistant produce director for Piggly Wiggly LLC, a Charleston-based South Carolina retailer, echoes that sentiment. "We still promote almonds during the October - January time period and do a lot of cross-merchandising with key baking items, but our switch to a branded almond program has created incremental sales throughout the year," he recognizes. "The addition of a variety of consumer packages, in-store POS and consumer advertising creates high brand awareness that drives sales, and gets almonds in the cart."

### Awareness For Almonds

Almonds are doing well thanks in part to the nut's on-trend positioning. But getting the word out is still critical to consumer awareness and ongoing success. Both Blue Diamond Growers and Paramount Farms use social media to engage consumers in a two-way dialogue and share information, and each have thousands of online fans. Additionally, both companies, as well as the Almond Board of California, recognize that almonds cross all demographic boundaries and as such, tailor

their marketing accordingly. From mini almonds targeting moms and kids, to gluten-free recipes on YouTube or commercials on ESPN that target the male sports fan, the reach of almonds has no limits, and technology is key to eliminating boundaries.

Blue Diamond's Greenlee details how the company is leveraging new QR code technology. "Consumer awareness of QR codes and Smart phone penetration is higher than ever," he says. "These new thresholds allow us to employ QR codes on advertising, FSI's and in-store POS to create a richly interactive

experience that allows consumers to download an almond recipe directly to their Smart phones." It's clear the recipe approach works: The Almond Board's YouTube channel features 15 recipes with nearly 10,000 views.

Seguin of Paramount Farms sums up the almond opportunity best. "The produce department is the highest traffic location in the store and cart-stopping displays create impulse purchases. The small footprint necessary for an almond display is low labor, zero shrink and high revenue throughout the year. Why wouldn't you take advantage of it?" **pb**

The advertisement features a central image of a clear plastic bag of almonds with a red and white label that says "ALMONDS" and "MARIANI". The bag is surrounded by a large quantity of almonds scattered across a white background. The words "THINK CLEARLY" are written in large, bold, red, block letters across the middle of the image. Below this, the words "THINK CLEARLY" are repeated in a smaller font, with each letter of the words formed by a cluster of almonds. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a text box with the following text: "Introducing our new clear bag. Now all of our products come in either foil bags or clear bags, so you can decide what's best for your customers. Scan the code to find out more." Below this text is the website address "www.marianinut.com". In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for "MARIANI Product of California" with a small green leaf icon.

# RETAIL'S FOOD SAFETY CHALLENGES



**W**hat is important to the long run success of retailers? The mission statements of most companies will list achieving profit and growth for the shareholders, closely followed by employees and customers, and sometimes includes the community. How these benchmarks are emphasized is often dependant on how a company views and adapts to the global events and changing trends affecting its

business.

Growing up in the Rochester area, New York's agricultural outskirts provided an opportunity to view two vastly different organizations from the end of World War II until the present. One, Eastman Kodak, was the largest in the area with a workforce exceeding 35,000, all making above-average incomes with substantial bonuses because of the successful photographic industry. By the 1980s, employment had grown to 60,000 in metro Rochester alone. But as the digital camera invented at Kodak in 1975 was left to gather dust since it didn't fit the business plan, employment worldwide dropped to 20,000 by 2010 and continues declining.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Wegman's opened its first 20,000-square-foot store in 1930 where my parents often shopped. By 1953, total full-time company employment barely exceeded 350. In contrast to Kodak, today's employment exceeds 32,000 as the company has expanded its reach from New England to Virginia, becoming the 28th largest North America food retailer.

Granted, in a family-held company, investments can focus without concern for shareholder second-guessing about each quarterly sales and earnings report. Therefore, it is not surprising the company would spend over two and a half million dollars for the training of approximately 600 new employees to open its latest store in western suburban Boston.

With this kind of business commitment, Wegman's management also stays aware of trends important to the consumer. Quickly recognizing the importance of food safety to today's consumer mindset, Wegman's contributed a quarter of a million dollars to the Center for Produce Safety.

The challenge for the rest of the food retailing community is to become accountable, recognizing the compound loss of sales and profit from foodborne illness. Overall, it is not a specific product as much as multiple similar events that create a fear persona about the overall purchase of the healthful fresh fruit and vegetable category.

The dollar loss from this potential problem can far outweigh the cost of developing and implementing programs enhancing the level of produce safety. Retailers should be aware of how involvement and interaction with these programs throughout the distribution chain from grower to consumer will provide a long-term cost benefit.

Often, contributions toward food safety programs become viewed as a cost, reducing profits reported to shareholders. However, an investment of .0025 percent per million dollars profit equals only \$2,500. The suggested contribution for a company with a hundred million dollars in profit would equal \$250,000 for the Center for Produce Safety. Based on 2011 fiscal year profits, Kroger would have a potential contribution of \$2.8 million, or less than the equivalent of one cent a share. The contribution standard for Publix would be similar. Then, consider the potential from Wal-Mart.

This context reflects the low cost investment for insurance destined to provide greater consumer confidence toward the purchase of healthy food from a department among the most profitable in the store.

The executive director of the CPS has stated the three-year-old Center began looking at product research and has now moved down the chain to processing research. With substantially greater financial resources, perhaps it's time to also include research interaction of retail operations with procurement and traceability programs, as well as related consumer

marketing promotion. Given retailer hypothetical contributions, it might be worthwhile establishing an adjunct retail produce center based at one of the more Eastern universities, such as Michigan State or Cornell University.

Steve Jobs, when he was not at the helm of Apple, once commented the company became more interested in making money than making great product. Subsequently, he proved making great product made many times more money. He was an innovator who could look into the future related to the present and come up with what he called "giving the market what it wants before the market knows what it wants." iTunes is a perfect example.

At the latest PMA Summit, Bryan Silbermann outlined a current consumer priority list built around survival economics. But there is a disconnect among retail price, quality and flavor value propositions. The need is for supply chain consistency from grower to retailer to consumer identifying and satisfying what the market really wants.

Produce is more than a commodity business. Produce safety is not a cost, per say, but should be part of a company's culture. Now is the time for food retailers to share accountability and meet their responsibility in the food safety challenge. Fifty more Wegman's are needed. **pb**

**The challenge for the ... food retailing community is to become accountable, recognizing the compound loss of sales and profit from foodborne illness.**

By Dave Diver

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



# THE CHANGING TIDE OF TRANSPORTATION

Interview conducted by Mira Slott, *Perishable Pundit* investigator and special projects editor



**R**ichard Bright, editor and managing director of *Reefer Trends*, traveled from the United Kingdom to discuss a variety of transportation and logistics issues during last month's New York Produce Show and Conference. Prior to his presentation, *Perishable Pundit* Investigator and Special Projects Editor, Mira Slott, got a preview of his thoughts.

For those who missed the presentation or are interested in learning more, below is an excerpt from Slott's interview with him, originally published in the October 20th edition of Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*.

**Q: What are the key issues discussed at The New York Produce Show and Conference?**

**A:** The fresh produce business in Europe and in the U.S. is going through profound change — a revolution wouldn't be an exaggeration. Previously in model A, the supply chain was more or less controlled to a large extent by supplier nations. This is best exemplified by the large "board" operations of Enza in New Zealand and Capespan in South Africa running as a single channel, where the power was held by the supplier nations.

With the dissolution of those two boards in particular, the landscape has changed quite dramatically for major fruit agencies in South Africa and New Zealand. Now, instead of the consolidated constricts, you have a much more fragmented structure. As a result, it's much easier for customers in Europe to go directly to producers and importers.

**Q: How are these changes manifesting themselves in the international trading environment?**

**A:** With globalization of the retail sector, retailers have become even more powerful. Also, they are looking for ways to increase their margins. The biggest way to do that, unless you pay suppliers less and charge consumers more, is to cut costs out of the supply chain.

**Q: Could you discuss the trend toward direct sourcing from a logistics perspective? Do you see growth in containerization and the rising influence of container lines as a catalyst to direct sourcing of fresh produce?**

**A:** There is a dramatic increase in container ships being built and an equally dramatic rise in the amount of reefer equipment being manufactured. In contrast, the order book for specialized reefers is empty. The principal advantage of the container over the reefer ship is that the unit of shipment is reduced: instead of requiring, say, a critical mass of 3,000 pallets to justify a sailing, all you need is 20 pallets. The change has freed up a lot of exporters and producers who want to ship direct to market. More importantly, it has freed up customers who would like to source direct and not have to buy from importers and distributors.

But also, fragmentation of the industry has given retailers much more power. In the old model, the retailer would say it would like to pay this price for grapes this week. Now, the retailer controls the price and says, "We're paying you this amount." The balance of power has shifted. And the huge increase in reefer equipment has become a catalyst.

**Q: How entrenched is this power shift you're describing? And who will it affect most? Are there particular commodities or suppliers at more risk? What does this mean for companies throughout the produce supply chain?**

**A:** It's starting to happen now and will continue to happen. The principle consequence is the sector of the floating fridge reefer ship will disappear. It's less cost efficient than the container.

It will limit the number of options of suppliers to market and will have the most impact on companies in the Southern Hemisphere and the possible disappearance of brand, increasing power held by the retailers. Another result is that it will keep costs low.

**Q: Is there still a place for reefer ships in certain instances?**

**A:** Major fruit commodities will be impacted most, obviously bananas, apples, citrus, avocados, kiwi fruit and grapes. As far as the U.S. market, major suppliers' counter-seasonal program is with Chile, and the majority of products still come from reefer ships, on a pallet-to-pallet basis.

**Q: Why is that? Is product quality affected by form of transport based on commodity or trade route?**

**A:** It's a contentious issue. If you talk to surveyors, they claim containers on a pallet basis are inferior to reefer ships. That is changing and the quality gap is much, much smaller. I think quality issues will dissipate and be a non-issue over time.

In Europe, the conversion from reefer ships will be faster than for the U.S. as developments are progressing at an accelerated pace over here.

**Q: As this conversion unfolds, what should produce industry executives prepare to encounter?**

**A:** It is in the process of taking place now, so there is a learning curve on the true impacts. I would speculate that over time the major implication is that the middleman distributor with his margins will be sidelined and the reefer ships will disappear. Ideally, suppliers could take lessons on the paradigm of Zespri, how it is organized, with its state regulations, where more money goes to suppliers, and the producers are wealthy. It's completely different than anything in the world, but also almost impossible to duplicate.

**Q: How does a changing retail environment influence this phenomenon? For example, in the U.S., could a resurgence of regional chains and independents strengthen the need for middlemen and distributors? Wouldn't smaller chains in a more fragmented market find it financially and logistically untenable to source direct on a global scale?**

**A:** In the UK and Europe, there is still very much consolidation. Bigger retailers are still getting bigger and medium and smaller stores are disappearing.

In this country, the big retailers are building out-of-town complexes and putting all the smaller, less efficient grocers, fishmongers and butchers out of business in the UK. And this is the case in Continental Europe as well. In the end, the logistical element of the supply chain generates the most cost. These retailers have the resources to keep costs low, and ultimately, it's the cost that drives consumers.

# GOOD NEIGHBORS

Gene Fabio began working at J. Bonafede Co. Inc. in 1982, following his graduation from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School. "My grandfather, John Bonafede, started the company in 1912. We are preparing to celebrate our 100th anniversary next year, so it's a very exciting time around here," says Fabio. Gene is now the president of J. Bonafede, and runs it with the help of his brother Butch.

"When I joined the family business, I came to work for my two uncles, John and Peter," recalls Fabio. "They are still active in the business and enjoy coming to work. Back then, we were located at 15 New England Produce Center. But my Uncle John [pictured second from right, with Gene to his right] sold our bays to Lou [D'Alleva, the current vice president at Garden Fresh Salad Co. Inc.] and moved to 29 New England Produce Center. We took this photo in 1984, before we moved bays. We're still good friends — and neighbors — with Lou [pictured third from right]."

The company has always had a strong base in tropicals, selling products such as bananas, *yucca*, plantain, *cassava*, tamarind, guava, sugar cane, etc. While the company's clientele has changed over the past century, its core business remains the same. "Our business has evolved in that the smaller customers we generally serve have become more ethnic," explains Fabio. "The variety of produce we offer is far more diverse to serve the new cultures arriving in the neighborhood. Our customers, with their small, independent stores, reflect the changing tide of the immigrant population."



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

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