

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

IMPORT TRENDS



Chefs & Consumers Drive Import Growth

Wider Assortments From More Countries

Year-Round Availability For Berries, Citrus, And Cherries

Hispanic Demand Sparks More Mango And Avocado Imports

Global Harmonization For Produce Trade

INSERT



FLORAL BUSINESS MAGAZINE

EXCLUSIVE



NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT PMA'S STATE-OF-THE-INDUSTRY ADDRESS
SUPER BOWL MARKETING • CHILEAN FRUIT • POTATO & ONION SALES
ALMONDS • THE PATH TO PTI
PRODUCE KIT TRENDS
VEGETABLE OPTIONS ON MENUS
BOSTON MARKET PROFILE



Dole leads the way in nutritional education, helping consumers to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

The DOLE brand is synonymous with high quality and safety standards for fresh fruit and vegetables.





COVER STORY

24 5 TOP IMPORT TRENDS
 Anything is possible for the future, but based on current circumstances, experts around the globe believe in the strong gravitation toward these five trends.

COMMENTARY

8 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT
 DC Lacks What Bob Carey Had: Humility

118 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE
 'Rules Of Retail' (Part III)

119 EUROPEAN MARKET
 Building Bridges For The Produce Industry

120 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY
 The Path to PTI: How Technology Vendors are Addressing Produce Traceability Initiatives

IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 THE QUIZ**
- 6 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE**
- 10 PRODUCE WATCH**
- 16 TRADE SHOW CALENDAR**
- 20 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**
- 21 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**
- 22 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**
- 121 INFORMATION SHOWCASE**
- 122 BLAST FROM THE PAST**

FEATURES

34 SCORE A TOUCHDOWN WITH SUPER BOWL MERCHANDISING
 From avocados to flowers, retailers can capitalize on winter's ultimate football feeding frenzy by planning now.

38 HEAT UP SALES OF WINTER PRODUCE FROM MEXICO
 Increase winter revenues from Mexico-sourced items with a little extra promotion focus.

46 CHILE: WINTER PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY STILL ABOUNDS
 Retailers are encouraged to continue to plan and execute promotions on key items.

83 MERCHANDISING PROGRAMS TO SELL MORE POTATOES & ONIONS
 Industry experts discuss traditional and unique ways to merchandise, promote, and sell more potatoes and onions.

DEPARTMENTS

DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS

115 Breaking The Almond Barrier
 Industry breaks through seasonal and snacking nut stigma with new uses and merchandising versatility in produce departments.

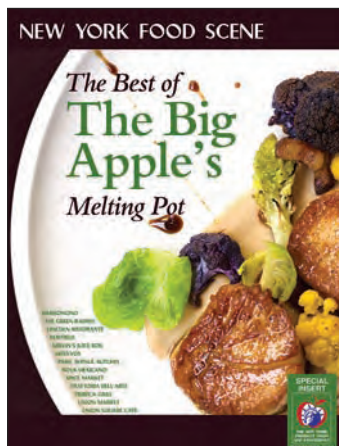
SPECIAL REPORT

90 TREND TRACKER: NEW KITS MAKE PRODUCE PREPARATION FASTER AND EASIER

EXCLUSIVE

NEW YORK FOOD SCENE: THE BEST OF THE BIG APPLE'S MELTING POT

As produce shifts to the center-of-the-plate star of New York's eclectic food scene, 13 various foodservice operators share how they bring fruits and vegetables to the main stage.



p. 51

FLORAL BUSINESS MAGAZINE

- **Buying Power: How Small Chains And Independents Vie For Value**
- **Broadening Your Customer Base**
- **Is 2014 The Comeback Year For Foliage**



p. 83

SPECIAL FEATURES

17 FROM THE PAGES OF THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT
 PMA's State Of Industry Address Makes The Case For Women In Executive Positions: But Is This Analysis Or Advocacy?

94 ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS: HONG KONG FOOD MARKET
 The 3,000 sq. ft. produce department, with over 200 fruits and vegetables contributing over 30 percent of total dollar sales, caters to New Orleans' Asian residents.

99 REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE: BOSTON
Scratching A Niche
 The wholesalers on the Boston produce terminal markets have developed, maintained and grow their businesses to meet the demands of the area's retail and foodservice sectors.

111 FOODSERVICE PROFILE: Deuxave Restaurant And Bar
 Produce shines on the menu of this friendly Boston restaurant.

113 BOSTON RETAIL PROFILE: Roch's Fresh Foods
 Unique family arrangement works to fill a retail niche for generations of Rhode Islanders.

REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Buzzy Blyer
Sales Manager
Makoto Dressing, Inc.
Melbourne, FL

Sales manager Buzzy Blyer has been working for Makoto Dressing Inc. in Melbourne, FL, for five years. He manages everything from direct sales, to accounts, and partnerships with brokers, to gain distribution and promotions.

"We are a supplier of ginger-based dressing and marinades," Blyer says.

Blyer has been a part of the produce industry for most of his career.

"I've worked for several other companies along the way," Blyer says. He was with Sun Giant Raisins in the 80s. "Then I moved to Ready Pac Foods (Irwindale, CA). I worked for them for a while and some smaller companies in between," Blyer explains.

Blyer says he has been reading Produce Business for a long time. "I get the issue each month, and I always read it," Blyer says. "I like to read about how the different chains are doing and how different categories are doing."

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) What is the telephone number for Red Blossom? _____
- 2) What are the three locations for Vision Import Group? _____
- 3) What is the website address for Florida Natural? _____
- 4) How many tons of blueberries does the Chilean Blueberry Committee project for exports this season? _____
- 5) In what year did Andrew Duda and his family bring their first cash crop of celery to the market? _____
- 6) What is the booth number for New York Apple Country at The New York Produce Show and Conference? _____

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NEW NEONICOTINOID LABELING BURDENS PRODUCE INDUSTRY

By Ray Gilmer
United Fresh Produce Association Vice President of Issues
Management & Communication

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) decision to issue new warning labels for neonicotinoids to protect bees has rocked many in the produce industry, and United Fresh is voicing its concern to lawmakers and EPA regulators. The new labels, which include a new bee advisory box, prohibit the use of neonicotinoids (a relatively new class of insecticides that share a common mode of action affecting the central nervous system of insects, resulting in paralysis and death) when bees are present and when plants and trees are flowering. The EPA also requires that growers applying these neonicotinoids contact local beekeepers prior to the application. Industry leaders argue that these new restrictions will be incredibly difficult to follow, particularly the requirement to contact local beekeepers, who often operate without notice to growers.

The onus seems to be placed on growers and applicators to notify beekeepers in advance, and industry members are concerned that there doesn't seem to be any reciprocity in information sharing and communication. In many cases, producers have no way to identify beekeepers in their area, much less the information needed to contact them. For this reason, the industry is very supportive of a national registry of apiaries.

Developing a national registry of apiaries may not be as daunting as it sounds. The Montana Department of Agriculture is already registering honeybee producers in its state. Its website provides a map of apiary locations in Montana. Likewise, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture maintains an Apiary Registration System. The EPA and/or USDA could maintain a national registry of apiaries that provides not only a map of beekeepers across the U.S., but also a list of contact names with associated phone numbers or email addresses. This would facilitate open communication between producers and beekeepers, which in turn would offer greater protection for

local bee colonies.

Industry leaders also question whether the EPA has sufficient scientific evidence to support these new pesticide label restrictions. In 2013, EPA and USDA published a joint report, *National Stakeholders Conference on Honey Bee Health*, which disclosed that many factors contributed to the decline in the honeybee population in North America. These factors included the loss of habitat, parasites and disease, genetics, poor nutrition and pesticide exposure. The report mentioned the Varroa mite as a particular concern.

Opponents of the new labeling law agree that the recent decline in the honeybee population is due to multiple stressors, but exposure to agrochemicals is not a major factor. They cite large-scale field studies conducted in the U.S., Canada, Belgium, France and Germany that found poor bee health was associated with the presence of the Varroa mite and bee diseases, but not with the presence of pesticides. Long-term feeding studies with one of the neonicotinoids requiring a warning label showed no effect on bee mortality, weight gain, longevity, brood development, honey yield, or overwintering survival when applied properly in the field. These results help explain why it is imperative that the EPA consider the entire breadth of research when creating new regulations.

EPA's labeling requirements would apply to foliar use applications of four neonicotinoid products that are widely used by producers – imidacloprid (marketed as Admire Pro by Bayer CropScience), dinotefuran (marketed as Venom by Valent U.S.A), chlothianidin (marketed as Belay by Valent U.S.A), and thiamethoxam (marketed as Platinum and Actara by Syngenta Crop Protection).

Producers argue that neonicotinoids offer critical benefits that cannot be replaced by other pesticides. Neonicotinoids are less toxic than many older chemicals they replaced. They also effectively control pests, such as whiteflies,

Asian citrus psyllid, glassy-winged sharpshooter and leafminers, which have become resistant to other insecticides and helped reduce the number of applications required, thus lowering the total amount of product used in the environment. "Neonicotinoids have a much lower mammalian toxicity than some of the products once used, which is one reason why they have been so readily adopted by farmers," says Nasser Dean, stakeholder relations manager for Bayer CropScience.

The EPA continuously reviews all registered pesticides to determine if they meet evolving data requirements, as established in the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), which states that these chemicals do not cause unreasonably adverse effects to humans or the environment. As part of this process, the EPA sent a letter to all registrants of the affected neonicotinoid products, which required them to disclose any known adverse incidents involving pollinators, particularly honeybees and bumblebees.

United Fresh Produce Association and the produce industry are working with regulatory authorities to ensure that as this review process continues, the EPA will continue to rely on sound scientific principles in guiding future regulations. United and producer leaders are advocating that the EPA use a robust science-based risk assessment process to determine the potential risk posed by neonicotinoids, and not on emotional pressures exerted by those opposed to modern pest management tools. "These new EPA label restrictions on neonicotinoid pesticides will seriously affect pest management strategies for many produce industry growers," says Robert Guenther, senior vice president of public policy for the association. United will continue to speak out on behalf of the produce industry and make sure EPA officials and Congress know how these policies impact our growers.



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DC LACKS WHAT BOB CAREY HAD: HUMILITY

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



As the year winds to a close, there is an unsettling spirit in the air. Healthcare, which has been a problem for a long time, seems to be more of a mess than ever. Our deal with the Iranians has more than a whiff of 1938 Munich in it, so gives the unsettling feeling that we may have bought “peace for our time” but only if we are thinking of exiting soon. In the Pacific, a resurgent China demands extraterritorial rights at the expense

of Japan, so we make a show of flying B-52s through the disputed zone but *sotto voce* tell our commercial aircraft to respect the zone.

Of course, every generation has its challenges and it would be self-aggrandizing to think ours are greater than those faced by previous generations. Yet just as psychologists tell us that what children most need and want is a sense that grown-ups are in charge, so what makes the current situation so difficult is a sense that the people and institutions that compose our nation’s leadership are, in fact, not up to the challenges that confront us.

For some this is personal. They see in our President neither the conviction of our righteousness nor the willingness to fight that they consider essential. They see a world in which many countries — Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, to name a few — voluntarily foreswore nuclear weapons because these countries operated under the Pax Americana, with the American nuclear umbrella and conventional military might being their shield. In a new world, where that shield is uncertain, all these countries and more will have nuclear weapons, and that will be a more dangerous and less stable world.

Others see the problem as institutional. Divided power as between the Republican-led House and Democratic-led Senate obstructs the ability of government to work at the speed expected in a digital age. Legacy institutions such as the United States Senate give disproportionate weight to rural and agrarian sectors of society. Lifetime tenure for judges restrains the implementation of progressive ideas.

One might see the problem differently, as a kind of failure of character, in which short term interests supersede longer term considerations. The recent decision of the Democratic majority in the United States Senate to change the rules to prevent filibusters of judges and most executive appointments is a case in point. Whether the filibuster should exist at all and certainly whether it should be used on executive appointments is an issue on which men of good will may differ. The problem is that nobody in the whole country believes that this change was a result of deep reflection on the nature of filibusters; they see it as short-term maneuvering for immediate advantage.

Indeed, it was President Obama himself who, when as a Senator confronted with the same proposal by Republicans in 2005, said on the

senate floor: “I urge my Republican colleagues not to go through with changing these rules. In the long run it is not a good result for either party. One day, Democrats will be in the majority again and this rule change will be no fairer to a Republican minority than it is to a Democratic minority.”

When the 22nd Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed, its purpose was to limit Presidents to two terms after Franklin Roosevelt broke the tradition George Washington had established of limiting tenure to eight years. Yet that amendment contains these lines: “...this article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.” In other words, this amendment was not passed as a device to prevent Harry Truman from running for President multiple times. It was passed because of the considered long-term judgment of our political leadership that multiple Presidential terms were, as

Republican New York governor and Presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey proclaimed, “...the most dangerous threat to our freedom ever proposed.”

So if a group of Senators gets together to reflect on the filibuster and wants to propose a change effective with the next President, that would be statesmanship. In

other words, if they were prepared to vote for this change without knowing if their party or philosophy would get advantage from it, that would indicate civic-mindedness. Instead we see them all as hacks, doing short term things for short term gains and not building a better country.

No one expects that men shall be angels, and thanks to James Madison and his ilk, we have a government designed to frustrate those who are not, but those who think that one can entirely separate character from leadership misunderstand the nature of both.

The produce industry lost a man of exemplary character and an extraordinary leader this month when Bob Carey, longtime leader of the Produce Marketing Association, passed away. Back in those days the association didn’t pay much. Bob joined the Reserves because he didn’t have a pension plan, so leaders in his day had to have non-pecuniary motivations.

Bob was wise and funny and supported this columnist and this magazine in its early years because he supported everything that might help the industry. The great character trait he had, often missing from political leaders, is humility. He once told this columnist to never worry about getting credit for one’s work; if you do the right things, for the right reasons, those who need to know, will come to know. It was as wise advice as I have ever received, and I earnestly try to follow it. I wish Bob were still here and we could fund a trip especially for him: Mr. Carey Goes to Washington.

pb

What makes the current situation so difficult is a sense that the people and institutions that compose our nation’s leadership are, in fact, not up to the challenges that confront us.

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TRANSITIONS

READY PAC FOODS, INC. IRWINDALE, CA

Ready Pac Foods, Inc. announces **Tony Sarsam** will serve as its new chief executive officer, effective immediately. The hiring of Sarsam concludes a thorough search process that began earlier this year following the retirement announcement of Ready Pac's former CEO, Michael Solomon.



WEST PAK AVOCADO, INC. MURRIETA, CA

West Pak Avocado, Inc. announces the hiring of **Neal Cunningham**. Cunningham joins West Pak's sales team based in Murrieta, CA, where he will be responsible for expanding the company's sales in the United States. In his prior sales roles, Cunningham has been involved in all aspects of new business development, customer retention and growth, customer service, and account management.



Ready Pac Foods Inc. promotes **Rick Montoya** as its new vice president of the Retail Specialties division. Montoya held the role of Procurement Manager for the Retail Specialties division since 2008.



SEALD SWEET INTERNATIONAL VERO BEACH, FL

Seald Sweet International welcomes industry veteran **Mark Lewis** as he returns to its team following an 18-month medical leave of absence. Effective now, Lewis is re-appointed executive vice president of Seald Sweet. Lewis' expertise will continue to complement and strengthen Seald Sweet's global growth.

Ready Pac Foods Inc. also promotes **Sean McClure** as Procurement Manager of the Retail Specialties division. McClure began his career with Ready Pac's Retail Specialties division as a Merchandiser in 1999, and was promoted to Buyer in 2001 and Senior Buyer in 2006.



TO-JO MUSHROOMS, INC. AVONDALE, PA

To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc. announces that **John Cunningham** joins the company as a national accounts manager. Cunningham will manage To-Jo's existing Food Products customer base and will develop new National Accounts that can benefit from To-Jo's extensive line of processed mushroom products.



To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc. also announces **Julie Petrovick's** promotion to director of strategic plan implementation. Petrovick has been promoted to facilitate implementation of the company's new strategic plan. She will work with the company's executives coordinating the strategic direction, implementation, and measurement of goals set by management.



To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc. announces **Peter Wilder** has been appointed to marketing director at the company. In his new role, Wilder will be responsible for the implementation of an integrated marketing and communications strategy for the company that will guide both the Fresh and the Food Products divisions of the company.



GOURMET TRADING COMPANY LOS ANGELES, CA

Gourmet Trading Company hires **Caylan Gingerich** as its East Coast procurement director. Gingerich grew up in Oregon on a blueberry and hazelnut farm. After studying International Business at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, she returned to the family farm to partake in hazelnut harvest.



She then worked at Giumarra Companies in sales for a year.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

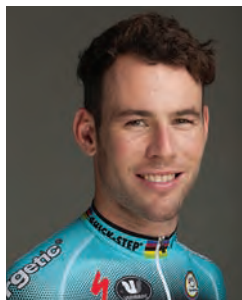
GRANT J. HUNT'S ADDS SPICE TO ORANGE BAG

The Grant J. Hunt Company, Oakland, CA, introduced a California Orange/Tajín Seasoning bag at PMA's Fresh Summit in New Orleans. The 4-pound bag features California Navel or Valencia oranges — depending upon the season. It also includes two Tajín-brand seasoning packets that contain a mix of chili peppers, sea salt and dehydrated lime.



PRO CYCLIST CHOOSES AMERICAN PISTACHIOS AS OFFICIAL SNACK

During the annual harvest for U.S. pistachio farmers, American Pistachio Growers of Fresno, CA, announced the addition of British pro cyclist Mark Cavendish MBE to its world-class athletic ambassador team. Cavendish declared the nutritious, American-grown pistachio nut as his "Official Snack."





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ABATE FETEL PEARS MAKE U.S. DEBUT

The first load of Abate Fellet pears arrived in the U.S. in time for the 2013 edition of the PMA's Fresh Summit. There was a special pear-tasting event featuring the Abate Fellet at the conference, and the pears were presented in a simple recipe showcasing the unique flavor of this variety. The event was hosted by the European Flavors stand.

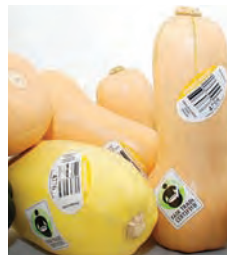
MICHAEL SCHUTT OF RALEY'S HONORED

The National Mango Board, Orlando, FL, honors Michael Schutt of Sacramento, CA-based Raley's Supermarkets as its 2013 Mango Retailer of the Year. Schutt won the top honor because he exemplified a certain criteria that results in outstanding mango sales and volume results for Raley's. He initiated training programs at both the store and distribution center levels to ensure mangos were handled and merchandised effectively.



RBEST PRODUCE MOVES HEADQUARTERS PORT WASHINGTON, NY

The owners of RBest Produce Inc. (originally based in the Bronx) joined Nassau County's Executive Edward P. Mangano at a ceremony to celebrate the grand opening of the company's new corporate headquarters and warehouse in Port Washington — a move made possible by the assistance of the county executive's economic development team.



GIUMARRA ADDS ORGANIC WINTER SQUASH

Giumarra, Los Angeles, CA, announces the expansion of its line of Fair Trade Certified fresh produce with the addition of USDA Certified Organic and conventional acorn, butternut, and spaghetti squash. The squash is grown in Mexico and is available now through March to meet consumer demand for the winter holidays.

HARVEST FOR CMI'S KIKU BRAND APPLES IS COMPLETE

Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, announces that harvest is done and KIKU brand apples are ready to ship from its growing/shipping partners, Rice Fruit Company, located in Gardners, PA — the heart of Pennsylvania's orchard country. KIKU brand apples come from select growers in strategic regions across the U.S.



COLORFUL HARVEST MAKES A DEAL

Salinas, CA-based Colorful Harvest LLC announces that founding members Doug Ranno, Tom Remick, David Knudsen, and Art Davis (together owning a 60 percent interest in the company) sold their shares to The Andrew Smith Company and remaining founding member Jeffrey Sholl, giving each a 50 percent interest.



DOLE WILL 'PEEL MORE LOVE' IN 2014

Dole, Westlake Village, CA, announces that it will make the "Peel the Love" campaign even more fun in 2014. Beyond extending this year's tour a month past its originally scheduled Labor Day finale, Dole is bringing back an expanded "Peel the Love" effort in 2014 featuring more recipes, retailer partners and tour stops designed to bring its eating-healthy-can-be-fun message to more of America.

GEORGIA PECAN COMMISSION ANNOUNCES CONTEST WINNER

The Georgia Pecan Commission, Perry, GA, announced the winner of its inaugural "Fall in Love with Georgia Pecans" Pin-It to Win-It contest. Charlette Bond of Livermore, CA, was randomly selected as the grand prize winner. As a result of the contest, "Likes" on the Georgia Pecan Commission's Facebook page have doubled.



HIGH DEMAND FOR PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATOES

The potato harvest in Prince Edward Island, Canada is complete, and the famous potatoes are appearing on supermarket shelves and restaurant menus across Canada and the North-eastern United States. Island potato growers are reporting a good crop of excellent quality potatoes this year.



IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION'S CHEF'S CALENDAR WINS GOLD

Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID, in conjunction with *Plate* magazine, took home top honors in the Best Achievement of Corporate Objectives—B2B Strategy for its annual Chef's Calendar. Over 30 judges assembled in New York, Washington D.C. and San Francisco to judge all 587 entries.



LOBUE CITRUS SWEETENS SWEEPSTAKES WITH DONATION

LoBue Citrus, Lindsay, CA, is celebrating the start of the Navel season with the Celebrate Citrus Sweepstakes. The sweepstakes runs now through February 28, 2014. LoBue Citrus is offering \$1,000 to three winners to spread the joy this holiday season. In addition, the LoBue family and board of directors will match each \$1,000 prize with a donation to a deserving non-profit.





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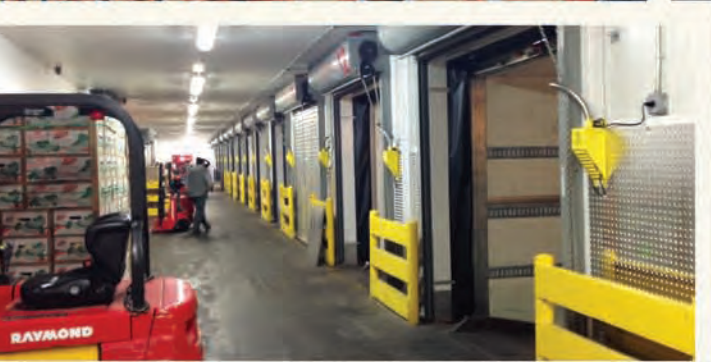
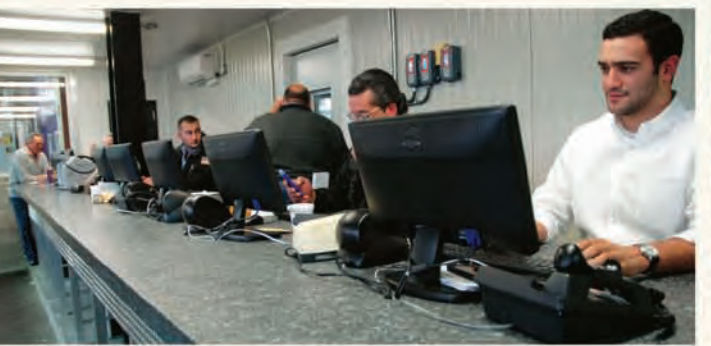
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PMA's State Of Industry Address Makes The Case For Women In Executive Positions: But Is This Analysis Or Advocacy?

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 11.12.2013

The annual State of the Industry address at PMA was for several years a speech delivered by PMA President and CEO, Bryan Silbermann. It was generally fact-checked to the nines. In recent years, however, other people have been included in the State of the Industry presentation, and the same fact-checking doesn't seem to go on. This year's presentation included a flawed claim about children consuming more fruit with Elmo's image on them. Beyond the cartoon connection with produce, though, the State of the Industry address had other presentations that raised at least as many questions as they answered.

For example, Elisa van Dam, Senior Director of Executive Education and Corporate Outreach at Simmons School of Management, which is the institution PMA works with to conduct its annual Women's Fresh Perspectives Conference, gave a speech telling the assembled why "women are good for business."

It was an odd speech because it didn't rise to the burden it assumed. In 2013, we are not aware of anyone in the industry arguing that women are incompetent or shouldn't have executive or board roles. So, in consequence, there is unanimity that if one is trying to fill a position and the best candidate available is a woman, one should hire the woman.

So the burden of a speech such as this is higher, and the argument has to be made that having women in the business is a virtue in and of itself — that hiring the best qualified person for each job is not sufficient — that there is an independent value to having women more prominent on the team that goes beyond the value of any individual. In other words, that one should hire a lesser qualified person specifically because she is a woman because having more women on the team is an independent variable and increasing that variable produces benefits.

However, this speech didn't persuasively make that case. Ms. van Dam started out by building a "financial case" which she acknowledged only proved correlation, not causation. In truth it didn't really even prove correlation in a meaningful way. Three studies were presented, all of which basically took a group of companies, for example, the Fortune 500, and determined that companies that had the highest representation of women in senior management positions did better compared to those that had fewer women in senior positions.

But this type of study isn't very helpful because all of these groupings, such as the Fortune 500, include companies from multiple industries.

It is quite possible, for example, that old industrial companies, say, coal mining or certain types of manufacturing, are both slower growing

and have not been as open to, or as attractive to, female executives as more modern organizations.

Put it another way, Facebook may have Sheryl Sandberg of *Lean In* fame as chief operating officer, and Joe's Old Fashioned TV Manufacturing Company may not have a top female executive at all — but that doesn't mean that if Joe's acquired some good female executives, it would grow like Facebook, and it doesn't mean that if Sheryl were Stanley, Facebook wouldn't have grown.

For these studies that Ms. van Dam mentioned to be meaningful, they have to be industry-specific. Otherwise they throw off more smoke than light.

Now Ms. van Dam also made what she called the "talent case," which is that roughly half the people in the world are female, so companies should look to mine this talent pool. This is both obvious and unobjectionable. One reason why, say, the Islamic world has found its comparative power and influence in the world to decline compared

to Christendom, is clearly that conservative Islamic countries don't fully utilize the talents of their women.

But, once again, the "talent case" just establishes what is now a truism: that a company would be foolish to confine its recruiting to males. It does nothing to establish that one ought to preferentially hire women.

Then Ms. van Dam makes what she calls the "market case," which basically asserts that companies should have executives that look like your customers. Since grocery

shopping, and thus produce purchases, skew heavily toward females, having more females in the executive ranks is a plus.

This sounds intuitive but, upon analysis, is quite questionable. First, it is not at all clear that Ms. van Dam is actually cautioning executives at companies whose products sell predominately to men against the dangers of hiring too many women and thus not "looking like your customers."

Second, although customers for some companies may be women, they also are many other things. They are white or black or Latino or Asian; they are senior citizens or Jewish or Muslim or Catholic or Protestant; they are high-IQ or low-IQ; they are rich or poor. Is Ms. van Dam really arguing that companies should have executive staffs that mirror their ultimate consumer base? If she is, she is certainly not presenting evidence that this produces higher profits.

Third, the notion that businesses should "look like their customers" in some way may be true, but it may not be. We have a male friend who owns a brassiere business, a successful one. How does he manage to do this? Well here is a possibility: When we were writing about Tesco's efforts to establish Fresh & Easy in America, we suggested that

We don't even mind break-out sessions which people choose to go to and where one person is presenting their views, but to subject the general session audiences to the highly biased viewpoint of one individual speaker really doesn't serve the industry.

the fact that we both spoke English was a big disadvantage.

In Thailand or Poland, Tesco knew it somehow had to listen to the locals, but in America it could assume it understood the market. Perhaps our male friend at the brassiere company has an advantage. A female might be inclined to assume that her anecdotal experience with brassieres is reflective of those of women in general or of the particular women who are customers of this firm.

Having no personal experience with the product, perhaps our friend is compelled to rely on statistically significant market research. We don't know if this is true but just going on about the importance of "looking like our customers" is not necessarily true either.

Fourth, the question of who is "the customer" is something that requires some reflection. Frieda Caplan has spoken out many times to say that she thought being a woman was an advantage — not because she looked like her customers — the ultimate consumers — but because she looked different from her customers — the retail buyers and her competitors. So she was distinctive and remembered.

Finally, Ms. van Dam makes what she calls the "effectiveness case." This relies on some studies, one in particular. Ms. van Dam puts it this way:

... ultimately, we at Simmons believe that the most important reason that women are good for business is the effectiveness case. When you have more women on a team, the team is more effective. There's a lot of research out there, but I'm just going to highlight two studies. First, there was a great article in the Harvard Business Review not too long ago. It was actually in the "defend your research" section, because the researchers were surprised by their results.

They started by giving their subjects a standard intelligence test, and then assigned them randomly to teams. Each team was asked to complete several tasks — including brainstorming, decision-making, and visual puzzles — and to solve one complex problem. Then the teams were given effectiveness scores based on their performance. What researchers thought would happen is that the teams with the highest average IQ would also have the highest effectiveness score. That didn't turn out to be the case. Instead, what they saw was that the teams that had more women had the best results.

This is interesting but, actually, not what the study found! The study, titled, *Evidence for a Collective Intelligence Factor in the Performance of Human Groups*, was a search for a collective intelligence — what makes a group smart — and that characteristic is called "C," and here is what the study actually says:

Finally, "C" was positively and significantly correlated with the proportion of females in the group ($= 0.23$, $P = 0.007$). However, this result appears to be largely mediated by social sensitivity (Sobel $z = 1.93$, $P = 0.03$), because (consistent with previous research) women in our sample scored better on the social sensitivity measure than men [$(441) = 3.42$, $P = 0.001$].

In a regression analysis with the groups for which all three variables (social sensitivity, speaking turn variance, and percent female) were available, all had similar predictive power for "C", although only social sensitivity reached statistical significance ($b = 0.33$, $P = 0.05$) (12).

In other words, what the study actually found was that individuals with high "social sensitivity" allow a group to have higher "collective intelligence" and that women, selected randomly, are more likely to have higher "social sensitivity" than randomly chosen men. However business executives, especially high ranking business executives, are most decidedly not chosen randomly. Business executives are hired

through a selection process that selects for the traits believed necessary to succeed in that particular position.

If Ms. van Dam's argument is that companies under-value social sensitivity and should make that more a priority, that is one thing, but that might not translate into more female hiring at all. People who apply or are considered for senior management positions do not reflect the median characteristics of their race or sex or religion. These are elites, and nothing in this study provides any support for the idea that a company will be more successful if it selects more women from senior management applicants.

The study itself is flawed in other ways. Although the groups were given tasks that were then graded, that is different than actually studying real-world business outcomes. For one, it may underrate the value of specific expertise. A group that works well together is all fine and good, but if the task is to develop a rocket that can go to Mars and back in some time frame or on some budget, the "winning" group might be the one with the best aeronautical engineers, not the one that has the highest collective intelligence.

Second, there may be a price paid in being so "socially sensitive." Did Steve Jobs, who was notorious for making business associates cry, succeed less than he could have, had he only been more socially sensitive? Read this description:

As early as 1987, the New York Times wrote: by the early 80's, Mr. Jobs was widely hated at Apple. Senior management had to endure his temper tantrums. He created resentment among employees by turning some into stars and insulting others, often reducing them to tears. Mr. Jobs himself would frequently cry after fights with fellow executives."

Some twenty years later, Michael Wolff's description of Jobs was a little different: "There's the mercurialness; the tantrums; the hours-long, dictator-like speeches; the famous, desperate, and transparent hogging of credit; and always the charismatic-leader complex, through which he has been able to seduce and, subsequently, abandon so many of the people he's worked with. He may be as troubled and unsocialized (and, too, as charismatic) a figure in American business life as anyone since Howard Hughes."

The notion that success in business is predicted accurately by how well groups perform on the McGrath Task Circumplex is, to be generous, unproven.

The truth is that the industry is filled with super-talented women. We would hire loads of them in a snap if we had the opportunity. The vast majority of them got to where they are and keep their positions because they are talented executives, not because their companies think they should hire less talented women just to "up" the numbers. It is actually very insulting to these accomplished women. On the industry's "up and coming" roster, women are well represented, as in this year's 40 under Forty group — where 33% selected are women — clearly demonstrates.

The question for us is why PMA thinks it is a good idea to have people lecture the industry with one-sided presentations. There is nobody at PMA with particular expertise in this subject, no reason to think PMA knows the "right answer" to these questions. So if PMA thinks these subjects worthy of exploration, then the association should arrange to explore it. Maybe conduct a debate, or a panel discussion with people of different views.

We don't even mind break-out sessions which people choose to go to and where one person is presenting their views, but to subject the general session audiences to the highly biased viewpoint of one individual speaker really doesn't serve the industry.



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Vegetable Options Increase On Restaurant Menus

GREG HOBBY, SENIOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, TECHNOMIC, INC.

Consumers have been telling restaurants for decades that they want more healthful options on menus, but historically they have rarely purchased “better-for-you dishes.” That long-term trend has been shifting slowly, and consumers are beginning to place greater importance on their eating habits.

Part of the change has to do with the way consumers define “healthy,” as many have shifted their definition from “low fat” and “low calorie” to “fresh” and “natural.” Vegetables have benefited from this evolution, as consumers and menu developers alike discover uses beyond everyday salads and side dishes.

What's Driving Demand

Consumers are placing greater pressure on restaurants to offer healthy but flavorful fare. A majority of consumers (65 percent) agree that “restaurants can offer healthy food in a way that will still taste good,” according to Technomic’s *Category Close-Up: Vegetables* report. And more than nine out of 10 consumers agree that menu items containing a full serving of vegetables are more healthy. Interestingly, nearly half (48 percent) of consumers think that having a full serving of vegetables makes a dish more tasty, compared to only 8 percent who think vegetables make a dish less tasty.

The rise in vegetarianism — and more so, flexitarianism (the practice of eating mainly vegetarian foods, but occasionally obtaining protein from meat) — has also played a role. Two-thirds of consumers agree, at least somewhat, that vegetarian meals can be just as satisfying as meat-based meals. When we asked consumers what percentage of the meals they eat, both at home and away from home, include some type of meat, poultry or seafood and what percentage do not, we found that 18 percent, or nearly one out of five meals, do not contain meat.

Even consumers who are not necessarily interested in healthy or meatless meals are likely to be interested in foods described as “local,” “natural” and “organic.” In a 2012 Technomic survey, 56 percent of consumers said they consume “local” foods at least

once a week (a figure that is up from 47 percent compared to those who surveyed the same answers two years prior). Fifty-five percent said they eat “natural” foods weekly (up from 44 percent), and 35 percent said the same of “organic” foods (up from 28 percent).

More Vegetables on Menus

These consumer demands have restaurant operators across the board adding vegetables to the menu in new applications. *Category Close-Up: Vegetables* used Technomic’s MenuMonitor online trend-tracking tool to analyze the menus of 683 of the top restaurant chains, emerging concepts and independent operators over five years.

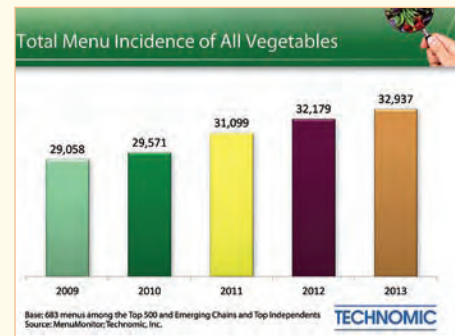
As the “Total Menu Incidence of All Vegetables” chart (above right) illustrates, incidence of all vegetables (including produce such as tomatoes, which are technically fruit but used by culinarians as vegetables) increased by 13 percent since 2009.

The data that follows is a look at different categories of vegetables and some insights from the report.

Root Vegetables: This category includes some of the most widely consumed vegetables — white potatoes, carrots and sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes and beets have shown notable increases (each up more than 75 percent over the five-year period). Both have sweet flavor characteristics, a fact that operators can exploit by offering diners options that are at once sweet and healthy.

Leafy Vegetables/Lettuces: While many of these are used as a salad base, innovative restaurant operators have taken iceberg, cabbage, arugula, kale, spinach and Brussels sprouts into center-of-the-plate options. The darling of the category is kale. While the total incidence of kale remains relatively low, it grew by almost 400 percent over the past five years. Operators have found a variety of uses for kale, including salads, “chips” and as a replacement for sautéed spinach.

Botanical Fruits, Culinary Vegetables: A number of fruits are commonly recognized as vegetables, such as avocado, bell pep-



per, eggplant, tomato, tomatillo and zucchini. Over the past five years, almost all of these have shown positive trends (with eggplant the exception). Many are commonly found in ethnic (primarily Latin-inspired) dishes. Avocados and tomatillos have posted the largest five-year growth rates within this category.

Other Vegetables: This category contains mainstream vegetables that do not fit neatly into the other categories, such as onions, asparagus and broccoli. Broccoli fared well on restaurant menus over the past five years, with gains of nearly 30 percent in incidence. Its strong performance can partially be attributed to the interest in healthier kids’ meals, as 14 percent of all broccoli mentions are kid-centric.

Key Takeaway

While many consumers still consider restaurant visits a treat and a reason to indulge, many restaurant operators are building traffic by creating options that incorporate healthful elements in an innovative, appealing and even indulgent manner. In addition to imparting a “healthy” element, fresh vegetables allow operators to add vibrant flavors and colors, making it even more appealing.

TECHNOMIC

Technomic offers a fact-based, uncompromising approach to consulting and decades of industry experience. Serving the food industry’s leading companies since 1966, Technomic’s proprietary research, trend analysis, forecasts, common-interest studies and state-of-the-industry reports fuel clients’ business and marketing plans. It is the “go-to” source for food and foodservice industry data, intelligence and commentary.

Opportunity For Restaurants, But Numbers Are Hard To Measure

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

It is not precisely correct to say that consumers have rarely purchased “better-for-you dishes.” In fact, every day consumers make what they believe to be healthy choices, purchasing fish rather than meat, grilled or baked food, rather than fried, and ordering salads.

What is true is that consumers rarely buy food in restaurants that is marketed as “healthy.” In fact, chains that create special “healthy” menus are typically giving the kiss of death to these items as the consumer reads such a menu as proclaiming, “Here are the items that don’t taste good enough to be on our regular menu.”

So if the restaurant industry is serious about being part of the answer to the obesity crisis, it has to create new categories of “healthy” foods that taste good. It has to use the proper ingredients and the proper culinary techniques to create food that is both good enough to be featured as part of the regular menu and healthy at the same time.

If consumers have actually shifted the way they define healthy to “fresh” and “natural” from “low fat” and “low calorie,” this makes the marketing job easier, but it is not clear that it will really help in the battle against obesity. The problem is that calories and carbohydrates are real things that can be measured. Fresh and natural are merely marketing slogans. In many cases, say frozen seafood, the quality can sometimes be better than fresh.

A focus on fresh sure will help the fresh fruit and vegetable industry, and certainly many will prefer the taste and flavor of fresh fruits and vegetables, but there is just no indication that, say, pizza made with fresh produce toppings, rather than canned or frozen produce toppings, is somehow “healthier” or more likely to reduce obesity in the population at large.

The wish is father to the thought, and so it is nice that so many consumers think “restaurants can offer healthy food in a way that will still taste good.” It is also great to know that “more than nine out of 10 consumers agree that menu items containing a

full serving of vegetables are more healthy.” But it is unclear whether these beliefs are new. For generations, mothers have told their kids to eat their vegetables, so for a very long time people have thought vegetables are healthy. So this can be true without leading to any change in consumption.

Equally the buzz on vegetarianism and flexitarianism is real, but some of it is labeling. People have often alternated meals, with one night being soup night, another spaghetti, fish another night, chicken still another. We don’t really have any quantifiable evidence that these eating trends are actually boosting fresh produce sales. One can be a vegetarian and just eat a lot of pizza and pasta.

Equally, although it is interesting to know that consumers tell us that 18 percent, or nearly one out of five meals, do not contain meat, it is not clear if that is a big change or any change at all. People have been eating bowls of cereal or pancakes or French toast or eggs for breakfast for a very long time. A grilled cheese sandwich and tomato soup for lunch is hardly an innovation.

Sometimes our own marketing efforts change the numbers. For example, that the number of people who tell us they consume “local” foods at least once a week is up from 47 percent to 56 percent in the past two years may tell us less about eating habits than about the number of retailers and restaurants promoting food as local.

Today many retailers only sell organic versions of low velocity items. It is just not worth stocking an extra SKU. So many consumers wind up buying organic, but it may not be because they are really looking for it.

Back in 2010, the National Restaurant Association, the International Foodservice Distributors Association and the Produce Marketing Association made a commitment to double produce usage in foodservice by year 2020. One problem: There is no baseline number from which to measure progress. So, in the absence of meaningful data, people have started talking a lot about menu mentions. It is, of course, nice to know that menu mentions of produce have

If the restaurant industry is serious about being part of the answer to the obesity crisis, it has to create new categories of “healthy” foods that taste good.

increased by 13 percent since 2009, but it is not clear what this means. It may just indicate a change in the way menus are worded without indicating higher usage of produce at all.

Equally, while noting increased mention of specific items on the menus, such as sweet potatoes, beets, kale, avocados and broccoli, is intriguing and may speak to culinary trends, it tells us precious little about the total produce purchases at restaurants and even less about consumption. If kale replaces creamed spinach, that may not change total produce procurement. Adding broccoli to kids’ menus is exciting, but often it is an option and the kids still choose fries; and even if the kids must take the broccoli, until the children eat it, it is not consumption.

The kernel of really good news here is the broader idea that restaurant eating has become so common that people are no longer generally viewing it as an indulgence occasion. That opens the door for selling more healthy and delicious food. The challenge is for the produce industry to partner with chefs and restaurants to make sure the offerings are as delicious as they are healthy.

pb

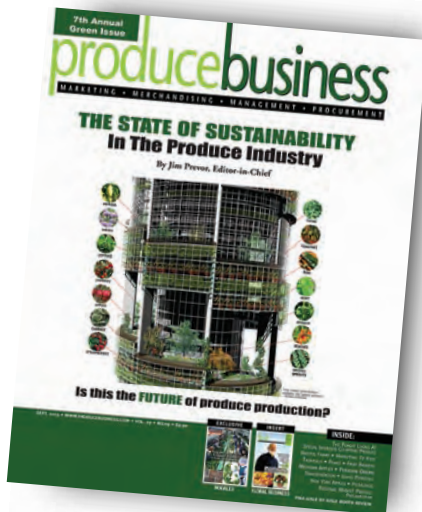


Sustainability and Fracking Dreams ó Propped-Up Illusions of Unlimited Consumption

I pretty much agree with everything [Jim Prevor says] in the Sustainability article. The expensive “local” greenhouse projects some retailers are touting are being built to grow crops that few, if any, of the local farmers would consider growing in greenhouses simply because they would quickly go broke. One might hope that these PR endeavors can lead to some useful technological progress.

However, I lose [Mr. Prevor] when he gets to fracking. Isn't fracking seriously contaminating previously pristine ground water? [Jim makes] it sound like a wonderful solution to the energy crunch. Or have I been duped?

Not to say that most alternative energy options are much better, in terms of overall foot-



print. I see both the fracking and the sustainable dream as trying to prop up the illusion that we can consume to our heart's content. Where the heck are we headed?

Bob Sanderson
President

Jonathan's Organics Inc./Jonathan Sprouts
East Freetown, MA

The Other Side of Sustainability

I have just finished reading your “State of Sustainability” editorial in the September 2013 issue and want to commend you on it. While the content will not land [Jim Prevor] on the short list for any major positions in the Obama Administration, Joseph Schumpeter would be proud, which means you have chosen sides wisely and properly.

As an aside, we have just finished packing peaches for this season and the Publix Supermarkets continue to be our major account; so much for only locally grown product! Keep up the good work; I'm forwarding your article on to others.

Again, a great article.

Jim Mertz
Vice Chairman
Symms Fruit
Caldwell, ID

Grower/Shipper Comments Lacking in Packaging Article



A quick note to let you know I enjoyed the article on page 75 in the October 2013 issue, “Using Packaging as Silent Salesman.”

How delighted I was to see our tomato label as a positive example of this, but there was no caption or credit for that matter under the photo much to my dismay.

While this industry is always striving to do better through innovations that hopefully in the long run increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, appealing packaging is certainly a necessary starting point. Truth be told, this was in fact the impetus behind our rebranding and clear label concept we launched just 2 years ago.

Overall I found your article insightful on understanding what packaging suppliers are

doing to try and meet this challenge and at the same time helpful in retailer feedback on consumer demand-drivers. However, I do have to tell you (and maybe I am slightly biased) that I felt it missed the mark by not interviewing grower/shippers like myself as to our insights and research on the subject and what has been working for us as company, lessons learned from our own customer feedback (consumer and retailer alike).

Nevertheless, I enjoyed and do hope articles like this continue in PRODUCE BUSINESS.

Helen L. Aquino
Marketing Manager
Village Farms International
Eatontown, NJ

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5 TOP IMPORT TRENDS FOR 2020



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Anything is possible for the future, but based on current circumstances, experts around the globe believe in the strong gravitation toward these five trends. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Savvy supermarket retailers pull out all the stops to stay ahead of the trends through a variety of creative ways. Knowing that business intelligence is a distinct advantage, it pays to know what fruit might be the next fruit variation, if cherries will be available year-round, or if fresh fruits and vegetables from China will ever be as popular, or plentiful, as those from Chile.

These are just a few of the issues on the minds of U.S. retailers regarding produce imports and what the nation's marketplace might look like in 2020. A look into the future reveals one unarguable fact, asserts Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc., based in Monrovia, CA, "Imports will become a bigger proportion of the fruits and vegetables we consume here in the U.S."

Imports indeed will increasingly supplement domestic production of horticultural crops, according to the February 2013-released report, *USDA Agricultural Projections to 2022*. In the next decade, imports are projected to supply a majority (or 52 percent) of domestic fruit and nut use and 24 percent of vegetable use, in terms of farm weight. In 2012, these shares were 44 percent and 19 percent, respectively. The value of these imports are projected to reach \$64.5 billion in fiscal year 2022, with fruits and nuts accounting for \$21.3 billion and vegetables \$15.8 billion.

1. CHEFS & CONSUMERS DRIVE IMPORT GROWTH


One of the main drivers in the desire for imports is the work of

America's chefs, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's World Variety Produce, Inc., in Vernon, CA. "Chefs build their reputation on signature dishes. They dread the day when a major ingredient is out of season."

Consumerism is also poised to take greater hold by 2020. "Americans will travel more and be exposed to different foods," says Don Harris, president of Harris Consulting Solutions, in Boulder, CO. "They'll want choices. For example, they may try the flavorful old world varieties of apples grown in Poland and then want to buy them at home. Retailers will increasingly be driven by consumer demand and figuring that out rather than what suppliers have to sell."

"Growers around the world are focusing on new variety development as a way of expanding sales and becoming more relevant to consumers, as well as really looking at what consumers want in terms of taste and texture," says Karen Brux, the managing director for North America for the San Carlos, CA-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA). "I think we'll see more new varieties coming out of Chile. We've seen great interest in niche items like lemon plums and pink seedless Muscat grapes from Chile, and there's definitely room for more."

Karin Gardner, marketing communications manager for the Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia, agrees. "There will be a continued push for breakthrough flavors by innovators like New Zealand in the apple category. I think this will be driven in part by the maturation of generation Y, who crave all things new and



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different, and is perhaps more interested in culinary pursuits than some of their elder peers. Perhaps this will lead to even shorter product lifecycles, so it's something for us as marketers to keep in mind."

2. WIDER ASSORTMENTS FROM MORE COUNTRIES

"Mexico will further solidify its position as the U.S.'s top partner for fruit and vegetable imports over the next decade," says Ken Bright, in research and development at the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association (PMA). "Mexico accounted for nearly 77 percent in total volume growth of fresh fruit and vegetable exports to the U.S. over the past decade. Several other top exporters to the U.S. also experienced increased volumes, but their rate of growth was slower than Mexico resulting in overall loss of market share."

Many industry observers wonder what is fueling Mexico's dominance in the U.S.'s imports of fresh produce.

"There's more land, water, cheap labor and a government that wants to expand agriculture because it puts people to work," says Spezzano Consulting's Spezzano. "Many U.S. companies now have partners in Mexico."

Yet, the produce import environment in 2020 will become even more colorful and exciting than it is today, says Oppenheimer's Gardner. "We'll see a wider assortment from more countries of origin, as they gain access to the U.S. market. We are already seeing new South American countries being approved to export citrus items, for example, to fill demand and give retailers as well as consumers new options to consider."

"The total volume of fruit exports from Latin America has almost doubled from 45.7 million tons to just under 82 million tons in the past 10 years," explains John Giles, the Reading, UK-based market research consultant

"We have several years of experience with blueberries, but we are getting into the U.S. market with citrus fruit for this first time in 2013."

— Marta Bentancur, Uruguayan Union of Fruit Growers and Exporters

and divisional director with Promar International Ltd., a leading agri food supply and demand chain consulting company and a subsidiary of Genus plc. "This looks set to grow in the future, with overall volumes for all fruit from a cross section of countries, including Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Argentina."

Chile has led the Latin American countries in fruit exports. During the 2012-2013 season, Chile's largest exports to the U.S. in descending order of volume were table grapes, apples, blueberries, oranges, kiwifruit, plums, clementines, nectarines, mandarins, peaches, pears, avocados, lemons, cherries and pomegranate, according to data supplied by the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (ASOEX), based in Santiago, Chile.

"While grapes and apples currently account for more than 60 percent of the Chilean fruit entering the U.S.," says the CFFA's Brux, "I believe we'll continue to see strong growth in cherries, blueberries, citrus and kiwifruit, with larger marketing programs put in place to support these specific categories. Growth will result from a combination of increased demand and increased acreage/production in Chile."

"Pears, apples, cherries and blueberries are major fruit exports to the U.S. from Argentina. In the future, the country would like to add citrus (such as lemons, tangerines and clementines — which harvests from late March through August) to this list," says Ricardo Ajo Usle, general manager for Buenos Aires, Argentina-based COPEXEU (a committee of growers and exporters of produce to the U.S.). "The barriers are phytosanitary and political. A change in government is happening now and that should make it politically friendlier for exporters to make investments. Like the trend we see here with berries, I think we'll see more companies that are fully integrated grower/exporter/marketers."

"Citrus, in particular oranges and mandarins, as well as blueberries will be the largest fresh produce

exports to the U.S. from Uruguay in 2020," says Marta Bentancur, manager of international relations and market access affairs for Montevideo, Uruguay-based UPEFRUY (Uruguayan Union of Fruit Growers and Exporters). "We have several years of experience with blueberries, but we are getting into the U.S. market with citrus fruit for this first time in 2013. Going forward, we will have to learn about logistics and be certain to supply good quality and safe fruit as required by customers in the U.S."

In the past decade, Peru made the biggest gains percentage-wise in fresh produce imports to the U.S. at 8.3 percent, followed by Mexico at 8.0 percent, according to the Geneva, Switzerland's International Trade Centre's (ITC) Trade Map data. During the 2012-2013 season, the U.S. received 20.46 percent of Peru's avocados, 20 percent of the country's citrus, and 18 percent of Peru's grapes.

"Peru is experiencing an increase in production area," says Nancy Tucker, the PMA's vice president of global business development. "In northern Peru, a new irrigation project will open up tracts of land in the desert for high quality agriculture. Similarly, there have been new irrigation projects in the northern state of Minas Gerais in Brazil, which is arid and has been subject to frequent droughts. There's a good possibility we'll see exports to the U.S. increase in the future, although Brazil does have a strong domestic market."

"Central American countries, known mostly for exporting bananas," says Promar International's Giles, "are feeling the pressure to diversify."

Ecuador currently exports bananas and mangoes to the U.S. In the future, says Wilson Contreras, investment officer for Pro Ecuador and based in the country's trade office in Chicago, IL, "We believe that flowers (roses mainly) will be the largest fresh produce export. In order to do this, there's a need to finalize a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement to reduce tariffs that takes into consideration the asymmetries between the economies of both countries, a need to increase direct air connectivity between Ecuador and different regions of the U.S., and a need to associate small and medium producers to export directly to the U.S."



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“The U.S. market is critical to the Latin American export effort and currently accounts for some 45 percent of this region’s overall exports,” says Giles. “However, the growth in some international markets has been especially impressive. For example, exports to Asian markets have increased by some 173 percent over the last decade and to Australasian markets by some 156 percent compared to 90 percent for the U.S. Going forward, this means that U.S. retailers will not be automatically assured of getting product from Latin America, since these countries can now pick and choose where they send their produce. They’ll need to work harder to develop their supply chain and supply relationships.”

The Oppenheimer Group’s Gardner agrees. “Asia will continue to be attractive to many fruit exporters, whether from Chile or other countries. As marketers, we have a significant task in building and developing strong markets here, so that Chilean growers continue to send strong quantities of high quality fruit to the U.S.”

“The U.S. market for imported fruit is still growing,” says Giles, “especially for tropicals and exotics.”

“Dragon fruit has rapidly gained popularity,” says Melissa’s Schueller. “We’ve imported it from Vietnam since 2008. Now, it’s also grown in California and Florida.”

As for imports, Thailand received U.S. approval in 2011 to import dragon fruit; Nicaragua received approval in late 2012 as part of an opportunity provided by the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); Mexico received approval in 2013 for irradiated dragon fruit. This inventory, plus domestic production, now makes this fruit available year-round in the U.S.,” says Schueller.

In the future, Oppenheimer’s Gardner says, “It’s possible that we’ll see more mainstreaming of superfoods like goji, acai and kiwifruit as people strive for the quality of life that comes with healthy eating.”

“Retailers must be more open-minded about new products,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s, a specialty produce marketer and distributor in Los Angeles, CA. “Just because it doesn’t have a PLU, or the buyer doesn’t know what it is or doesn’t like it, those reasons shouldn’t stop the product from coming in-store. Offering the latest and greatest is how retailers can compete.”

European Union. There’s not a counter-seasonal advantage to importing produce from

Europe. However, explains the PMA’s Tucker, “depending on the cost of freight, it may become advantageous for the Eastern U.S. to import produce by ship from Europe rather than truck it from the U.S. West Coast.”

“It’s possible for us to export kiwifruit, oranges, table grapes and radicchio to the U.S. and now apples and pears for the first time this fall — after working with the USDA to clear phytosanitary obstacles,” says Simona Rubbi, manager of new markets for the CSO (Centro Servizi Ortofrutticoli) — a coop in Ferrara, Italy. “In the future we hope to be able to export asparagus and plums to the U.S.”

There could be a counter-seasonal advantage for the U.S. in importing fruit from Europe rather than South America. Consider that the distance from Brussels to the port of Philadelphia, PA, is just over 3,700 miles compared to just over 5,000 miles from San Antonio, Chile, to Philadelphia.

Leen Guffens, press officer for the Brussels, Belgium-based VLAM — Flanders’ Agricultural Marketing Board, points out, “Belgian endive (a vegetable part of the chicory family) is the most important export product to the U.S., and according to the Belgian suppliers, it will remain so in the future. However, if the U.S. is interested in fresh fruits from outside South America, there might be some opportunities for Belgian produce such as pears and apples if we could export them.”

“Blueberries are being planted all across the globe,” explains Jim Roberts, vice president of sales for Naturipe Farms, in Estero, FL. “As the U.S. reaches out and forms trade agreements with other countries, it may be possible for us to bring in berries from places like Spain. Spain hits a window when the U.S. has light production. There are already protocols in place to import citrus from Spain.”

Peppers and eggplant are major exports to the U.S. from the Netherlands. Going forward, says Ger van Burik, exhibition coordinator for the Hague-based Holland Fresh Group, “there won’t necessarily be different items or as much variety as what we already grow.” Some of these items are: hot peppers, purple and white, two-color, and mini eggplant.

The trend continues for Holland to export its greenhouse technology to North America, explains Robert Keijzer, export manager for Kubo Greenhouse Projects, in the Netherlands. “First we built greenhouses in Canada and now Mexico. Both countries have the advantage of being closer to the U.S. market. In addition to peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant and zucchini, we’ll see more greenhouse grown lettuces, herbs and strawberries.”



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Looking ahead, PMA's Tucker says, "it will be interesting to see the success of the European Union/United States free trade agreement to increase sales of fresh fruits and vegetables."

This trade agreement, which may be finalized by the end of 2014, will be the largest regional free trade agreement in history and cover 46 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product, according to the Washington, DC-based International Monetary Fund.

Africa. U.S. importers will begin to look more at the whole continent of Africa, not just South Africa, predicts Harris Consulting's Harris. "Nigeria has the potential to become a significant provider of fruits and vegetables to the U.K. Plus, some parts of Africa are closer to the U.S. than South America."

Australia & New Zealand. "Kiwifruit from New Zealand will likely be an important counter-seasonal market," explains Michael Worthington, chief executive of the Produce Marketing Association Australia and New Zealand (PMA A-NZ), based in Victoria, Australia. "Ditto for apples from New Zealand, with market development in the U.S. around some specific new varieties that are clearly differentiated. However, I do think that Australia and New Zealand's focus will increasingly be on China and other Asian countries; it is a closer, faster growing market."

Far East. "There are currently seven types of fruits eligible for imports into the U.S. from Thailand. These are lychee, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, rambutan and dragon fruits," says Krissana Sukhumparnich, agricultural consul for the Royal Thai Consulate, in Los Angeles, CA. "I foresee that longan and mangosteen would still be the most important tropical fruits from Thailand. Rambutan and mango could be another prospective export leader if we can overcome the technical problem on appearance after irradiation. Other possible treatments with less adverse effects, such as cold treatment, are being studied. However, by 2020, this problem should be resolved."

There will be less negativity about fruit and vegetable imports from China in the next decade, predicts Frieda's Caplan. "I think they will button up on food safety and therefore will have less stigma attached to Chinese product. We already import starfruit from Taiwan."

This perceptual change could be huge considering that China grows half of the world's volume of vegetables and 30 percent of its fruit, according to Fruit&Vegetable-Facts.com, published by Jan Kees Boon, in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Currently, less than

0.9 percent of vegetables and 1.4 percent of fruits grown in China are exported.

3. YEAR-ROUND AVAILABILITY FOR BERRIES, CITRUS AND CHERRIES

"Imports in 1960 were pretty much bananas and pineapple," says Spezzano Consulting's Spezzano. "We had seasonality back then. Today, there are many counter-seasonal opportunities including apples, pears, melons, avocados, mangos, berries, citrus and cherries."

"Berry imports have grown from around 86,000 tons to just under 400,000 tons annually over the past decade," says Promar

"There are currently seven types of fruits eligible for imports into the U.S. from Thailand. These are lychee, longan, mango, mangosteen, pineapple, rambutan and dragon fruits..."

— Krissana Sukhumparnich, Royal Thai Consulate

International's Giles. "Mexico leads the charge at around 240,000 tons and accounts for some 60 percent of the overall U.S. import market. Chile has seen its sendings rise from 35,000 to 55,000 tons. Argentina is a relatively small supplier, but exports to the U.S. still grew from just a few hundred to 9,500 tons over this same time frame. Chile and Argentina combined, however, increased in share of the overall market from 4 percent to 16 percent."

Mexico started with blackberries, then raspberries and strawberries. Now it will become a bigger player in blueberries. "Advantages are climate and trucking costs to market. Chile has to ship and Argentina has to fly in 100 percent of their blueberries," says Naturipe's Roberts. "The challenge going forward is to find the right variety. Southern highbush varieties don't take to the hot climate. The constant stress without dormancy means production drops off after 5 years, and it's not profitable to replant this often. Proprietary varietal development will be the way in the future."

The U.S. imports blueberries from Southern Hemisphere countries such as Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. Peru will export its first blueberries to the U.S. in 2014.

"Mexico will also be a bigger supplier of strawberries to the U.S.," says Roberts. "Challenges in Southern California, such as land costs, are causing less acreage to be planted. Consumers won't see any less fruit because retailers will fill in from Mexico."

"Contra-season Navels and clementines figure 10 to 15 percent and 5 to 10 percent, respectively, of these citrus varieties now consumed in the U.S.," says Spezzano Consulting's Spezzano. "Brazil could come on in the future. However, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Australia and South Africa are major exporters to the U.S. currently."

"Citrus from Australia has been a mainstay for 15 years in the U.S. market and will probably still be important," says PMA A-NZ's Worthington. "Although I personally think the volumes will, if anything, decrease. South America and South Africa are increasingly taking share from Australia in the U.S. market, leaving Australia with the high quality/high price point sector. China, Japan and Indonesia are all likely to be more attractive markets for Australian citrus in the coming years."

South Africa began exporting citrus to the U.S. in 1999. Shipments, which enter from late June through the end of October, now range at plus or minus 40,000 tons per year. In addition to Navels and Clementines, varieties include Midnight oranges, Cara Caras and Star Ruby grapefruit.

"Because the South African citrus is not chemically treated on arrival in the U.S., it is shipped in very cold temperatures and must remain at those temperatures for 24 days — longer than science requires," says Lisa Packer, who represents South Africa's Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF). "We would like to see that time reduced to 22 days so that it can get to market sooner."

Grape imports to the U.S. have remained relatively flat over the past decade. "Grapes need to be fumigated before they can enter into the U.S. market," says the CFFA's Brux. "If this requirement was lifted, that would definitely provide a boost to imports of Chilean grapes."

"Increased plantings boosted cherry production in Chile by 15 to 20 percent annually," says Cristián Tagle, president of the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Cherry Committee, which represents 80 percent of the country's cherry growers/exporters. "We project volumes of cherries to the U.S. will continue to grow."

"It's just a matter of time until fresh cherries are year-round," says Melissa's Schueller. "Availability has already expanded to nearly eight



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Australia has opportunity to supply mangos to the U.S. from late October to mid-December, at a time when Mexico, Ecuador and other countries are not at their peak.

months: May to late August/early September domestically and November to early February from offshore. In the past five years Chile exported Rainiers as well as Bing cherries.”

4. HISPANIC DEMAND SPARKS MORE MANGO AND AVOCADO IMPORTS

The Hispanic population in the U.S. grew four times the national rate between 2000 and

2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By 2020, Hispanic descendants will reach 60 million (or nearly 18 percent of the U.S. population).

“It stands to reason that we’ll see continued growth in imported mangos, avocado, peppers and other traditionally Hispanic items in step with evolving demographics,” asserts Oppenheimer’s Gardner.

The market for mangos in the U.S. grew

38 percent between 2000 and 2012, spurred by consumer demand, explains Megan McKenna, director of marketing for the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board (NMB). “We will continue to see Mexico, Ecuador and Peru as the main suppliers to the U.S., each up 35 percent, 115 percent and 120 percent, respectively, since 2000. We’ll also continue to see strong imports from Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti.”

Additionally, Australia has significant volumes of mangos coming in line over the next few years, according to PMA A-NZ’s Worthington. He adds that this fall, Australian growers received the green light to export mangos to the U.S. The fruit will be irradiated to prevent the spread of fruit flies and mango seed weevil.

“Australia has opportunity to supply mangoes to the U.S. from late October to mid-December, at a time when Mexico, Ecuador and other countries are not at their peak,” says PMA A-NZ’s Worthington. “We also have varieties that can be differentiated. The Calypso has a better shelf life than the more well-known Kensington Pride, and it has more mango and less seed per fruit.”

“Irradiated mangos figure less than 3

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percent of fruit currently imported,” says the NMB’s McKenna. “That could change in the next seven years.”

“U.S. imports of avocados soared from 78,000 tons a decade ago to just over 500,000 tons annually,” says Promar International’s Giles. “Mexico will continue to be the dominant supplier, followed by Peru and Chile.”

Emiliano Escobedo, the Irvine, CA-based executive director of the Hass Avocado Board (HAB), says, “Seventy-five percent of the current avocado supply is imported. As demand for avocados grows in the U.S., imports will also grow. In 2020, the U.S. supply of avocados will be primarily from imports versus avocados produced domestically. I don’t know if we will hit the 2 billion point by then, but this year’s total supply of avocados (domestic and imported) will reach nearly 1.8 billion pounds.”

5. GLOBAL HARMONIZATION FOR PRODUCE TRADE

There might not be world peace by 2020, but suppliers agree we should consider importing from countries like Israel, Egypt and Afghanistan. PMA’s Tucker believes there would need to be more harmony with food safety, traceability and organic standards.

“The rest of the world will continue to develop export programs, and this will be facilitated by universal food safety systems and uniform grade standards,” says Harris Consulting’s Harris.

Harmonization of food safety and traceability will likely happen as a result of the incentive to meet Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) regulations and buyer requirements for the U.S. market.

“There’s plenty of opportunity for imports to the U.S. market, but meeting the U.S. food safety regulations will probably be an absolute necessity by 2020,” says Ray Gilmer, vice president of issues management and communication for the Washington, DC-headquartered United Fresh Produce Association. “The Food & Drug Administration (FDA), foreign producers and others in the supply chain still have considerable work ahead to establish systems that harmonize food safety from global sources for U.S. consumption, but the upside of gaining access to this market should provide ample incentive. Achieving that global food safety standard will be a challenge for many foreign producers and supply chain partners, so we will likely see new partnerships, consolidations and shakeouts as companies invest for the long-term U.S. market play.”

“Expect to see an FDA proposal on traceability in 2014 under FSMA,” says Bob Whitaker, Ph.D., the PMA’s chief science and technology officer. “The desire for a rapid trace back system will extend to imports too.”

“But predictability when it comes to how organic standards would harmonize is tougher,” says United Fresh’s Gilmer, “Because consumer expectations can be unique to each global region.”

On the topic of phytosanitary standards, Gilmer adds, “These and resulting trade protocols can shift based on pest and disease threats, and can be affected by negotiations among

trading nations, so my ‘crystal ball’ is still fuzzy on this issue.”

Finally, “sustainability will continue to be a consideration for all produce, imports included,” explains Oppenheimer’s Gardner. “I like to think we’ll see more Rainforest Alliance and Fair Trade certified items, assuring greater environmental stewardship and worker welfare but allowing retailers to differentiate. There’s a great deal of research and development going on right now as produce marketers strive for packaging options with a ‘lighter’ footprint for the future.”

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Score A Touchdown With Super Bowl Merchandising

From avocados to flowers, retailers can capitalize on winter's ultimate football feeding frenzy by planning now. BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Super Bowl Sunday has become one of America's biggest food holidays. Nearly 42 percent of consumers surveyed say they expect to throw a party (16.6 percent) or attend a party (25.2 percent), according to the January 2013 Consumer Survey from BIGinsight, a product of Prosper Business Development, a business development and marketing firm in Worthington, OH.

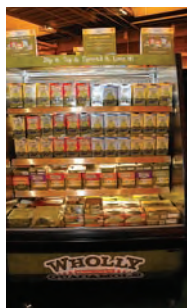
Nearly three-fourths (74.0 percent) say they plan to purchase food and beverages for the big Super Bowl, which will air on February 2, 2014. What's more, projected spending per study participant will average \$82.30. Assure your produce department gets its share of this ring by merchandising snack and finger foods in the run-up to Super Bowl XLVIII, set for the MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ. Here are 14 tried-and-true produce items to promote:



1. Avocados. Consumers chowed down on a record 79 million pounds of avocados during the 2013 Super Bowl, according to the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board. This quantity is poised to increase, thanks to good supplies and retail promotional opportunities. "Mexican avocados will be the dominant force in the market in early February," says Maggie Bezar Hall, the Bath, MI-based vice president of trade and promotion for Avocados from Mexico, Inc. (AFM).

Retail promotions include 'The Ultimate Game Day Spread,' a partnership with Mexican-made Cholula hot sauce and Irving, TX-headquartered Mission Foods, one of the largest producers of tortilla products. Shoppers who purchase 3 Mexican avocados and a bottle of hot sauce receive free Mission-brand tortilla chips or tortillas. AFM provides tie-in pieces for special lobby displays featuring

both avocados and partner products. The promotion runs from December 30, 2013 through February 2, 2014. AFM is also running a retail display contest with prizes totaling more than \$150,000.



2. Guacamole. Pre-made guacamole, such as Wholly Guacamole-brand products, are a big hit during Bowl Season, says Jennifer Sawyer, marketing manager for Fresherized Foods, in Saginaw, TX. "In January, our sales team will be offering Off Invoice Promotions for retailers that take them." The company's newly launched Homegating website will remain up through Super Bowl Sunday. The site is a one-stop-shop for busy football fans and is filled with party tips, recipes and how-to videos featuring Chef Nathan Lippy. In addition, two new products to the Wholly Guacamole brand are party favorites: Taco Bean Dip over Guacamole and Black Bean and Homestyle Guacamole Layered Dip.



3. Guacamole & Salsa Mixes. Concord Foods, in Brockton, MA, offers retailers a football-theme shipper display that holds 144 1-ounce packets of guacamole seasoning mix. "Two avocados mixed with one packet of mix makes 2 cups of great-tasting guacamole," says Curt Rice, national sales manager. The company makes five flavors: authentic, classic, classic spicy, mild and extra spicy. Rice says the most popular shipper combination is 96 packets of mild and 48 spicy. Concord also sells salsa mixes in hot and mild flavors. One 1-ounce packet combines with 1-pound of ripe tomatoes.

To really boost the produce ring, retailers can promote Concord's online recipe for Super Guacamole. This recipe calls for 1-packet each of guacamole and salsa mix, plus two avocados, 1-pound of tomatoes and 1/2 cup chopped red onions. Suggestively sell by displaying all of these ingredients together with bags of tortilla chips.



4. Hot Peppers. Let customers choose their heat level when making homemade guacamole or salsa and sell more hot peppers as a result, thanks to shipper displays from Triple H, a family-owned grower/shipper based in Culiacan, Mexico. Each shipper display holds two types of peppers, such as Anaheim and habanero, or serrano and poblano. Information on header cards provide a description of each variety, a line chart to indicate heat level, and scan codes take shoppers to usage ideas and recipes. "Retailers can cross-merchandise these shippers next to chips, tacos, nachos or soft tortillas," suggests Alicia Garza, in marketing.



5. Salad Toppings. Tap into consumers' desire to eat more healthfully. Fresh Gourmet, headquartered in Los Angeles, offers a shipper display that holds six cases of customized crispy salad toppings. Ten flavors include Garlic Pepper Crispy Onions, Santa Fe-style Tortilla Strips and Wasabi Ranch Wonton Strips.

A single layer tray of Hass avocados on top comes with a header card affixed with tear-off IRC coupons for \$1 off any bag of toppings.

“This is a great promotion for January,” explains Ting Sheng, in marketing. “It encourages shoppers to make fun, interesting, jazzed-up salads for the big game and capitalizes on the popularity of avocados at this time.”



6. Snack Tomatoes. Sell snack tomatoes packaged in team colors. Greenco Holding B.V, in The Netherlands, with growing facilities in Mexico, introduced its mini plum tomatoes in the U.S. last year. The tomatoes, grown exclusively for the Tommie's brand from a Japanese seed, are super sweet. Package types include bags, a bucket with a lunch-sized box on top and now clear plastic ShakeMugs.

The ShakeMugs are packed 12 per bright green display box for easy merchandising. “We can customize the ShakeMugs with a football theme by making the tops in team colors,” says commercial director, Jan Zegwaard.

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7. Edamame. Melissa's/ World Variety Produce, in Vernon, CA, named edamame, or ready-to-eat green soybeans, as one of the Top 10 produce snack foods to promote for the Super Bowl. The 10-ounce shelled and 12-ounce in-shell product, available in conventional and organic, is pre-cooked and packed in modified atmosphere packaging with a 21-day shelf life. The company also sells spicy edamame in a 7-ounce microwavable tray. “Merchandize edamame in the refrigerated case next to baby carrots, celery sticks and other finger foods for crudité platters,” recommends director of public relations, Robert Schueller.

“Merchandize edamame in the refrigerated case next to baby carrots, celery sticks and other finger foods for crudité platters,” recommends director of public relations, Robert Schueller.

8. Mushrooms. Mushroom Fajitas make a great recipe idea for football parties at home, suggests Dave Rich, Southwest sales manager for Monterey Mushrooms, Inc., based in Watsonville, CA. “People’s eyes glaze over when a recipe has more than five ingredients. So keep it simple. Slice white button or crimini mushrooms and sauté in a little butter and fajita seasoning. Roll up in either a 6-inch tortilla cut in two or in cocktail tortillas to make it bite-sized.”

The company recommends cross merchandizing these ingredients with toma-



toes, bell peppers, onions, lettuce and guacamole to increase the produce ring. Taste sample in store. The company has provided skilllets to retailers such as H-E-B Grocery Stores, a 350-plus chain headquartered in San Antonio, for mushroom demos.

9. Dips & Dressings. Ranch and Blue Cheese are year-round best-sellers for Ventura Foods, LLC, the Brea, CA-based makers of Marie's Salad Dressings. Two to four weeks prior to the Super Bowl, senior brand manager, Greg



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Samarge, suggests merchandising these dressings next to a variety of vegetables such as celery, carrots, cucumbers, broccoli and cauliflower florets as well as sliced meats, chips and chicken wings. In addition, “try offering customers fun flavors too, such as Chipotle

10. Tofu. Consider that while only 7 percent of consumers identify themselves as vegetarian, 36 percent indicate the use of meat alternatives, according to Mintel’s June, 2013 U.S. released report, Meat Alternatives. House Foods America Corporation, headquartered



in Garden Grove, CA, offers recipes on its website for dishes like Soy-Sational Guacamole, Crispy Tofu Parmesan Sliders and Teriyaki Tofu Kebabs.

The company can provide recipe tear pads for tofu-based dips such as Roasted Red Pepper and Tuscan Tofu, White Bean and Garlic as well as for the Tofu Chili. “We suggest our tofu products be cross-merchandised with popular Super Bowl recipes such as chili and dips,” says manager of public relations and marketing, Yoko Difranca.

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11. Pistachios. Wonderful Pistachios, marketed by Bakersfield, CA-headquartered Paramount Farms, has created in-store displays that tie directly to the company’s national FSI drop on Jan 19, just in time for the playoffs and two weeks prior to the Super Bowl. These are two of the biggest snacking periods of the year, offering retailers the opportunity to partake in two rounds of displays, one for each of these events.

Wonderful Pistachios also offers retailers a host of Super Bowl-themed bins, balloons, floor graphics, and danglers. “The Super Bowl is the most widely watched sporting event of the year, and Wonderful Pistachios is the top selling snack nut item on the market. This makes a perfect combination for merchandisers,” explains vice president of marketing for Paramount Farms and POM Wonderful, Marc Guerin.



12. Peanuts. The goal is to have 16- or 24-ounce bags of roasted in-shell peanuts merchandized front-and-center in the produce department in their football themed display boxes, says Peter Jessup, director of retail sales for Hampton Farms, in Raleigh, NC. "Peanuts aren't a shopping list item. They're an impulse sale. Our most successful cross-promotion was placing them over in the beverage aisle."

The company provides a half-pallet display that holds 12 cases. The peanuts are available in mixed cases of salted and unsalted. Hampton Farms is a sponsor of the Orange Bowl and Youth Football Alliance.



13. Kale Chips. Forget junk chips. Health-conscious football fans can now crunch on kale chips. Brad's Raw Foods, in Pipersville, PA, has introduced raw kale chips (dehydrated kale leaves with added raw cashews, sunflower seeds and spices) in nine flavors: kale, hot kale, beet, cheddar, red bell pepper, hot red bell pepper, Indian, sundried tomato and sweet potato. The chips are organic, gluten-free, vegan, kosher and non-GMO.

"We have wooden crate stacks made by local artisans to display the chips in-store, ideally near to the fresh kale," says Ansley Stauffer, national trade show and events manager. Brad's Raw Foods conducts more than 250 in-store demos nationwide each month.



14. Flowers. It's not just men who watch football. The NFL counts 185 million Americans, or nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population, as fans, according to a September 5, 2013 article published online in Bloomberg BusinessWeek, with 45 percent of these women. Supermarket retailers can tap into this market by selling bouquets in team colors, explains Juan Contesse, director of business development for The Gems Group, in Miami.

"Super Bowl isn't an event traditionally associated with flowers. However, with less than a two-week lead-time, we can make and ship bouquets of daisies dyed in team colors. We've done this for Roundy's." Contesse also recommends cross merchandising freestanding bucket displays of bouquets in the beer aisle. **pb**

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Mexican produce can represent up to 70 percent or more of a produce department's assortment during the winter months.

Heat Up Sales Of Winter Produce From Mexico

Increase winter revenues from Mexico-sourced items with a little extra promotion focus.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Retail departments throughout the U.S. and Canada rely heavily on products grown in Mexico during the winter season. “Mexican produce can represent up to 70 percent or more of a produce department’s assortment during the winter months, so it’s a critical part of retail profits,” says Gonzalo Avila, chief executive of Malena Produce Inc. in Nogales, AZ.

The growth of protected agriculture in Mexico has resulted in an abundance of high quality produce items at retail. “The shift to such growing methods — from shadehouses to greenhouses — has enabled many growers to produce better quality product with better yields and for longer periods,” explains Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers, LLC in Rio Rico, AZ. “As growers experiment with different varieties and seeds, Mexico will continue to produce better quality products to help satisfy U.S. consumer demand for wholesome, competitively priced fresh produce.”

Mexico’s supply completes year-round availability for many items. “It affords us the

consistency of always having the product in our department,” says Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate Gonzalez Markets, a 38-store chain in Anaheim, CA. “Our customers want product year-round as much as possible.”

“Without products from Mexico, there would be no produce department in the winter months as we currently know it,” asserts Alejandro Canelos, director at Apache Produce in Nogales, AZ.

Mexican winter availability comprises some top items in the produce department. “Winter imports from Mexico include peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, green beans, summer and winter squash and tomatoes,” says Ciruli’s Aguilar. “The flavor and quality of items continue to improve, and shipping seasons are prolonged due to better controlled growing environments.”

“Mexico now offers a wider range of product availability,” says Danny Mandel, president and chief executive of SunFed in Rio Rico, AZ. “Our green, grey, and yellow squash are available every day over nine months of the year. The same is true of our protected ag-grown cucumbers. Our red, yellow, and orange

peppers, all from protected agriculture, are great to color up the produce department throughout the winter and spring. We also see increasing amounts of eggplant from protected agriculture.”

Mexico has stepped up to fill a void for consistent watermelon as well. “Delicious new varieties of watermelons, adapted to grow in areas throughout Mexico, allow for continuity of supply,” says Mandel. “Through determined research and constant exploration to identify the best growing areas, very high quality Mexican watermelons now provide North American consumers unending opportunities to enjoy their favorite melon.”

As shoppers seek winter products, retailers can increase sales with promotion on these key items. “Our research indicates U.S. grocery shoppers don’t change purchasing patterns dramatically from season to season,” says Avila. “They expect year-round availability for most items, and Mexico fills that important gap in domestic or local production.”

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	Super/Class 1	70/99 mm	2-3/4 to 3-1/2"	5 kg	11 lb
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produce department, Mexican tomatoes contribute significantly to sales. "Imported Mexican tomatoes allow U.S. markets to offer consumers quality, wholesome tomatoes at competitive prices," asserts Aguilar.

"Tomatoes are Mexico's largest produce export," says Peter Warren, import category manager for Ayco Farms in Pompano Beach, FL. "They tally about 100 million cases per year, if you put them at 25-pound cases. Greenhouse tomatoes are close to 40 million cartons per year."

The Mexican source is crucial for category development. "Mexico is as equally important as other prominent winter growing regions in diversifying the production base," says Ben Reilly, midwest business development manager for Giumarra in Los Angeles, CA. "It helps maintain a consistent supply of fresh winter tomatoes for North American retailers and consumers."

"Mexican varieties can represent 50 percent or more of the tomato category," reports Avila. "As protected agriculture grows in Mexico, so does the volume and overall quality. Malena has added significantly to its category this season with more hothouse beefsteak and on-the-vine varieties."

A good tomato program begins with quality. "You must start with good tasting tomatoes," emphasizes Warren. "If they taste good, consumers will buy them. Start with good supply and handle them correctly once they're received."

"Imported Mexican tomatoes allow U.S. markets to offer consumers quality, wholesome tomatoes at competitive prices."

— Sandra Aguilar, Ciruli Brothers, LLC

"Display multiple varieties at room temperature," says Aguilar. "Color is very important for tomato sales, so having ripe and ready-to-eat fruit is imperative."

Northgate Gonzalez's tomato program depends heavily on color. "Our customers shop based on color," says Cano. "They want red, ripe tomatoes now. We work with shippers to pre-ripen the tomatoes and ship to us with the

color we need. We have key specs on the color, sizing and variety."

Variety spurs purchase. "Variety is very important," says Apache's Canelos. "Different tomatoes have different uses, and different consumers have different tastes. Cultural background or upbringing can lead people to prefer one type over another."

"Variety is important to U.S. consumers," agrees Aguilar. "This is due to increased awareness of eating healthy and consumers being more educated about the food they eat. The abundance of recipes readily available online and the influences of alternative eating styles, TV chefs and Food Network personalities have popularized many fresh commodities, including tomatoes."

"Stores should offer plenty of variety and merchandise next to avocados, onions, and hot peppers," suggests Joseph Bunting, business manager of produce for United Supermarkets, LLC of Lubbock, TX, which currently operates 57 stores under four unique brands: United Supermarkets, Market Street, Amigos and United Express.

Drawing attention to display and expanding consumers' use are additional methods to increase sales. "We stress building



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excitement at display with cross-promotions, color ribboning or other tactics that draw the eye," says Avila.

Malena focuses on helping expand tomato usage occasions. "Our educational efforts with produce department managers involve communicating what we term the 'extended day-parts' strategy," says Avila. "This means educating customers that tomatoes are good for all meals — breakfast, mid-morning snack and dinner. We promote the nutrition, convenience and flavor benefits of tomatoes for grab-n-go at any time."

WINTER WATERMELON

Mexico's strong position in watermelon fits perfectly with the growing winter melon consumption. "Winter watermelon is an increasingly important category," says Ayco's Warren. "Mexican supply fills in perfectly between Central American supply and domestic production. Keeping good product before consumers all year long increases consumption."

"The big jump in increasing consumption is coming during the winter season," reports Gordon Hunt, director of marketing and communications for the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) in Orlando, FL. "There are good reasons to have watermelon in the winter. If you stock it, people will buy it."

To better identify the purchase factors for winter watermelon consumers, the NWPB recently completed specific research by Boca Raton, FL-based Rose Research. "Our research found the number one reason people buy is because they like the taste," says Hunt. "So stores should be sure to have good quality first. You won't stimulate sales if you don't ensure the watermelon tastes good."

"Display an overwrapped cut melon on the whole melon display," advises Warren. "This way people see what the product looks like inside and will be more prone to buy. Sampling also increases sales, when possible."

Winter shoppers also want watermelon for health. "This has moved up very steadily over the past five to six years since we've been putting out a health message," says Hunt. "Watermelon is a great product for weight loss because although it's sweet, it is 92 percent water and the rest is nutritionally packed. The emergence of information on the energy-enhancing amino acid citrulline has also caused greater interest in and purchase of watermelon."

The winter months present specific promotional theme opportunities. "In January, our message is the Get Fit Weight Loss theme,"

explains Hunt. "People are focused on their New Year's resolutions to get healthy and fit. February is Heart Health Awareness month. We have the Heart Check approval and a good promotion can be planned around watermelon's heart health. Stores can even do a Valentine's promotion on how watermelon is 'good for your sweetheart's heart'."

Early Spring continues the body image, health focus. "In March/April people know swimsuit weather is coming and shoppers start looking to get in shape again," advises Hunt. "The weight loss and health messages carry over through these months as well."

Convenience is another important factor for winter sales. "People tend not to want a whole watermelon in the winter so stores should focus on mini's and fresh-cut," suggests Hunt. "We see most of the winter sales coming in the form of cut and mini's."

"Price can really complicate winter watermelon sales," says Apache's Canelos. "We do more cut melons in the winter to alleviate the price shock of buying a whole large melon."

"Cut melons can help brighten and warm produce displays during cooler seasons," says Giumarra's Reilly. "To maximize sales, watermelons should be displayed in two different locations throughout the produce section."

The value and versatility of watermelon are great sales messages. "Showcasing the per-pound price of cut melon is a great way to feature its value," says Juliemar Rosado, NWPB marketing communications manager. "Promoting versatility through a number of recipes not only helps push sales of watermelon but also other produce items. Recipes featured on our website combine many different ingredients and are a great tool for cross-promoting items."

The NWPB has a multitude of free POS items available for retailers in the form of recipe cards, posters, brochures, stickers, and more, all accessible on its website. "We also have backroom handling information available for the employees that work with our product daily," adds Rosado.

GORGEOUS GREENHOUSE

As Mexico steps up its protected agriculture efforts, many growers find themselves in transition.

"In our case, many SunFed growers are driving the transition from open field agriculture to protected agriculture," says Mandel. "This makes problems from weather far less likely while substantially stabilizing the consistency of supply, and raising the quality to levels we could not have imagined 20 years ago."



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“Without Mexican greenhouses, the category would still be what it was 20 years ago — a specialty category of relative insignificance in terms of total sales,” says Apache’s Canelos. “Now we have tomatoes of all varieties, colored bell peppers and seedless cucumbers, just to name a few of the most popular items.”

Items produced under protected agriculture represent a significant category and profit center. “This is a huge growth trend for Mexico with acreage increasing over 40 percent in the past three to four years,” says Malena’s Avila. “Tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers top the list, but other former specialty items, such as eggplant, are also growing exponentially.”

“Competitive costs in greenhouse produce led to aggressive promotions,” says United’s Bunting. “But quality is essential.”

“Ayco Farms has taken a huge position in the greenhouse deal, and we see it as a core item for our company,” reports Warren.

Retailers can play up the quality and appearance of greenhouse products. “Greenhouse items can provide amazing quality and retailers should focus on this,” asserts Warren. “Building large beautiful displays of combined greenhouse items will attract customer attention.”

“Offer variety and display together when possible,” suggests Bunting, adding, “such as tying in hot house cucumbers with hot house bell pepper displays.”

Stores can capitalize on specifically promoting greenhouse products. “Chains whose consumers state a preference for greenhouse should promote the production practice with signage/POP and hand-outs, as well as in ads,” suggests Avila.

“Greenhouse sales can be stimulated with ads,” concurs Warren. “Retailers should work with their suppliers to come up with something to promote each month.”

“We recommend retailers work closely with suppliers to ensure their specs are being met and they are capitalizing on key promotional periods for ad opportunities,” says Aguilar.

MIGHTY MANGO

Mangos are traditionally known as the most popular fruit across the globe and continue gaining popularity with U.S. consumers. “The increase in demand is in part due to increased awareness and information about how to select and prepare mangos,” explains Aguilar. “Changing U.S. demographics and the fact that mangos are available on a year-round basis also play a role in growing consumer demand.”

“The Mexican mango supply is essential to

the category as it makes up nearly 67 percent of the volume of mangos sold in the U.S.," reports Megan McKenna, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB) in Orlando, FL. "The Mexican season spans six months with strong volumes from March to August."

Mexico produces many different mango varieties and supplies the U.S. market with five of the top ones. "These varieties are Ataulfo, Kent, Keitt, Haden and Tommy Atkins," says McKenna. "In 2012, Mexico shipped a total of 58.1 million boxes. Mexico's season in 2013 began the end of January and came to an end the first week of October with a total of approximately 65.9 million boxes — an increase of 7.8 million boxes."

Ensuring consumers get a good-eating mango is the first step to greater sales. Aguilar explains Mexico's advantage. "Because of shorter distance and transit times than off-shore suppliers, Mexican mangos can be picked at a higher brix, giving consumers access to fresher, sweeter fruit."

Educating consumers on selection and preparation is fundamental. "Many consumers do not know how to select a mango," says Aguilar. "Retailers have a higher chance of repeat sales if their produce staff is educated on how to identify ripe and ready-to-eat fruit so they can transfer the knowledge to their customers."

The NMB offers POS, images, recipes, nutrition messages and other mango information on its website. "Basic messages about mangos can help to overcome mango purchase barriers," says McKenna. "Point-of-sale material featuring how to select, ripen and cut can help demystify the mango."

Displays should be visible and include options. "Opt for big displays in high-traffic areas with fruit available in several varieties and in different stages of ripening," advises Aguilar. "This helps retailers satisfy 'eat-now' as well as 'eat-later' consumers. Ready-to-eat fruit allows produce staff to cut and provide samples for customers who have not tried a mango before."

The NMB encourages retailers to use secondary displays including the new NMB mango bins. "Displays outside the tropicals section move more mangos," says McKenna. "Demos, ads and in-store specials are also a great way to reach consumers, many who have never tasted a fresh mango before."

Retail-ready consumer packs are also gaining momentum. "We offer clamshell packs and high-graphic cartons designed to educate consumers and help boost sales," says Aguilar. "We have also invested in developing

our web presence with a new consumer-centric mango site."

HIP HOT CHILES

Spicy and specialty peppers are a unique and increasingly popular category. "We see specialty peppers gaining more ground, especially with our expanding ethnic chain customers," reports Malena's Avila. "Our main sellers are the Anaheim, Caribe, Jalapeno and Serrano varieties."

Aguilar concurs. "We see increased demand for hot peppers, both from retail and foodservice customers. As a result, we have diversified our product mix to include several varieties of hot chili peppers and tomatillos. Education is key with this item to meet sales and profits, and our merchandising programs focus on those."

Two distinct segments drive the increase in demand. "One is what we term a 'mature' customer profile, mainly the ethnic

"Eggplant is gaining popularity from cooking shows and health trends. Increased sales come mostly by offering recipes and new ways of cooking it. A lot of people just don't know how to cook it, or use it."

— Alfonso Cano, Northgate Gonzalez Markets

consumer," explains Avila. "The other 'growth' segment is mostly Anglos who use the peppers infrequently in certain dishes. There is a high potential opportunity to attract the mainstream population who has never tried them."

"There is a huge crossover between mainstream Americans and Mexican cuisine," says Northgate's Cano. "With respect to hot peppers, you need to figure out what type the customer is looking for, and if you have it then you'll sell it. You must have it consistently though."

Retailers can profit by making the products highly visible instead of waiting for customers to seek them out. "Regular promotions can

help retailers move more volume," says Aguilar. "Hot peppers are usually consumed with other products as part of a recipe, so if you promote hot peppers, there is a good chance other items in the fresh produce section will also see increased sales."

"Tie in more profitable items into displays such as avocados, tomatoes, and onions," advises United's Bunting.

"We recommend our customers conduct in-store demos and website tutorials for their customers so they understand the flavor profiles and correct usage/portions of chili peppers," says Avila.

Thinking creatively and aggressively will yield results. "Have cream cheese and bread crumbs handy with jalapeño popper recipes during football season," suggests Aguilar. "We've seen full bin displays of Anaheim and jalapeño peppers at the retail level during peak seasons. Some retailers also offer roasting in front of the store to bring customers in."

EXCITING EGGPLANT

Eggplant may be another sleeping profit-generator during the winter Mexico season. "Mexico exports various eggplant varieties to the U.S., including American (Regular), Italian, Chinese and Indian (also known as Hindu or Baby eggplant)," says Aguilar. "Ciruli Brothers ships multiple varieties, grown both in fields and under protected structures."

Suppliers are working to increase demand. "Our main focus with this item is increasing overall consumption," adds Avila. "We have launched a comprehensive trade and consumer program focused on education and building excitement at retail. These programs are derived from solid market and consumer research findings. Vegetarian and Meatless-Monday trends have set a solid cornerstone for our efforts, providing our retail partners with an opportunity worth pursuing."

"Eggplant is gaining popularity from cooking shows and health trends," says Cano. "Increased sales come mostly by offering recipes and new ways of cooking it. A lot of people just don't know how to cook it, or use it."

Merchandising should focus on preserving quality. "Eggplant displays best when fresh, firm and glossy," says Aguilar. "Displays should be kept cold and not piled too high because eggplant is sensitive to touch. Too much pressure or piercing will result in bruising later on. Produce staff should rotate displays frequently to remove fruit showing signs of bruising and over-maturity — brown, off-colored patches and wrinkly skin."

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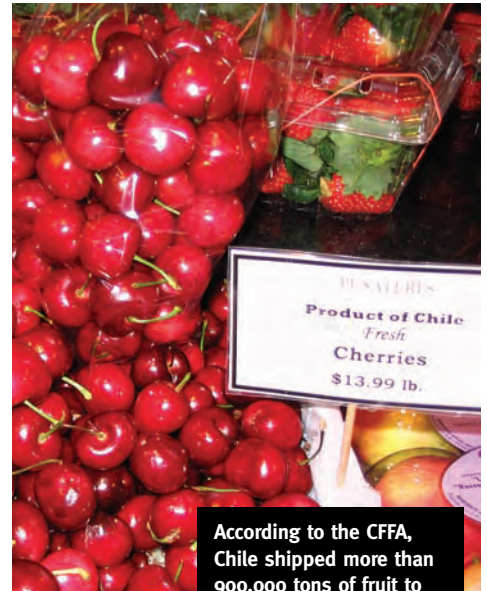
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CHILE: WINTER PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY STILL ABOUNDS

Retailers are encouraged to continue to plan and execute promotions on key items.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Despite Americans' familiarity with Chilean fruit, evidence shows strong retail promotions entice consumers to buy, sending sales upward. "Promotions always generate activity above and beyond the normal flow of promotion," says Eric Crawford, president and chief executive of Fresh Results, LLC, a fresh berry grower/shipper in Sunrise, FL.

"Chilean fruit in the winter can be an impulse item," asserts Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate Gonzalez Markets, a 37-store chain in Anaheim, CA. "The consumer needs to be nudged to buy it."

As proof, joint demos of Chilean citrus and Tajin (a brand of seasoning with a mix of chili peppers, sea salt and dehydrated lime) in early November by the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) more than doubled sales of Chilean navels in the stores that participated. "Every display or sales contest we ran for Chilean winter fruit in the 2012/13 season increased sales by double or triple digits," says Karen Brux, managing director for the Santiago, Chile-based CFFA. "Customers are faced with many choices in a produce department,

so product merchandising and promotions are essential in raising the profile of a product and generating increased sales."

"Promotions help increase sales," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for Kings Food Markets in Parsippany, NJ with 25 Kings and 6 Balducci's stores. "You need to bring new users to the category by promoting."

Over the past decade, Chile has clearly established itself as a crucial fruit supplier in the North American market, and consumers embraced the imports. "For many years, North American retailers have been buying Chilean products to satisfy consumer demand when domestic products are not available," says Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL. "Chile produces a wide variety of high quality products and has best-in-class food safety systems in place."

"It's impossible to not pay attention to Chilean winter fruit," says Mark Greenberg, president and chief executive of Capespan North America (a global supply chain management service that offers alternative,

direct-to-market channels and customized solutions for the global fresh produce industry) in Montreal, Canada. "Chile is North America's most important source of off-season deciduous fruit from mid-autumn through mid-spring."

"Chile is, by far, the largest exporter of off-season produce in the Southern Hemisphere," says Steve Monson, senior sales representative at C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc. in Eden Prairie, MN. "A wide variety of Chilean winter fruit exports allow U.S. retailers to merchandise an abundance of quality produce in the off season."

According to the CFFA, Chile shipped more than 900,000 tons of fruit to North America in 2012/13. "The fruit supplied from Chile during our winter months enables North American consumers to continue eating the fruits they love, whether blueberries, grapes or stone fruit," says Brux. "With the popularity of all these items and the marketing support provided by the CFFA, there are numerous opportunities for retailers to promote."

"Chilean fruit adds sales," says Kneeland. "It's a lot of money, especially from the grape



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standpoint, and helps total sales throughout the department.”

Keep On Promoting

Although Chile suffered a severe frost affecting some production areas and commodities, suppliers still tout an abundance of opportunity for retail promotion in the upcoming season. “Retailers should still look to promote grapes, cherries, blueberries, apples, pears, citrus, kiwi, and avocados,” says Christou. “Stone fruit was affected by the freeze and quantities might be tight.”

“The frost mostly affected stone fruit and kiwi,” reports Manuel J. Alcaino, president of Decofrut, a company that advises and optimizes fresh fruit businesses by providing information and analysis in Santiago, Chile. “Reports range around 60 percent damage. But even so, 40 or 50 percent is still an interesting volume because Chile is a large producer of stone fruit. There were some areas the frost did not affect. So depending on who you’re buying from, you may still even have a big focus on stone fruit.”

“Stone fruit was one of the commodities hardest hit by the frosts,” says Brux. “But, we will support retailers who have promotable volumes during the main promotion period of January through March.”

Blueberries, grapes, apples and pears are expected to have a normal or even banner season. “We don’t expect this year to be any different in blueberries than past years,” says Fresh Results’ Crawford. “We should be able to market adequately to accommodate a relatively small deficit in total blueberry yields and not interfere with promotional activity.”

“Retailers surely should focus promotion on grapes which were not that affected,” says Alcaino. “Apples and pears were also not much affected and will also be good items to promote as well.”

C.H. Robinson’s Monson agrees that promotions boost bottom lines. “Due to a large concentration of availability during this time period, promoting produce from Chile during the winter months is a great way to increase visibility and sales.”

All Out On Grapes

Grapes represent a win-win for consumers and retailers. “Grapes have overcome the stigma of seasonality,” says Northgate’s Cano. “Consumers expect them in the store all year long.”

“Retailers love promoting Chilean grapes,” says CFFA’s Brux. “We’ll be focusing our promotion efforts on the February/March

timeframe.”

“Not only do grapes hold the largest share of any other import crop from Chile, but they have been experiencing a substantial growth rate at 8 percent annually over the past five years,” reports Monson.

While last season yielded challenges, this season looks to hold opportune grape promotion prospects. “Last year, we had a quality situation due to humid weather,” explains Decofrut’s Alcaino. “We saw a tremendous impact in the condition of the fruit. This season we have the opposite. We have very high volume and excellent condition. High prices often keep a lot of households away from grape buying. To create demand, we must have accessible price.”

However, the situation makes promotion indispensable. “From the marketing point of view, we need to work together to sell this year,” says Alcaino. “We need a reasonable price for the early grapes and to keep them moving throughout the season. We don’t want to see people holding inventory. We need to move inventory. We need to see the market active and volume moving. Promotions, ads, and any other activities to move the product are very important.”

“Of all fruit, table grapes are among the most price elastic with consumer uptake highly responsive to changes in price,” says Capespan’s Greenberg. “Promotions allowing retailers to offer premium fruit at attractive retail prices will always increase sales. Promotions need to be well planned and should closely mirror expected product availability in the market.”

Consistent ads and a visible, clean display will affect sales. “We really push grapes,” reports Kings’ Kneeland. “We put them on ad, featuring them in the flier we send out to customers. We merchandise them up front so as soon as people walk in the door they see them.”

“Make sure the grape display is neat and clean,” advises Brux. “No one likes to pick up a sticky bag. The display should have a feeling of freshness and abundance.”

Variety encourages sales. “Everyone has their favorite color of grapes, so stock red, green and black to maximize sales,” says Brux.

“Cross-merchandising adds to grape sales,” says Kneeland. “We like to combine grapes with cheese displays. Winter encompasses a lot of holidays and parties, so these promotions fit well.”

Capitalize On Blueberry Demand

Blueberries represent another significant

USE PROMOTION TOOLS

Stores can utilize POS and signage to attract attention and increase impulse sales. Del Monte's Christou explains, "POS and signage can be informative about product quality, introducing new varieties, highlighting seasonal products, and providing nutritional information and recipes. Del Monte offers a variety of POS material showing nutritional value and benefits, as well as recipe cards that not only attract consumer's attention but also educate them."

The CFFA will work with retailers on custom signage and display/sales promotions but also has a wealth of general materials available for the 2013/14 season. "We have point of sale cards, ironman posters, nutrition and usage brochures, new recipes developed by registered dietitians and a wide range of images and nutritional information that can be used by retailers' social media and supermarket RDs," says Brux. "We also have

short, one-minute videos direct from Chilean orchards that are available for posting on retailers' Facebook pages or other social media outlets."

Consumer marketing programs offered by suppliers are another great way to promote Chilean winter fruit. "These programs help build relationships that consumers come back to the next time they shop," says Schwartzhoff. "C.H. Robinson offers produce managers display contests, consumer contests giving the winner a trip to Chile for the winter, and Facebook contests that connect the retailer with their consumers. All of these add excitement for products at the store level as consumers are shopping."

The CFFA has merchandisers throughout the U.S. and Canada. "They work with nationwide retail chains, regional chains and independent retailers to develop customized, tailored promotions for all the different fruits available from Chile," says Brux.

profit opportunity for retailers. "Blueberries in general and especially from Chile add high revenue value for the produce department," says Fresh Results' Crawford. "Retailers are always looking for an item to generate more revenue and blueberries are in the top three."

While volume has been limited in the past, Chilean supply continues to increase. "Blueberry imports have experienced a total of 36.8 percent growth over the past ten years," reports C.H. Robinson's Monson.

"While winter blueberry volume has been limited in the past, it's been increasing recently," says Kneeland. "Blueberry demand is very consistent in our stores. Our customers always want them. It's something we need to have."

"Consumers are looking for year-round supply of blueberries," says Crawford. "Chile fills a window when it's not available out of any other growing region. The continuity of supply is important. Retailers should be

excited about Chilean blueberries and look to promote aggressively."

Blueberries are expected to be available for promotions this season. "We anticipate a 7 percent increase over last year," says CFFA's Brux. "U.S. consumption has grown from 414 million pounds in 2005 to 853 million pounds in 2011, and we foresee continued growth. We have a large promotion program to support sales. Retailers should focus on the months of January and February."

"Last year we saw a big increase, and this year we're looking at a similar number," says Decofrut's Alcaino. "The U.S. market has responded very well to Chilean blueberries. They come in at a great time of year, and it's a good product for retailers to focus and promote."

Retailers can capitalize on health and nutrition. "Blueberries have a great nutrition story," says Brux. "Retailers should promote the

healthy attributes of blueberries at the point of sale, giving shoppers even more reasons to purchase them."

"Promoting grapes and blueberries as healthy snacks and touting the health benefits of these items can help drive sales," says Drew Schwartzhoff, director of marketing at C.H. Robinson.

Encouraging dining occasions also helps increase sales. "One growth area for retail is the breakfast category," says Schwartzhoff. "Building a display or cross promoting blueberries with other breakfast items can encourage consumers to eat this important meal at home. Additionally, as healthy snacking continues to trend upward, C.H. Robinson works with retailers to create messaging specifically around healthy snacking for in-store signage and in advertisements."

"Make additional displays around the department and tie them in with other fruit such as pineapples," suggests Kings' Kneeland. "We also merchandise them in the dairy department next to the yogurts."

As popularity increases, stores can promote larger containers. "Consumption continues to climb, so it's time to bring out larger pack sizes," says Brux. "They simply sell better than 4.4 and 6 ounce containers."

Surprise Them With Cherries

Retailers have a unique opportunity to surprise customers with cherries this winter. "Cherries are popular when we can get them and people don't mind paying the retail," reports Kneeland. "It's one of those surprise items. When a customer doesn't expect them and they see them, more than likely, they'll buy."

"We have some of the biggest up-sales in



“Supermarkets should work toward building and maintaining open communication platforms and strong relationships with their suppliers to understand when the best times are to promote a specific commodity.”

— Steve Monson, C.H. Robinson

cherries during January,” says Northgate’s Cano. “The deal is very sensitive to supply and price, but customers will buy them and spend more money for cherries in January than in the summertime.”

Chilean cherry supply is expected to support promotion. “Although production was affected by the frost, maybe about 35 to 40 percent, it’s still a good item to focus on,” explains Decofrut’s Alcaino. “Cherries in the U.S. winter are not a common item, so any

amount is great to promote. The capacity to produce cherries in Chile is very high, so the reduction (due to the frost being over) results in a decent volume.”

“Cherries will have promotable volumes in January, and we have a small marketing program to help promote in select retailers,” says CFFA’s Brux.

Visibility is crucial to selling this impulse item. “Most consumers probably don’t know cherries from Chile are available in winter,” says Brux. “For the short season they’re in market, retailers benefit from building a display in an area of high visibility, whether within the produce department or even at the checkout.”

Maintain Communication

Communication is central to a successful Chilean program. “You need active and ongoing communication with suppliers,” says Kneeland.

Chile has an excellent track record in communicating to the buying community, which may prove invaluable this season. “Chile has done a very good job over the past few years of really identifying their volume curve and communicating it to the retail community,” says Fresh Results’ Crawford. “They keep

everyone posted each day and get retail ramped up to take advantage of the good quality and the decent supply for January.”

Capespan’s Greenberg says retailers should do their part as well. “With the springtime freeze in Chile having affected some table grape varieties, retailers should confirm with suppliers that the product they want to promote will be available in adequate supply when they choose to promote it.”

Working together will assure profitable promotions for all. “Supermarkets should work toward building and maintaining open communication platforms and strong relationships with their suppliers to understand when the best times are to promote a specific commodity,” says C.H. Robinson’s Monson. “Advanced planning between retailers and Chilean suppliers also helps to avoid, or at least greatly reduce, any hiccups during the harvest and shipping period.”

“With accurate information, suppliers can help buyers plan for any changes in volume due to weather or harvest conditions,” says Del Monte’s Christou. “Ads can also be planned when peak volume is anticipated. Buyers can work more efficiently if they can react faster to volume fluctuations.” **pb**

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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

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DECEMBER 2013

NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

The Best of The Big Apple's Melting Pot



As produce shifts to the center-of-the-plate star of New York's eclectic food scene, 13 various foodservice operators share how they bring fruits and vegetables to the main stage.

New York chefs are at the forefront of every national trend as they flex their creative muscles with innovative and flavorful treatments of seasonal dishes that often cast fresh produce as the star of the show.

From Manhattan to every corner of the five boroughs, restaurants and prepared foods outlets are showcasing colorful, healthful and local fruits and vegetables, allowing consumers to celebrate the best of the Big Apple's tasty melting pot — without the guilt.

"Most of the New York chefs are not just using produce as a side dish, but they are using it more as the center-of-the-plate," says Chris Neary, corporate executive chef for J. Kings Foodservice Professionals, Inc., a large regional foodservice distributor based in Holtsville, NY.

The New York Times food and wine columnist, Florence Fabricant, concurs. "Another trend that has started in New York and shown up in California, particularly in new restaurants, is having a menu that features a vegetable as the key ingredient," she says. "You might see a dish with cauliflower as the main ingredient, and filet of beef, halibut steak or chicken breast might show up on the second line of the menu."

As more consumers demand to know where their food is coming from, New York's restaurants are leading the way with seasonal offerings that are purchased from farms in the surrounding area.

"We work with 30 local farmers and often drop off product that is less than a day out of the ground," says Neary. "Chefs are asking for local produce; they want to know what farm it comes from so they merchandise it on their menus."

In response to this growing demand, farmers are raising an increasing number of varieties of produce, allowing chefs to offer a broader and more nuanced palette of flavors as they shape their menus. Such products include apples, pears, mushrooms, onions, potatoes, stone fruit and herbs, and — more often than not — these

ingredients are introduced to the public through the creativity of chefs in the nation's premier restaurant city.

"I think the trends have to start in the restaurants," says Fabricant. "Retailers would not be selling arugula or radicchio unless restaurants had not had them first."

"As consumers become more familiar with the new varieties of fruit and vegetables found in restaurants, TV shows or cookbooks, they are more likely to seek them out at retail outlets," Fabricant says.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of farmers markets throughout the five boroughs presents further evidence that chefs and consumers alike are demonstrating a growing appetite for fresh, local produce. The farmers markets as well as stationary outlets such as Fairway Market, Whole Foods Market and specialty stores are magnets for produce-hungry buyers.

With a population of nearly 8.5 million people and upwards of 50 million tourists annually, New York City boasts more than 24,000 foodservice operations and bars, according to the New York City Hospitality Alliance. The Zagat Survey estimates the average per-person cost of dinner out in New York is nearly \$45, including drink, tax and tip. Clearly, these operators rely on their ability to menu a lot of produce.

PRODUCE BUSINESS scoured Gotham to offer readers a behind-the-scenes tour of the city's incomparable food scene by profiling 13 unique, produce-centric venues, ranging from Greek, Italian, Mexican and Asian restaurants that change with the season to landmark establishments, an organic juice bar and a vegan food truck.

While differing in price range, cuisine and daily traffic counts, these eating spots share a passion for produce almost bordering on the reverential.

Hopefully our smorgasbord of offerings will whet your appetite and prompt an in-person visit on your next trip to the Big Apple.

— Ellen Koteff



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Cuisine Specialty: Pizza



To celebrate its second anniversary this past October, Barboncino's owner and chef Ron Brown offered free brunch to customers. The line, he says, extended out the door and onto Franklin Avenue where restaurateurs like Brown have made the Crown Heights, Brooklyn neighborhood — located conveniently off the 2, 3, 4 and 5 Express trains — a serious foodie destination.

"This is the culmination of everything I've wanted to do in the restaurant business," says Brown, who doubles as a filmmaker. "The only cooking surface is a wood-burning oven made by a family outside Naples, Italy, that's been making them for over 100 years."

Barboncino's main draw is its oven-roasted pizza, which consistently features produce. On Halloween, for instance, Brown and his staff created a "spooky"



pizza that combined seasonal vegetables like red kale, roasted butternut squash, and fire-roasted pumpkin seeds with staples like *fior de latte* (mozzarella fresh-pasteurized or unpasteurized cow's milk), parmigiano reggiano and fontina cheeses. Because the Halloween-themed pie was so popular, Brown says that they'll likely offer it through the fall.

Barboncino's biggest selling pizzas are also some of the most produce-heavy pies. These include the Arugula pie with cherry tomatoes, the Eggplant and Zucchini pie with organic Italian tomatoes, and the Kale pie with sautéed kale, caramelized onions and rosemary potatoes. Brown is also proud of his brunch recipes. "We have our own take on the frittata," he says. "I can't ever recall seeing it baked into dough like we do, kind of like a mini pie." Barboncino frittatas feature a number of popular vegetable ingredients,

like Brussels sprouts, asparagus, onions, yellow squash, bell peppers, scallions, Bibb lettuce, basil and garlic.

As a result of the restaurant's fanfare, Barboncino relies heavily on Baldor Specialty Foods (wholesaler out of the Bronx) for its supply of produce, which Brown says has a consistent quality of good product. On occasion, Brown will buy from a local marketer. Each week, Brown says that Barboncino goes through an estimated 10 cases of arugula, and at least two or three cases of both red and yellow peppers. (One of Barboncino's most popular appetizers is a Fire Roasted Peppers dish.) And of course, there's the kale, which Brown has offered from time to time as a daily special. "It's been so popular, which is telling me that I need to get kale on the menu," says Brown. "We order a case and it's gone that night. Boom!"

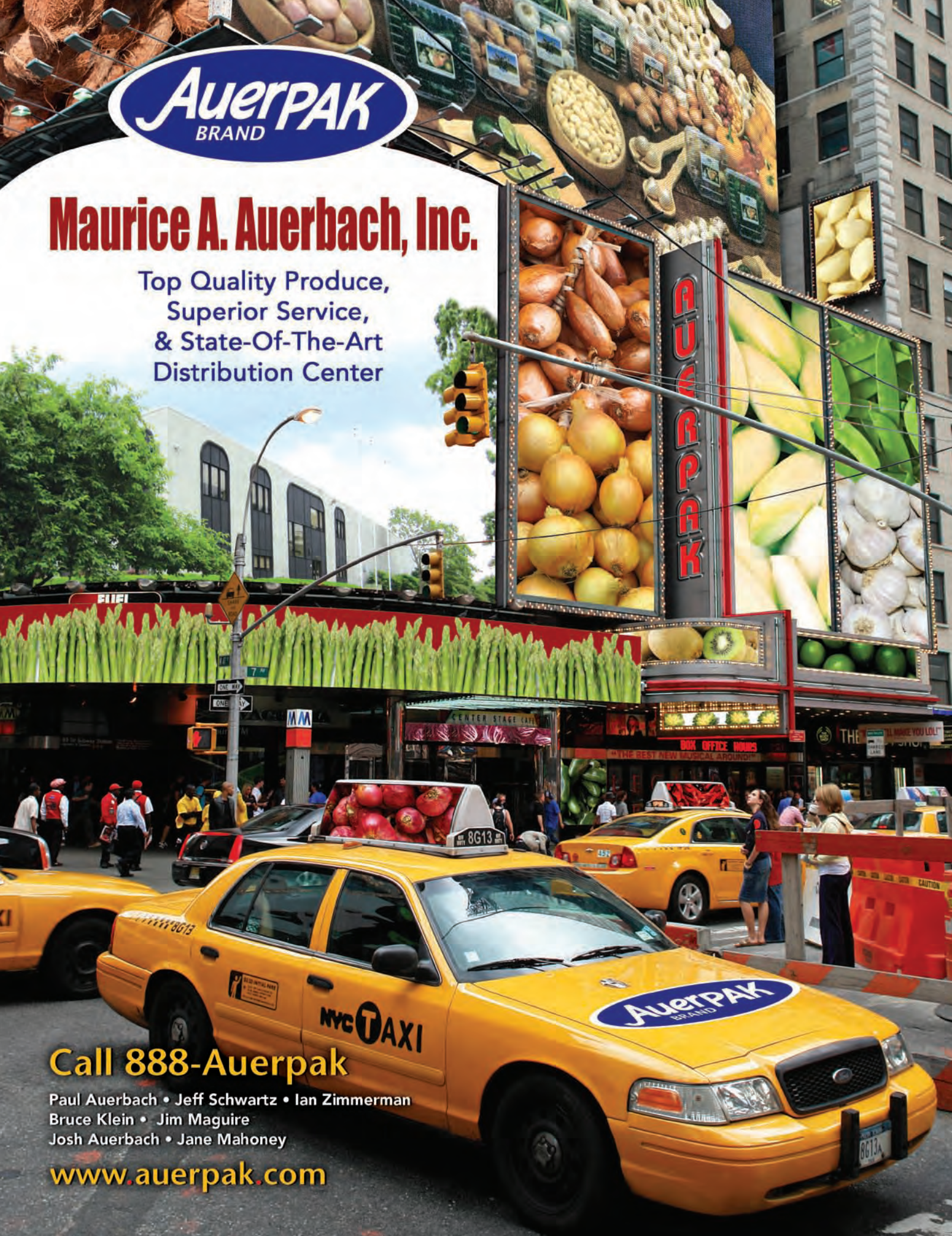
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Cuisine Specialty: Organic Vegan

After stints with such top culinary stars as David Bouley, Matthew Kenney, and Albert Roux, and a decade spent as a private chef, long-time vegetarian — and recently converted vegan — James Rafferty decided it was time to take his cooking skills on the road. The Culinary Institute of America graduate purchased a former FedEx truck on eBay, developed a streamlined menu of organic vegan dishes, and launched The Green Radish into the burgeoning Manhattan food truck scene.

The Green Radish, which hit the streets of New York in late August of this year, features a menu of organic, plant-based selections that Rafferty says must be flavorful, freshly prepared, nutritious, and can be served quickly. Parking in a different spot in midtown Manhattan Monday through Friday, The Green Radish currently offers a lunch menu featuring three soups and salads, eight main dishes, three sides, and six desserts. Future plans also call for breakfast offerings like muffins, buckwheat pancakes and coffee.

As the food truck logs more time on the road, Rafferty says he continues to modify the menu. “We can’t really offer specials because having to explain them every day would slow business down, which you

can’t do when most of your business is done in a 90-minute window.”

Not surprisingly, vegetables and herbs form the backbone of the menu, and Rafferty says the truck is “jam packed” with onions, peppers, carrots, zucchini, eggplant, sweet potatoes, beets, radishes and “tons of kale.”

The Green Radish’s best-selling item is a 6-ounce black bean burger, which is topped with cilantro, avocado, melted onions and chipotle mayonnaise, served on a sprouted wheat bun. The burger itself — along with chickpea burger — is baked off in advance in a preparation kitchen in New Jersey and then reheated at service.

Other top-selling dishes include the G-RADatouille wrap with zucchini, eggplant, toasted tomato, kale, hemp seeds and spiced balsamic dressing; and “No Lobster Roll,” made with mashed chickpeas, tarragon, celery and vegan mayonnaise, served on a sprouted wheat-toasted bun.

Rafferty says he has been purchasing his produce from a large area purveyor. However, the supplier’s requirement that he buy only in cases is forcing him to order more than he prefers. As a result, he is looking to buy in smaller quantities from more local sources in New Jersey. “We want the food to be as fresh as possible,” he says.

In the meantime, Rafferty says he is giving thought to increasing the size of his truck fleet. However, he will concentrate on the one truck “until we get things to where we want them. We need to do a little more fine-tuning.”

— Paul Frumkin



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Brunch: Sat.: 11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.,

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Cuisine Specialty: Modern Italian



Lincoln Ristorante’s executive chef Jonathan Benno doesn’t have to leave the neighborhood to find top-quality local produce. Twice each week, Benno or members of his staff travel a block or so from the restaurant’s Lincoln Center location on Manhattan’s Upper West Side to the nearby Tucker Square Greenmarket where they can select from among the area’s best seasonal fruits and vegetables.

Now 3-years-old, Lincoln Ristorante established itself as a destination for diners seeking to indulge themselves in Benno’s contemporary Italian cuisine. The 150-seat restaurant, a partnership between Benno and the Patina Restaurant Group, “strives to source the finest local ingredients and then prepare them using the best Italian culinary techniques,” explains Tanja Yokum, director of public relations and marketing for the New York-based Patina Group.

Located in a minimalistic, glassed-in space beneath Lincoln Center’s 10,000-square-foot sloping lawn, Lincoln Ristorante also offers patrons panoramic views of the famous cultural center and the surrounding neighborhood as well as an open kitchen that lets diners watch the



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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE



chefs at work.

However, the restaurant's chief attraction remains Benno's regularly changing menu, which is shaped by the seasonal, fresh produce available at the Tucker Square Greenmarket. For example, in late summer, the kitchen is able to buy locally grown San Marzano tomatoes, which are raised from heirloom seeds tracing their origins back to the Naples region in Italy. During the off seasons, the tomatoes are imported.

Also in late summer, Benno is able to purchase local corn — which is grated, cooked down until it has thickened into a polenta consistency, and then served with mascarpone cheese.

A fall antipasti dish, *Vedure Autunno con Bagna Cauda*, features an array of vegetables, including artichokes, sunchokes, radishes, carrots, cauliflower, cardoons, and endives, served with an anchovy dressing.

The Tucker Square Greenmarket's local influence also is reflected in Lincoln Ristorante's Lunch and Dinner Dessert menus, which include a *Sorbetti* containing Concord grapes, *Crostata Di Cotogno* with poached quince, and *Dolce Alla Ricotta* with ricotta cheesecake and candied pumpkin seeds.

But while the local produce available at the Greenmarket helps to guide Lincoln Ristorante's constantly changing menu, "the restaurant also works with several of New York's top suppliers to supplement that source," says Steve Charron, Patina's vice president of purchasing. "They understand that we're looking for produce locally sourced from New York and New Jersey; although, as the seasons turn, we're obviously forced to look a little beyond that."

— Paul Frumkin



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688 Franklin Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11238

(347) 318-3643

mayfieldbk.com

Hours of operation:

Sun. – Thurs. 5:30 p.m. – 11 p.m.,

Fri. – Sat. 5:30 p.m. – 12 a.m.

Brunch: Sat. – Sun. 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Bar Hours: Mon. – Thurs. 5 p.m. – 1 a.m.,

Fri. 5 p.m. – 2 a.m., Sat. 11 a.m. – 2 a.m.,

Sun. 11 a.m. – 1 a.m.

Cuisine Specialty: American/New, Seasonal

brick walls, is decidedly modern, even rustic. The food follows suit with simple yet elegant dishes that are frequently remarkable.

Mayfield, which is located just a few blocks from Barboncino [see bio on page 54] on bustling Franklin Avenue, is owned by chef Lev Gewirtzman, 38, who was born and raised in New York City.

He named his restaurant after crooner Curtis Mayfield, whose soulful melodies often fill the candlelit dining room with good energy.

Gewirtzman takes pride in maintaining a seasonal menu, which often features an array of specialty produce over a variety of dishes. And as wintertime approaches, Mayfield's seasonal offering includes

The atmosphere inside Mayfield, with its smooth marble countertops, wide wooden chairs and exposed



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The king of vegetables on the Mayfield menu, however, remains Tuscan kale: Gewirtzman estimates that he has sold 7,000 kale salads in the year that Mayfield has had its doors open for business.

— Jonathan Zalman

PRODUCE-BASED DRINKS

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130 W Houston St, New York, NY 10012

(646) 588-5375

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Hours of operation:

Mon. – Fri.: 7:30 a.m. – 10 p.m.,

Sat. – Sun. 8:30 a.m. – 10 p.m.

Cuisine Specialty: Juice bars and smoothies

Brussels sprouts, collard greens, Tuscan kale, cauliflower, rutabaga, and butternut and delicata squashes. “I’m also a sucker for mushrooms,” says Gewirtzman. “All the wild varieties.” His seasonal list also includes Chanterelle and porcini, as well as cultivated mushrooms for pickling.

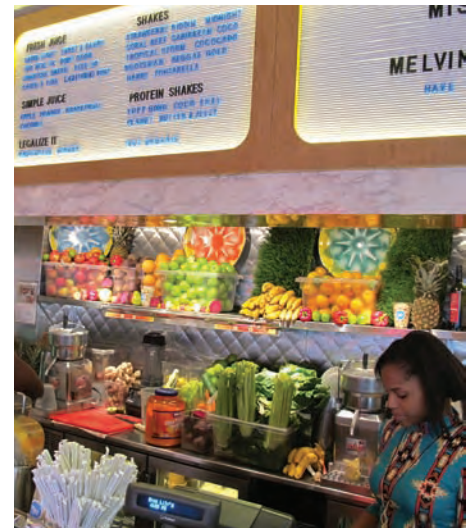
“This time of the year people get really into Brussels sprouts,” says Gewirtzman. Mayfield’s roasted Brussels sprout dish is a can’t-miss that combines the popular green with delicata squash, pickled mustard seed, and Dante cheese.

“I got introduced to the delicata squash a few years ago, and I fell in love with it,” says Gewirtzman. “My 6 year old got into it too — which is nuts!”

Each week, Gewirtzman says that Mayfield runs through about three cases of Brussels sprouts, and nearly four cases of collard greens. At times, Gewirtzman will order fresh produce from Phillips Farms in New Jersey, although, he says that Mayfield gets the bulk of its produce from Jim and Andy’s Produce, a local purveyor on Court Street in Cobble Hill in Brooklyn, and a larger regional distributor.

Of the 40 years that Melvin Major has lived in New York City, 15 of them have been spent making healthful, produce-heavy shakes at various locations across New York City. He partnered to offer his drinks in one location at Melvin’s Juice Box in the historic and posh Greenwich Village in Lower Manhattan. Originally from Hilton Head, SC, Major’s concoctions have become so popular that a second Manhattan location opened this fall in the Dream Downtown hotel, just blocks from the original site of Melvin’s Juice Box at Miss Lily’s, a Caribbean restaurant and bakery. “Everything should be made with love, before and after,” says Major. “If it doesn’t have that, then it’s not good.”

Melvin’s Juice Box sees lines out the door for hours on end, which may include, according to Major, celebrities like magician David Blaine, and actor Woody Harrelson. Inside an estimated 800 to 1,000 square-foot-space, Melvin himself — a smiling, bearded, dreadlocked man



— along with his staff churn out about 400 drinks each day.

The most popular drinks on the menu are: “Body Good,” which includes kale, collard greens, green chard, celery, apple, lemon and ginger (there’s a salad version of Body Good, too); and the “Sweet and Dandy” juice, which includes apples, beets, lemon, ginger, carrots and pineapple. “I came up with [the Sweet and Dandy] because I wanted more iron in my blood.”

The fresh-made juices are not cheap, ranging anywhere from \$9 – \$11, but they are 100 percent organic, something Major says that other chains will claim, but not actually produce. The area (Greenwich Village, SOHO) and its residents’ income levels enable Major to buy the best organic ingredients because his customers can and will pay for it. “Organic is healthy, but there’s a price on it that most people can’t afford.”

Major says he buys from many different suppliers, such as Ephrata, PA-based Four Seasons Produce, with which he’s been doing business for almost 20



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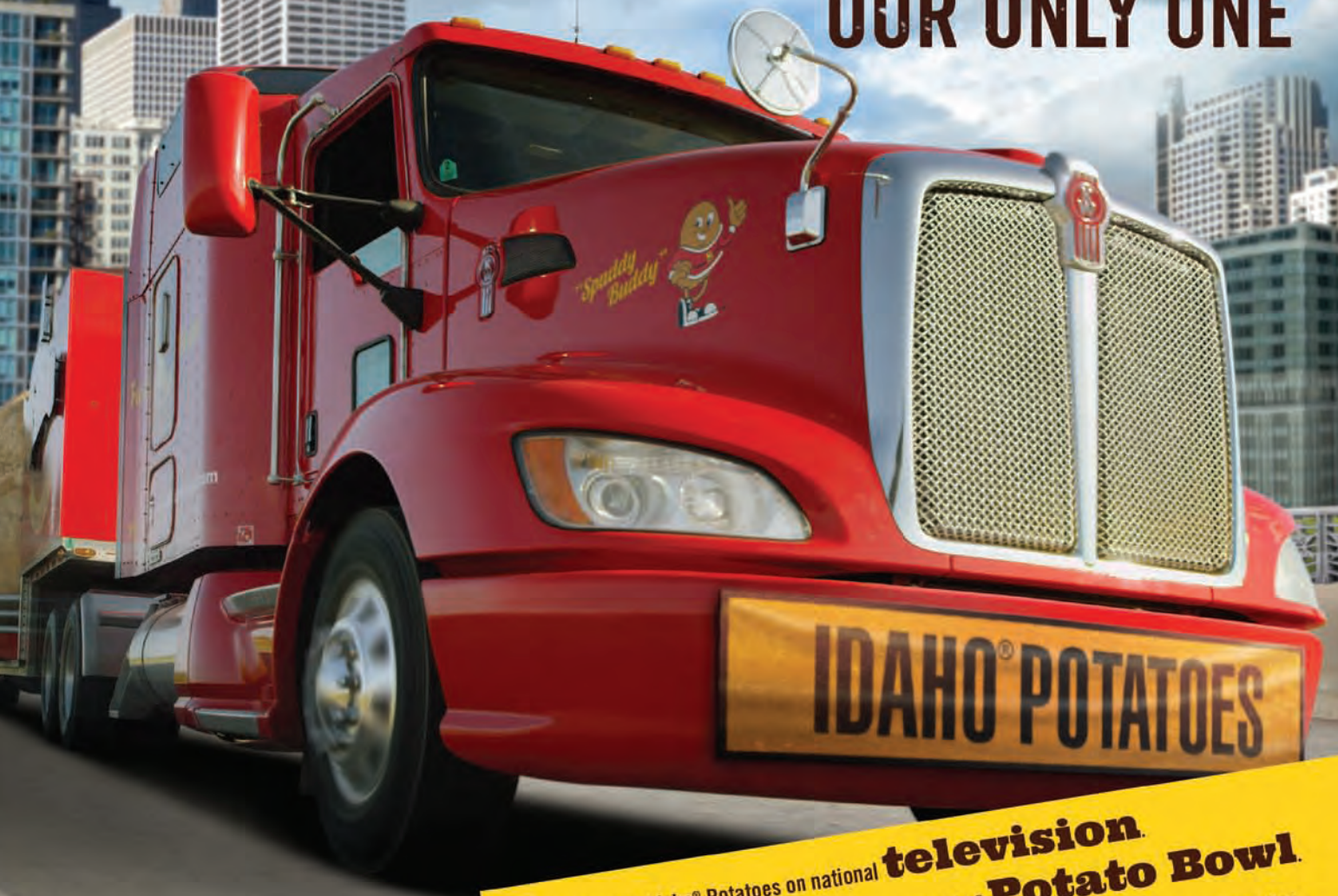
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'FIELD' DIRECTION

Another Resource From IPC: On-The-Ground Retail Expertise

Idaho Potato Commission's Northeast field director, Ken Tubman, discusses his work and provides consultation for produce managers.

Like all of the Idaho Potato Commission's (IPC) field directors, Ken Tubman is on familiar turf when he walks into the produce section. Running his own retail produce department is just one of the jobs Tubman has done during his 40-plus years in the produce business — the past 11 as IPC's Northeast field director. The Boston native prides himself on knowing his regional produce market inside and out, bringing a local perspective to savvy potato merchandising strategies. Tubman talked to *PRODUCE BUSINESS* about the value that IPC field directors can offer to retailers.

Q: What can a produce manager expect to gain from a visit with you?

A: The most important thing is that we're there to be a resource, not to sell them anything. We have more knowledge and expertise about Idaho® potatoes and the entire potato category than anybody else, and we want to share it. We know what will be helpful to you — and we know what will sell.

My visits are usually about half an hour, but I can be there as long as needed. We have a wide variety of tools we can offer to produce managers to help them plan and solve problems they may be seeing in the department. They have to stay on top of several different produce categories, but we only have to know one — so we have incredibly detailed expertise that we can share.

Q: What specific tools do you have for produce managers?

A: We have lots of customized category data, such as Nielsen statistics on potato sales in their market, to show them what specific varieties and package sizes are selling better right now. Produce managers also like to see what ads their competitors ran in specific time frames in the past year, and I give them all the competing ads in one booklet that they can easily reference.

We can also create a specially formatted potato category management report specific to a retailer. We do category reviews where we go to five of a retailer's stores and analyze the potato merchandising, and then give the retailer our



suggestions for how to increase the stores' sales.

We're also available to help a retailer's staff members who are new to the category and need to get up to speed quickly. I have retailers where I sit down with their merchandisers and do a class on potatoes. I can help them set up the category so it turns over and it's always fresh.

Q: What does the Idaho Potato Commission do to help produce managers sell Idaho® potatoes in particular?

A: We have incredibly creative, award-winning programs for retailers that help promote the Idaho® brand, from the Idaho® Potato Lover's Display contest each February to different strategic bin promotions to local ad money and support. And for the past two years, we've had the Great Big Idaho® Potato Truck traveling around the country to boost consumer awareness. The first year, the truck stopped at more than 100 retail stores, and this year the truck visited mostly retailers hosting major events, like a store grand opening or a national company meeting. We've continued to have the truck in some of our national TV advertising — it's a real crowd pleaser.



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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

years. He estimates that on a weekly basis, he runs through 23 boxes of kale, 16 boxes of collard greens, 16 boxes of green chard, 40 or more boxes of apples, 15 boxes of lemons, and 10 boxes of both celery and bananas, and about twelve 50-pound bags of carrots.

Price is often a deterrent, such as with organic aloe or organic lemon, which can be “crazily” overpriced. “I want the best quality possible,” says Major. “The more I spend for it, the better the quality is. Most of these companies lower their prices on organic stuff because they do a very big volume around New York, but the prices lately have been seeming a little too high.”

— Jonathan Zalman

PAYING HOMAGE TO PRODUCE

MOLYVOS

871 Seventh Avenue,
New York, NY 10019
(212) 582-7500

molyvos.com

Hours of Operation:

Brunch: Sat. – Sun.: 11:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Lunch: Mon. – Fri.: 12 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Dinner: Sun. – Tues.: 5 p.m. – 11 p.m.,

Wed. – Fri.: 5:30 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.,

Sat.: 5 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.

Cuisine Specialty: Greek



Molyvos, a restaurant named for a seaside village on the Greek island of Lesbos, serves true Greek cuisine transporting the diner out of midtown Manhattan into its namesake near the Aegean Sea.

Executive chef/partner Jim Botsacos' menu pays homage to not only his Greek, food-centric heritage but also that of the restaurant's owners, the Livanos family. Popular dishes include Roasted Black Mission Figs, Grilled Baby Octopus and Jumbo Head of Prawns with Preserved Lemon.

Two of the most popular dishes, The Traditional Greek Salad and The Marinated Beet Salad, are not complicated and favored because of their accentuation of fresh, flavorful ingredients.

Chef Botsacos says he particularly loves preparing “a tomato salad dressed with my New Greek Cuisine Extra Virgin Olive Oil and Feta... because it relies strictly on the freshness and quality of the produce for flavor.”

He prepares most dishes lathera-style, which cooks vegetables slow and low in an olive-oil based sauce prior to serving them in the traditional Mediterranean fashion through shared-plates

known as *mezede*s, alongside such proteins as whole fish.

The menu highlights the importance of health and freshness, which has become synonymous with a Mediterranean diet.

When speaking specifically to the Greek cuisines' high volume of fruits and vegetables, Botsacos explains, “At Molyvos, these ingredients are the backbone of the menu, and we are constantly incorporating the freshest most seasonal ingredients to illustrate all that Greek cuisine has to offer.”

To achieve his mission, Botsacos pays special attention to seasonality before planning any menus. When possible, he sources produce locally from such nearby locales as Blooming Hill Farm in the Hudson Valley.

When local sourcing is not possible, Molyvos relies on greenhouse-grown produce from California and Florida, which adds to the authenticity of this widely popular New York restaurant. That authenticity is not only reflected in the cuisine, but in the wine list as well — which is often touted as the nation's most expansive all-Greek wine list.

— Lucy Pack





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Hours of operation:

Breakfast: 7 a.m. – 10 a.m., for a limited time

Lunch: 11:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Dinner: Mon. – Thurs.: 5:30 p.m. – 10 p.m.,

Fri. – Sat.: 5:30 p.m. – 11 p.m.,

Sun.: 5 p.m. – 9 p.m.

Cuisine Specialty: New American seasonal



Few restaurants take the changing of the seasons quite as seriously as Park Avenue Autumn. Every three months the Manhattan restaurant closes its doors for 48 hours and completely reinvents itself, altering the décor, the dining room layout, the number of seats, staff uniforms, lighting fixtures, place settings, the menus and even the name. Currently called Park Avenue Autumn, the concept over the course of the year also will be known variously as Park Avenue Winter, Park Avenue Spring and Park Avenue Summer.

The restaurant is owned by Manhattan-based Fourth Wall Restaurants group — which also operates such high-end Manhattan destinations as Quality Meats, Maloney & Porcelli and the original Smith

& Wollensky — and is run by the father-and-son team, Alan and Michael Stillman. Park Avenue Autumn was opened originally as Park Avenue Cafe by Alan Stillman — together with chef David Burke — in the 1990s, but was transformed in 2005 by Michael Stillman into the restaurant's present incarnation.

Today, the East Side operation is under the culinary baton of executive chef Kevin Lasko. Not surprisingly, Lasko says the menu is driven by the seasonal metamorphosis and the availability of a variety of fresh produce. For the restaurant's autumn iteration, the kitchen is menuing a variety of squash — including pumpkins — collard greens, Swiss chard, kale and Brussels sprouts.

Lasko says about 70 percent of his produce is purchased either from greenmarkets or local purveyors, while stock vegetables like onions, carrots, celery and potatoes come from larger suppliers.

However, he says he is seeing “a lot of middle men popping up. They curate produce from about 30 farms in New Jersey, so rather than having to shop for products individually, I can get them from a single purveyor. I think that's the future.”

About 90 percent of the items on the autumn menu are different from those offered throughout the summer, Lasko says, although about 10 percent are retained as favorites. Of the new seasonal dishes, about 60 percent are making their appearance for the first time, while 40 percent are dishes that proved their mettle on previous autumn menus.

Free-range roasted chicken served with pumpkin pie and cranberry sauce is a popular autumn dish, Lasko says. The pumpkin pie filling, which he says is more savory than sweet, is served on *pâte brisée* and topped with whipped ricotta.

Park Avenue Autumn also is offering a grilled Berkshire pork chop that has been brined for 24 hours and served with roasted quince, maitake mushrooms and Brussels sprouts, and an apple cider gastrique.

The dessert menu, created by pastry chef Richard Leach, also offers seasonal ingredients in such items as warm pumpkin and molasses cake with sour cream and praline, and housemade Bartlett pear sorbet.

— Paul Frumkin

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(212) 533-3350

61 Columbus Avenue

(212) 977-7700

rosamexicano.com

Hours of operation: First Avenue location:

Brunch:

Sat. – Sun.: 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Dinner: Mon.: 5 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Tues. – Fri.: 5 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.

Sat.: 4 p.m. – 11:30 p.m.

Sun.: 4 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Cuisine Specialty: Upscale Mexican



When Josefina Howard opened the first Rosa Mexicano on New York's Upper East Side in 1984, her goal was to bring authentic Mexican fare to a dining-out marketplace that previously had offered no genuine options. While several New York restaurants were spreading the gospel of Tex-Mex through low-cost menus focusing on tacos, burritos and enchiladas, New Yorkers had yet to experience a high-end operation that truly represented the rich and diverse cooking of Mexico.

Nearly 30 years later Rosa Mexicano not only has succeeded in bringing the country's contemporary flavors to the streets of Manhattan, but it now also has 14 other high-volume locations in cities around the United States and three

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Hours of operation:

Lunch and Dinner:

Sun. – Wed.: 11:30 a.m. – 12 a.m.,

Thurs. – Sat.: 11:30 a.m. – 1 a.m.

Lunch Specials: 11:30 a.m. – 4 p.m., daily

Cuisine Specialty: Southeast Asian street food

branches — soon to be four — overseas.

The concept's pan-Mexican menu features a wide range of selections, including meat-centric dishes like slow-braised pork shank served on chipotle creamed spinach with red bean chorizo chili; and Baja fish tacos, featuring whatever is fresh and local that day served with housemade jalapeño tartar sauce and slaw. It also offers authentic preparations like its molé, which calls for more than 20 ingredients and takes eight hours to prepare.

However, two of its most popular signature preparations — guacamole freshly prepared at tableside and frozen pomegranate margaritas — feature fresh produce in starring roles.

Jason Berry, Rosa Mexicano's chief operating officer, says 95 percent of all tables order guacamole, which translates to more than one million Hass avocados purchased by the chain each year — making it one of the largest buyers of fresh avocados in the industry. The guacamole is prepared by making a paste of fresh cilantro, white onion, finely chopped jalapeño and salt using a traditional Mexican mortar and pestle. Then an avocado is split in half, cut into pieces with a knife, and tossed with the paste. The key, Berry says, is not to puree the avocado, but to leave it “half mashed and half chunky.”

Next, more fresh cilantro and diced tomato are added. It is served with house-made tortilla chips and salsa.

To prepare the frozen pomegranate margarita, white tequila, orange liqueur, fresh lime juice, fresh pomegranate juice and ice are pureed in a blender, poured into a glass and garnished with a lime wedge.

Produce in general plays an important role at Rosa Mexicano. The menu calls for 10 to 12 different chilis, including jalapeño, serrano, ancho, poblano, guajillo, pasilla, habanero and chipotle. While Rosa Mexicano has one main supplier for dried chilis, individual locations may partner with local farms and greenmarkets for specific ingredients. For instance, Berry says, restaurants in California might use locally foraged mushrooms.

“We'll use whatever we can find that's appropriate,” he adds

— Paul Frumkin



Spice Market, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's homage to Southeast Asian street fare, reflects the experiences of the celebrated Alsatian-born chef who, early in his career, spent time cooking in the kitchen of the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. His subsequent travels throughout the region inform the regularly changing menus at the 300-seat Meatpacking district restaurant, which has been known to serve more than 1,500 customers daily.

The Spice Market's chef de cuisine, Anthony Ricco, says the menus are influenced by the street foods of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Vietnam and other southeast countries. “It's honest food, like a fried spring roll you might get from a street vendor or a sate you might buy from somebody on a river boat in Thailand,” he says. “It's meant to be as close to that experience as you can get.”

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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE



The same mission informs the design of the sprawling 13,500-square-foot restaurant, which includes décor elements that were salvaged from the region. “The goal is to transport you to another place, so you don’t feel like you’re on 13th Street in Manhattan,” Ricco says.

In addition to offering a lunch/dinner menu that runs throughout the day, Spice Market also offers a fixed-price lunch menu featuring three courses for \$25 and a tasting menu priced at \$49 per person. Ricco, who worked for Vongerichten at his high-end destination Jean Georges before taking the kitchen reins at Spice Market

more than eight years ago, says the all-day dinner menu changes every six to eight weeks, with about 40 percent of the dishes being replaced by new items.

Ricco says many of the staples have been retained from the 2004-opening menu, like shaved tuna tartare with chili tapioca, Asian pear and lime, or ginger fried rice topped with crispy garlic and ginger and a fried egg.

For the dishes that change, seasonality of ingredients plays a key roll. Currently, Spice Market is offering dishes like a seasonal vegetable curry with beets, turnips and Brussels sprouts, and fall vegetable fried rice with XO sauce (a spicy seafood sauce originating from Hong Kong). And although certain dishes may sound seasonal, like butternut squash soup topped with ginger cream and Thai Basil, the popular item remains a fixture on the menu throughout the year.

While the Spice Market specializes in Southeast Asian fare, the kitchen purchases its produce domestically. For example, Ricco says lemongrass comes from California. “We buy some imported dry goods; but with fresh produce, we keep it as local as possible.”

— Paul Frumkin



PRODUCE-BASED ANTIPASTO BAR

TRATTORIA DELL'ARTE

900 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10106

(212) 245-9800

trattoriadellarte.com

Hours of operation:

Mon. – Sat.: 11:45 a.m. – 12 a.m.

Sun.: 11 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Cuisine Specialty: Italian

Despite New York’s overabundance of high-caliber Italian restaurants, Sheldon “Shelly” Fireman’s redoubtable Trattoria Dell’Arte still manages to stand out from the crowd. Guests continue to flock to the 25-year-old restaurant to enjoy the whimsical interpretation of a Tuscan artist’s studio by celebrated American graphic designer, Milton Glazer (most known for the I Love NY logo). The space includes oversized sculptures of body parts — including a gallery of famous noses — and unfinished paintings. At the same time, “the Carnegie Hall-area operation also relies on its rustic Italian fare to draw the crowds,” says managing director Brandon Fay.

Certainly, the restaurant’s menu, which features authentic dishes from across Italy prepared with locally sourced ingredients, remains a key attraction. But one of the real showpieces of Trattoria Dell’Arte is its 20-foot antipasto table. Fay credits Fireman with being the first restaurateur to introduce the concept to American diners when he opened one of his earlier restaurants, Cafe Fiorello, in the 1970s.

Today, Trattoria Dell’Arte’s antipasto table offers guests at least 40 different selections, the majority of which are produce-based and seasonally focused. In addition to working with regular suppliers for certain items, Fay says the kitchen also shops at local farmers markets, sourcing produce from upstate New York and New Jersey. During the summer, the restaurant purchases such vegetables as eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers and corn, while during the fall and winter it switches over to radicchio, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and leeks.

The antipasto table enables guests to vary the dining experience by selecting any combination of three vegetables, six vegetables, three seafoods, two vegetables with one seafood, or four vegetables

NEW YORK FOOD SCENE



with two seafoods. The table also offers a selection of soups, meats, house-made mozzarella dishes, specialty appetizers, and small salads.

Selections from the current antipasto table include roasted corn and shiitake mushrooms; roasted beets with sliced oranges; Sicilian eggplant caponata with

black olives, capers, golden raisins and tomato sauce; escarole, kale and white bean salad; artichoke couscous; cipollini onions in a red wine vinaigrette; caramelized fennel; and sautéed broccoli rabe with garlic, golden raisins and almonds.

A dish that was recently added to the

antipasti lineup is Italian hummus with garlic, fresh olive oil, pine nuts and walnuts. Fay says many guests order from both the antipasto table and the regular menu, often selecting several vegetable dishes as their appetizer.

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— Paul Frumkin

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When Tribeca Grill opened its doors in April of 1990, its group of A-list investors — including Robert De Niro (co-owner), Bill Murray, Sean Penn and Mikhail Baryshnikov — all but guaranteed the restaurant's launch would be the kind of seismic event that would keep its reservation book full for months.

Over the past 23 years, however, Tribeca Grill, which is co-owned and operated by Drew Nieporent's Myriad Restaurant Group, has proved there's much more to longevity than just celebrity connections. The 200-seat restaurant established itself as a Tribeca favorite by setting standards of quality and professionalism that are embodied in its relaxed setting, informal yet attentive service, and innovative American fare.

"The real stars are the people that work there," says Tracy Nieporent, director of marketing and partner in The Myriad Restaurant Group. "The consistency of the food and service has stood the test of time."

Not surprisingly, produce plays a critical role in the development of Tribeca Grill's menu. Nieporent says seasonality "has a big influence on our purchasing decisions," noting that "heirloom tomatoes grown in a hot house in Mexico in January are very different than the ones that are grown organically in New Jersey in August. We try to capture the ingredient at its peak to impart its true essence on the menu. If it's not in season, it's not on the menu."

Nieporent says executive chef, Kamal Rose, also seeks proteins that are complemented by seasonal produce "in order to create a more vegetable-forward menu." Nieporent cites as an example, red wine braised short ribs with baby heir-

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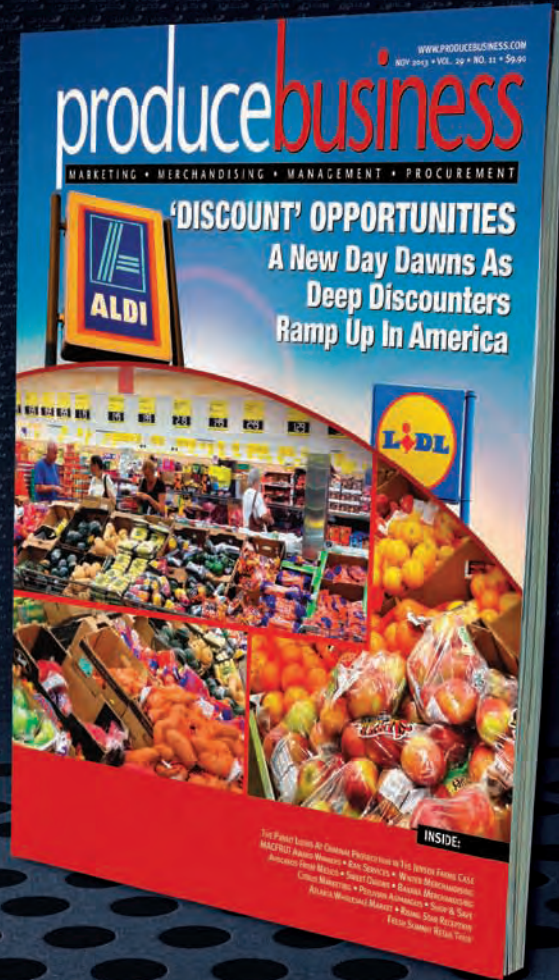
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loom carrots, parsnip mousse and celery leaves entree.

Some of the restaurant's best-selling dishes that showcase produce are: garganelli with winter squash, wild mushrooms and sage brown butter; grilled Amish chicken with broccoli rabe and ramp salsa verde; and Hampshire pork chop with sweet potato gnocchi, braised baby greens, pecans and brown butter balsamic.

Kamal utilizes a diverse range of techniques to prepare produce or fruit, including *sous vide* (technique using vacuum-sealed food and cooked at a gentle temperature in a precisely controlled water bath), confit, pickling and

smoking. For instance, he cures and smokes mushrooms to create what he calls mushroom "bacon."

Nieparent says the procurement method has not changed much since Tribeca Grill opened 23 years ago. "We are still in search of local farmers who deliver or sell their produce to trustworthy vendors that we work with," he says. "We buy the majority of our produce from one specific vendor in order to increase our buying power with that company, which also ensures that we are being sent the best possible products."

While Tribeca Grill features several signature dishes "that have truly stood the test of time," Nieparent says, the restaurant's mission statement "has been very consistent — which is to deliver high quality food and service at an affordable price with a diverse American menu that is upscale and accessible. So there are many new choices that are consistently offered to keep the menu exciting and vital."

— Paul Frumkin

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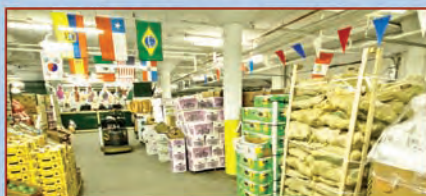
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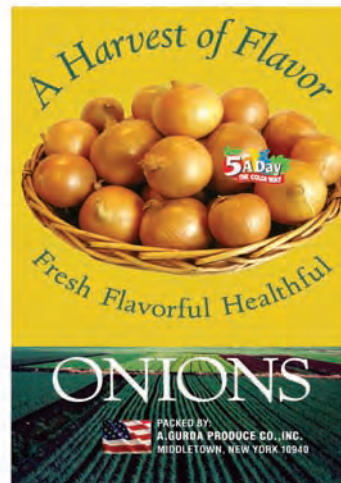
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With four locations across New York City — one in Manhattan, three in Brooklyn — Union Market prides itself on being a specialty neighborhood grocer, with an emphasis on neighborhood. This became apparent during Hurricane Sandy, says Head Chef Mike Ciardi, when access to food around New York was challenged. “We did not stop during Sandy . . . we lost nothing,” says Ciardi. “When a hurricane hits, people need groceries and they need prepared foods.” Every night after the storm hit, Ciardi says his staff was delivering hot food to Red Hook, Brooklyn, which was pummeled by the storm. “It was cool to be a part of being able to feed people in a time when it’s not so easy.”

In better times, the prepared foods department, for which Ciardi leads the recipe charge, is a staple of Union Market.

Food is prepared fresh every day at a commissary kitchen in Park Slope, Brooklyn, which then is delivered to the other Union Market locations in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

“We have a very health-conscious clientele,” says Ciardi. One of the most popular dishes features cauliflower, which is roasted with spices and mixed with ginger, shallots, tomatoes and cilantro. In one week, Ciardi says that Union Market goes through about 150 pounds of cauliflower that arrives freshly cut — a



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convenience which saves prep space and time.

Ciardi says Union Market cooks and sells large amounts of asparagus, Brussels sprouts, spinach and, most notably, kale. When Ciardi was first introducing kale in the prepared foods department during the last year, orders from other stores went from a few pounds each day to “much, much more.” Ciardi says that Union Market runs through about 30 cases (12, 10 ounce bags) of spinach each week, and about 15 cases of asparagus. He says he gets this produce from RLB Food Distributors out of New Jersey, or Baldor Specialty Foods in the Bronx.

The prepared foods department at Union Market updates its core menu based on the season. “It’s a combination of core, seasonal and micro-seasonal,” says Ciardi. In the fall, for example, there’s a focus on butternut squash and shiitake mushrooms. During the spring Ciardi enjoys cooking with micro-seasonal produce like wild leeks or fiddlehead ferns.

He has noticed a recurring trend where consumers are leaning away from basing a meal on meat and moving toward greens as the main item. “People are excited about vegetable-based cooking,” he says. “I’m noticing ‘vegetable-forward’ as a hip phrase in the food community.”

— Jonathan Zalman

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opened in 1985, the vision guiding the award-winning restaurant has always been local at heart. Four days a week, executive chef Carmen Quagliata or one of his chefs takes a walk over to the Union Square Greenmarket — just 150 yards from the restaurant's front door — to select the best local produce available and begin planning the menus for the day.

Although Union Square Cafe works with a supplier who provides basic produce, such as potatoes, Quagliata says from May through October more than 75 percent of all of the fruits and vegetables served at the 130-seat restaurant is sourced at the Greenmarket. He estimates the kitchen goes through hundreds of pounds of produce each day.

For example, when tomatoes are in season, the restaurant menu incorporates six to eight different local varieties in a given day; meanwhile, there may be six or seven different types of greens that are used as accompaniments for entrées.

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market, the purchasing process is planned when the kitchen staff conducts an inventory to determine what items can carry over for another day. Then the chefs head for the Greenmarket in nearby Union Square, which — during peak season — can showcase the products of as many as 140 regional farmers, fishermen and bakers. There, the chefs learn what's available, speak with the farmers, taste the products and make decisions about what will appear on the day's menu.

The market is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, "so you have to shop for the days when it's closed, too," says Quagliata. "And we have limited storage at the restaurant, so you have to keep turning it around."

Quagliata adds that communication between the chefs and local Greenmarket suppliers also helps to provide the farmers with some guidance in what they might plant in the coming year. "We might ask if they could plant more Kabocha squash, for instance, so it aids them with their planning."

While produce has become increasingly important in menu development, proteins remain critical to the mix. "People expect certain things — they want a good mix," says Quagliata. The market helps to determine which proteins will be featured in the day's dishes, too. "If I decide I want to offer a chicory salad with grilled fish, I might change the protein to go with the salad — for instance, offering swordfish rather than trout."

Quagliata says Union Square Cafe purchases more organically raised produce today than it previously did, but he emphasizes that element can't be the sole determining factor. "First, the produce has to be great and flavorful."

— Paul Frumkin

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According to Nielsen data, the potato and onion categories combined contributed a sizable 8.6 percent of total department produce sales.

Merchandising Programs To Sell More Potatoes & Onions

Industry experts discuss traditional and unique ways to merchandise, promote, and sell more potatoes and onions. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

Savvy retailers are infusing excitement into the potato and onion categories in an effort to boost profits by igniting incremental sales through a variety of joint programs that marry the two.

“Since potatoes and onions are often used together in recipes, displaying them together makes a great meal-solution display,” says Keith Durham, category manager for fresh foods at the Brookshire Grocery Company, a 152-store chain based in Tyler, TX.

Mankind has combined potatoes and onions in the same pot since the years BC when soups and stews were stirred over an open fire. Today, they remain basic ingredients in regional favorites. For example, a New England boiled dinner calls for these two vegetables as well as cabbage, rutabaga, parsnip, carrots, turnips and corned beef or ham.

Similarly, at Breaux Mart Supermarkets, a five-store chain based in New Orleans, bags of

baby gold potatoes, baby red potatoes, baby purple potatoes, regular sized red potatoes, garlic and yellow onions are merchandized together on an end cap and promoted via in-store signage. “These are some of the main ingredients for a Louisiana Crawfish Boil,” explains Jason Weishaar, manager of the location on Magazine Street.

Data also backs up consumer’s hand-in-glove purchase of potatoes and onions at retail. According to 2012 research by the Chicago, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group (through its alliance with Spire — a company that manages the loyalty card programs for more than a dozen retailers, and uses a database of purchase transactions for 30 million-plus U.S. households), onions were present in 7.2 percent of all purchase transactions. However, onions were included in 27.2 percent of transactions, and potatoes were also being purchased — an index of 37.7 percent.

The potato and onion categories combined

contributed a sizable 8.6 percent of total department produce sales during the 52-weeks ending August 31, 2013, according to data provided by the Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh food consulting firm. So it’s important to take the time and energy to merchandise these commodities properly.

Benefits & Limits

“Customers expect to see potatoes and onions displayed together,” says Ted Kreis, marketing director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), based in East Grand Forks, MN. “Not doing this would be a disservice to the customers.”

John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce, Inc., in Reidsville, GA, agrees. “Potatoes and onions have a natural advantage as staple items on most consumers’ shopping lists. Placing both on a display is sure to increase the ring at the register — especially during holidays when meal planning and



purchases provide an incremental sales bump.”

Other benefits of selling potatoes and onions together is they are often bought by the same buyer, have similar price points (depending on variety), don’t require refrigeration and have a relatively long shelf life compared to other items in the department.

One limitation is that some marketers believe potatoes and onions should not be exclusively sold together.

“If you always put these two vegetables together, it means that you are treating them as maintenance items and aren’t trying to drive sales,” says Matt Curry, president of Brooks, OR-based Curry & Company. “You aren’t celebrating either item, you are treating them as equals and not taking advantage of the seasonality and special products that exist within each category.”

Teri Gibson, marketing and customer relations manager for Peri & Sons Farms, Inc., in Yerington, NV, agrees. “There is no other vegetable more versatile than the onion. They can pair with every other vegetable, so other than keeping them away from the misted displays, they can be easily positioned almost anywhere.”

“Don’t pass up the opportunity to cross-promote onions in recipes and meal solutions, in favor of always putting them next to the potatoes,” says Derrell Kelso, Jr., owner and president of Stockton, CA-headquartered Onions Etc.

“Onions should be promoted as an ingredient for multiple cooking occasions,” says John Pope, vice president of sales and marketing for MountainKing Potatoes, in Houston, TX.

“Potatoes should be promoted based on ‘pairings’ or suggestively selling them with the ideal proteins that work with them. For example, Russets with beef, Reds with pork and fish, gold with turkey or poultry, and roasters and four packs in free-standing displays at the entry to the meat department.”

Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail for the Eagle, ID-based Idaho Potato Commission, agrees. “Potatoes and onions are two different sales. They represent two different purchase decisions by the consumer.”

Display Nearby, But Not Too Close

“Display potatoes and onions near to each other,” says Timothy Hobbs, director of development and grower relations for the Maine Potato Board, in Presque Isle, ME. “This adds excitement to commodities and can attract new

buyers. Plus, a nice display is more interesting and will cause shoppers to linger longer.”

Shuman Produce’s Shuman suggests, “placing both items in a central location in the produce department to capitalize on their quality as staple items. A purchase of one easily promotes the purchase of the other, especially if it’s within immediate reach.”

That said, “onions should never be in direct contact with potatoes or any other produce item because the onion flavor will easily transfer to the other product,” explains the NPPGA’s Kreis.

Peri & Sons Farms’ Gibson says, “Consider displaying potatoes across from onions but not side by side to ensure optimal shelf life for the onions.”

Potatoes and onions have seen a boom in offerings in recent years, and retailers should



PHOTO COURTESY OF ONIONS ETC.

take advantage of this to build their overall categories. For example, Onions Etc.'s Kelso says, "We suggest retailers carry: bulk white, red and yellow onions, a basket of boiler whites (for soups and slow cookers), and bulk jumbo sweets. Additionally, consumer packs such as: 10-ounce pearls, 3- and 5-pound yellow, 2- or 3-pound red, 2- or 2-pound white, and 2-pound sweets are also good. In other words, a total of 7 to 10 SKUs — depending on good traffic and store profile."

MountainKing's Pope recommends retailers carry 8 to 10 SKUs of potatoes. "Using a segmentation strategy, this would be 8- or 10-pound russets for value-driven shoppers, 5-pound russets, 5-pound reds, 5-pound golds and loose bulk reds and/or russets for the suburban segment, and 1.5-pound roasters, creamers, 4-count steakhouse bakers and 3-pound B reds for the upscale and empty nesters."

Curry & Company's Curry points out, "the amount of value-added products continues to increase for both potato and onions. Therefore, it's important to have a strategy mapped out for all the different potato and sweet onion opportunities. If you try to increase the sales of each individual variety, you'll lift sales for the entire department."

Make Room With Secondary Displays

A disadvantage to selling potatoes and onions together is finding the space to merchandise both in the produce aisle, especially during increased volume times such as the winter months. One way to remedy this, says Shuman Produce's Shuman, is to "utilize secondary displays with both products included to maximize their sales potential."

"Secondary displays get attention, grab the customers' eye and help provide incremental sales," says Mac Johnson, president and chief executive of Category Partners, LLC, in Aurora, CO. "Secondary displays are a great way to introduce new product so that it doesn't get lost in the primary display, and also a great way to highlight a promotion."

Randy Shell, vice president of marketing and new business development for Bancroft, WI-based RPE, Inc., says, "We always recommend secondary displays on promotional items, which could include expanding the home location, a secondary display in produce or a bin display in produce or the front of store."

Cross-Promote

"Cross-promoting items creates attention and awareness," says Peri & Sons Farms' Gibson.

"It's creativity and innovation that promote produce consumption and volume purchase."

Category Partner's Johnson agrees. "Anything that increases the basket ring, gets more groceries in the cart, and more produce is a good thing for retailers and suppliers alike."

A few years ago, the Parma, ID-based Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee (IEO) partnered with the Twin Falls, ID-headquartered Independent Meat Company (IMC), makers of Falls Brand meats, in a cross-promotion that featured five items grouped together


in a refrigerated end cap display. Customers who purchased a 4-pound pork shoulder, 5-pound bag of potatoes and 3-pound bag of yellow onions received 1-pound of bacon and a dozen eggs for free. Handwritten signage posted in an iron man stand next to the display called out "Buy a Pork Roast Dinner and Breakfast is on Us."


Participating retailers included Broulim's Fresh Foods, an 8-store chain based in Rigby, ID, and Rosauers Supermarkets, Inc., a 22-store chain in Spokane, WA.

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TIPS ON EFFECTIVE PRICING AND PROMOTING

Indicators show this season should be good to promote both potatoes and onions.

“Last year the U.S. over-produced potatoes,” explains Ted Kreis, marketing director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), based in East Grand Forks, MN. “This year, it looks like supplies will be down about 5 percent, but more in line with demand.”

The Greeley, CO-based National Onion Association (NOA) forecasts the 2013 to 2014 domestic crop at around 4 million bags lower than last season. However, this shouldn’t cause any shortage of onions in the U.S., or skyrocketing prices. The onion category also sees imports from Mexico, Chile and Peru.

Optimal pricing changes each season according to the ebb and flow of supply and demand. “Take each season by itself and price accordingly,” suggests Matt Curry, president of Brooks, OR-based Curry & Company. “Some years onion and potato pricing is similar, others it isn’t.”

John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce, Inc., in Reidsville, GA, says, “Placing either potatoes, onions, or both items in an ad will bring shoppers into the produce aisle for additional purchases.”

However, don’t give product away. “Huge discounts on potatoes aren’t necessary,” asserts Paul Dolan, general manager of Grand Forks, ND-based Associated Potato Growers, Inc. “Simply remind shoppers that potatoes are a great value.”

Mac Johnson, president and chief executive of Category Partners, LLC, in Aurora, CO explains, “There’s a fine balance between where the promotional price point needs to be. If it’s too deep, you might deliver pounds, but not the dollars; not deep enough, and you’ll probably sell what you normally would have sold — just for less money. ‘Two for’ pricing can be very effective, such as russets and reds, reds and golds, as they get more potatoes in the cart, increase the ring, and the two varieties will help increase eating occasions — such as the russet with a steak, and the red potato with a chicken dinner.”

Johnson adds, “I’m also a proponent of potato promotion frequency versus deep discounting. A BOGO on a 10-pound bag of potatoes is going to take that consumer

(unless it’s a big family) out of the potato buying arena for quite a while.”

For onions, Randy Shell, vice president of marketing and new business development for Bancroft, WI-based RPE, Inc., says, “We recommend promoting seasonally and at holidays. We also recommend small discounts on onions, as the volume sold does not spike enough to offset deep discounts. Pick one or two times per year to do a deep discount on onions. For potatoes and onions together, we like to do a bag promotion that is at a single price point so they can be merchandised together to drive impulse sales on one or the other.”

“Promote the categories often and move through the entire offering. In all promotions, focus on quality. Don’t downsize for a better price point,” recommends Ralph Schwartz, director of category management and director of value added marketing for Potandon Produce, LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID.

Retailers should consider placing photos of prepared recipes in their weekly circular when advertising potatoes and onions. According to the October 2013-released Prepared Potato Image Study completed by the Nielson Perishables Group on behalf of the Denver-based U.S. Potato Board (USPB), ads with prepared images delivered a 23-point greater volume lift (156 percent) versus ads depicting raw or bagged potatoes (133 percent).

Retailers consistently achieved higher volume percent lift on bag ads when prepared images were used, with red potatoes showing the most dramatic improvement (188 percent for 5-pound prepared reds versus 124 percent on the same type and quantity unprepared).

“We attribute this success to three factors. First, prepared potato images are more appetizing, and consequently do a better job of attracting consumer’s attention,” says Don Ladhoff, the USPB’s retail programs consultant. “Secondly, they illustrate the desirable ‘end result’ or the reason that shoppers are buying potatoes in the first place. Third, delicious potato photography provides inspiration for trying new potato preparations. Notice that the meat department already does this. Instead of raw ground beef, they show a tasty grilled hamburger.” **pb**



PHOTO TO LEFT COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES; PHOTO TO RIGHT COURTESY OF RPE SPUD

Provide Recipes

“There are a couple of different packaging trends on onions and potatoes,” says Curry & Company’s Curry. “One approach is to offer recipes, different usages, provide health information and educate the consumer about what else can be done with potatoes and onions.”

Peri & Sons Farms’ Gibson agrees. “It’s difficult for produce managers to keep track of signage and other marketing materials meant to give consumers more information. Because of this, marketing materials often go unused. However, one of the advantages of packaging is the opportunity to convey

messages such as recipes.”

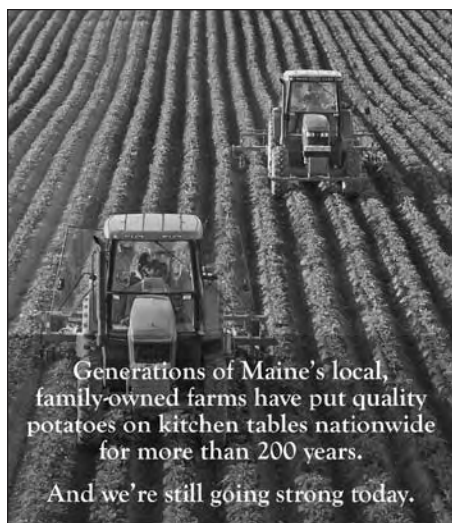
Bagged sweet onion sales account for approximately half of total annual sales for growers/shippers Shuman Produce. Shuman’s consumer packaging is available in multiple sizes and comes with recipe suggestions, storage and handling tips, nutrition information and is fitted with a QR code that directs consumers to mobile friendly content such as additional recipes. Recipes include Caesar Steak & Vidalia Onion Kabobs that call for small red potatoes, Potato & Onion Soup, and Potato Salad.

“Even generic or private label bags are starting to provide more information. Kroger

has added nutrition information,” says Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Monte Vista, CO-headquartered Colorado Potato Administrative Committee. “Wal-Mart has worked with our shippers to offer bagged potatoes with a QR code on the Kwik Loc that links to recipes and other information about Colorado potatoes.”

Take Advantage Of Seasonality

The holidays are a great time to promote combo ads featuring potatoes and onions. MountainKing’s Pope suggests, “10-pound russets, 5-pound golds and medium white onions for Thanksgiving; 5-pound butter reds,



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5-pound butter golds and medium yellow onions for Christmas; and 4-count steakhouse bakers for potato skins and 1.5-pound roasters and 3-pound B red or gold potatoes for bite size snacks with pearl onions for New Year's."

In the summer, a Memorial Day, a Fourth of July or a Labor Day ad could feature 5-pound red potatoes for salads and a 3-pound bag of sweet onions for both potato salads and topping hamburgers.

Beyond the holidays, there are ripe opportunities for seasonal promotion.

In the winter months, Curry & Company's Curry says, "in the cooler northern states, soups

and stews remain popular; so it gives you a great opportunity to have a soup or stew section highlighted."

During the spring and summer months, Shuman Produce's Shuman says, "Sweet onions are best promoted along with other items that are common to cookouts and family gatherings. We suggest potatoes as well as tomatoes, avocados, mushrooms, bagged salad, salad dressings and even beef and chicken."

The USBP's marketing campaign released its seasonal approach to selling potatoes in 2012. The campaign features five seasons, each with distinct themes for merchandising: 'Back-

on-Track' (September to October), 'Plus-Up-Potatoes (November and December), 'Nurture Me' (January and February), 'Spring Ahead' (March to May) and 'Lighten Up' (June to August). Many usage ideas suggested for each of these seasons include onions.

"Onions and potatoes benefit from regional and local strategies throughout the year as well as seasonally," adds Curry & Company's Curry. "Be creative, and don't settle for the ordinary. If you always market onions and potatoes the same way, you'll always receive the same results. Try different strategies and find new ways to increase sales."

pb

Side Note

USPB & NOA JOIN FORCES TO PROMOTE POTATOES & ONIONS

A collaborative project launched last year between the Denver-based U.S. Potato Board (USBP) and Greeley, CO-headquartered National Onion Association (NOA) has shown positive results during a pilot test at retail. The joint-venture focuses on custom-printed tote bags imprinted with the tagline 'Create Mealtime Magic' with two recipes that are prepared in 30-minutes or less on each side panel. One is an entrée, Potato-Onion Lasagna, and the other is a side dish, Bombay Potato-Onion Curry. The Home-Toter's two front panels provide nutrition information and cooking characteristics about potatoes and onions, respectively.

"The USBP approach us with the idea of the pilot test," says Keith Durham, category manager for fresh foods at the Brookshire Grocery Company, a 152-store chain based in Tyler, TX. "Once we agreed, we selected 80 stores to participate and communicated the purpose of the test, along with merchandising plans for the totes, to perishable and produce leaders throughout retail operations."

Brookshire's retail staff placed approximately 2- to 3-pound quantities of either potatoes or onions in the totes and placed the totes strategically around bulk displays, positioning them as a convenience purchase.

Results of the pilot test, which ran for six weeks during November and December 2012, revealed that stores merchandized with the tote bags realized \$36 more per store per week (or a 6.5 percent increase in bulk potato sales) and \$82 more per store per week (or a 7.5 percent increase in bulk onion sales), as measured by Nielsen Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based fresh food consulting firm.

Beyond the growth in bulk sales, the entire categories of potatoes and onions also benefited from use of the tote bags, with overall sales of potatoes climbing \$76 per store per week and onions rising \$90 per store per week.

"An investment of less than \$6 per store per week in tote bags created incremental joint category sales in the test stores of \$166 store per week, an exceedingly strong return on merchandising investment," concludes Don Ladhoff, the USBP's retail programs consultant.

"These positive results likely come from putting the product in

front of the consumer in a unique way — almost a farmers market feel — and creating interest creates sales," explains Mac Johnson, president and chief executive of Category Partners, LLC, in Denver.

"It's probably not for everyone either because of the type of displays a retailer might have, or the labor to fill the totes and merchandise, but it would probably work in a number of retailers."

Kim Reddin, the NOA's director of public and industry relations, says, "We are still in roll out mode. However, a number of growers nationwide are interested in the value add the tote brings to their retail customers. They say they have retailers who are interested in this program in all regions of the U.S."

Despite the program's success, one challenge remains. That is, the cost to purchase the bags. One party or the other, retailer or supplier, has to make an investment to purchase the totes.

"We are unable to purchase the totes since this would add extra cost to the purchase and deflate the value. However, we would continue to use them if the totes were provided," says Brookshire's Durham.

The USBP and NOA have negotiated with Package Containers Inc. (PCI) to produce the tote bags, says Ladhoff. "The cost of the totes is about the same as what a shipper is paying for a decent 5-pound poly bag."

Both Ladhoff and Reddin are working to find viable options to solve this problem. One potential solution is PCI offering truck load pricing on two pallets of bags for a more modest upfront investment from suppliers, or having shippers pack a couple of bags on the top of bulk potato cartons. Another is for PCI to customize tote handles with supermarket specific names and logos to provide more marketing incentive for retailers.

For cost savings plus maximum effectiveness, the NOA's Reddin suggests that the totes should be used in-store in 6- to 8-week blocks at a time. These timeframes can be strategic when a new crop is available or when there is a traditional lull in business.

"Within this time block, we recommend retailers put potatoes and onions on ad one or two of these weeks," recommends Reddin. "Don't lower the price; advertise at the regular price. The idea is to get customers over to the bulk potato and onion displays where they will see the totes and buy more."

pb





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New Kits Make Produce Preparation Faster And Easier

By Carol Bareuther, RD

Consumers crave convenience, and this has proven especially true when it comes to cooking. The number of food products released in the U.S. that can be described as “meal kits” has increased more than 81 percent to reach a total of 308 items from September 2008 to August 2013, according to

Mintel’s Global New Products Database.

Smart produce marketers have taken this trend to heart and introduced a number of ‘kits’ based around a variety of fruits and vegetables. Here is a sampling of some of the latest releases:

FRIED GREEN TOMATO KIT

Nature Fresh Farms in Leamington, ON, greenhouse growers of peppers, cucumbers, baby eggplant and nearly a dozen varieties of tomatoes, has made it easier to prepare this traditional southern dish.

“Consumers are always looking for variety, and this old-time favorite in a user-friendly kit makes preparation easy to follow,” says Mike Jones, in sales. The kit contains two large-size green tomatoes, batter mix (requiring only the addition of water), and preparation instructions packaged together in a rectangular cardboard box with a cut-out window in front showing the tomatoes and a handle on top for grab-and-go convenience.

Nature Fresh test marketed the product in various sizes and settled on the current form to take to market. “At this time,” says Jones, “the kit will be available to retailers from April through December with future year-round production planned.” Jones recommends the kit be placed within the main tomato display as well as showcased in satellite displays in the meat department to encourage impulse buys.



HERB LEMONADE KIT

The trend for herb-infused drinks inspired marketers at Rocket Farms (the Salinas, CA-based company is one of largest growers of indoor flowers, fresh cut herbs and potted edibles in the country) to create an Herbal Lemonade Kit.

The kit contains a mix of fresh rosemary, dill, mint, and edible ornamental flowers all packaged in a 2.5-ounce clamshell and designed to make a pitcher-sized serving. The kit is available now and year-round to all retail and foodservice operators nationwide.

“The kit is best supported with demos and adjacent display,” explains Jorge Michael, western regional sales manager for retail. Active demos are best, but the company also has had success in tests with silent demos where customers serve themselves from the decanter prepared in-store. Shippers are a hassle-free merchandising vehicle and ideally placed next to lemons or water to encourage consumers to add a refreshing twist to traditional drinks.

“Lemonade is only a serving suggestion,” says Michael. “Our Herbal Lemonade Kit can also be used with apple cider, iced teas and as an herbal water kit, providing a completely different experience.”



FRESH CRANBERRY SAUCE KIT

Naturipe Farms LLC, an Estero, FL-based grower-owned producer and international marketer of berries, is encouraging shoppers to “Kick the Can” this season by promoting the usage of the company’s Fresh Cranberry Sauce Kit. “Since we’ve entered the cranberry market, we’ve seen sales on fresh struggle and consumption of fresh cranberries decline,” says Jim Roberts, vice president of sales.

Janis McIntosh, marketing specialist for Naturipe, took the concept of “steam-in-a-bag” vegetables one step further and applied it to fruit. The 14-ounce kit contains 12-ounces of fresh cranberries and a 2-ounce packet of a lemon-sugar-water mix.

Consumers need only follow on-pack instruction to open the zip-top master bag, empty in the cranberries and liquid flavoring, zip lock the top, and microwave for an average of four minutes. Naturipe is test-marketing the product this season from late September through December with nationwide distribution expected next year. Roberts suggests merchandising the kit in refrigerated displays of fresh-bagged cranberries to acquaint shoppers with the product.



EGGPLANT KIT

New ways to prepare eggplant is the inspiration behind The Netherlands-based Purple Pride Worldwide and DOOR Partners B.V. (a marketing organization for greenhouse vegetables), new Cooking the World kits. Each kit, which is available year-round, consists of one eggplant, a packet of a proprietary dried herb and/or spice blend, and a simple recipe designed to serve two in one flow-pack.

Varieties include: Melanzane Arrosto (Italian), Garam Masala (Indian) and Melitzana Me Feta (Greek). A QR code on the pack takes shoppers to a 4-minute video that illustrates step-by-step preparation instruction, plus storage, serving tips and recipe variations.

The company offers promotional tools to assist in product visibility — such as a floor-standing shipper display and single layer shelf boxes. “We are talking with several retailers in the U.S. about launching the product,” says Loes AI, marketing and communications manager for Purple Pride.



SUMMER SQUASH KIT

The desire to drive a higher margin and new sales in the vegetable category year-round is what led Baloian Farms, a fourth-generation vertically integrated grower of vegetables in California and Mexico, to introduce a value-added microwavable cut yellow and green squash product in two flavors: Garlic & Parmesan Herb and Roasted Red Pepper & Garlic.

“We are constantly looking at our products and thinking about how consumers use them, and how we can make them easier, more convenient and flavorful,” says sales manager, Jeremy Lane. “We also wanted to develop a product unique to the squash category.”

Consumers simply slice and season the two green and one yellow squash provided in an individually wrapped tray along with a seasoning packet, and sauté the squash for five minutes. Colorful packaging showcases a picture of the finished recipe to help inspire, appeal and engage consumers.

Lane recommends that retailers display the package on shelf where they currently merchandise packaged squash. Both flavors will be available year-round. “There are also new seasonal flavors currently in testing, which we would introduce to retailers in the future for seasonal programs.”



SMOOTHIE SAVER

The popularity of smoothie bars and manufactured smoothies sold in the retail dairy section have soared — despite being perceived by customers as pricy. Knowledge that many shoppers buy fruits to make smoothies at home, combined with online market research suggesting more than 80 percent of weekly shoppers would be receptive to a convenient, competitively priced product that supplies all the ingredients for a fruit smoothie in one box, led Total Produce plc, one of Ireland's largest fresh produce providers, to develop the TOP Smoothie Saver.

"Components are typically an apple, pear, mango, a smoothie cup full of grapes and a smoothie cup full of berries," says Vincent Dolan, European marketing manager for Total Produce, which was involved in the development of the product. "We do change these elements to keep the mix fresh. However, we found this product works best in the summer months."

On-pack QR codes lead to how-to instructional videos, something that had been identified as a potential inhibitor to making smoothies at home. As for merchandising, this is dictated by the component elements. For example, if the kit contains berries and/or grapes, the pack needs to be stocked in a refrigerated area — typically beside fresh-cut fruits.

The Vancouver, BC-based Oppenheimer Group and Total Produce plc of Dublin, Ireland, formed a strategic alliance in January 2013, and Oppenheimer is researching the development of innovative pack styles such as the TOP Smoothie Saver for introduction into the North American market.



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Hong Kong Food Market

The 3,000 sq. ft. produce department, with over 200 fruits and vegetables contributing over 30 percent of total dollar sales, caters to New Orleans' Asian residents. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

The outside of the Hong Kong Food Market looks similar to any national chain supermarket. It's the anchor of a strip mall, albeit in the small town of Gretna on the west bank of the Mississippi River, just across from uptown New Orleans, LA. Plus, its sturdy brick facade is identified by crisp white letters, although the words Hong Kong are in an Asian-style font. What gives a clue that this is like no other supermarket in New Orleans, or in the whole of Louisiana for that matter, is the two white marble guardian lion statues at the entrance that welcome shoppers. Once inside, you'll realize you're not in Kansas anymore.

There's over 10,000 different brands of Asian foods that line the aisles of this 34,000-square-foot store. The Hong Kong Food Market opened in 2005, in the location of a former Wal-Mart, one month before Hurricane Katrina hit. The market suffered little damage and had its doors back open less than one month later. Core customers are the some 35,000 Asian residents that call the New Orleans metro area home.

Over half of them are Vietnamese who fled their war-torn country in the mid-1970s and found the sub-tropical climate and nearness to water like home. Today, the shopper demographic is super diverse. Asians, including locally living Chinese and Koreans, as well as



Hong Kong Food Market's owner, Cliff Davis holds a jackfruit.

Hispanics, Arabs, East Indians, African-Americans and Americans, families and small restaurant operators, all shop regularly at the Hong Kong Food Market.

Fresh Produce A Huge Draw

The 3,000-square-foot produce department, the largest in the store, represents 30 percent of the market's total dollar sales. There are some 200 fresh fruits and vegetables available. The five top sellers are young coconuts, Chinese vegetables, mango, bean sprouts and bitter melon. Coconuts and mangos, in particular, are sold by the 'each' as well as by the case.

Cliff Davis, who owns the supermarket with his Vietnamese wife, Jennifer, explains, "Produce is delivered four days a week from a distributor in Florida and wholesalers in Texas and California. We have about 1500 square feet of cooler space in the back dedicated to produce."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

Refrigerated cases span the entire far walls of the department. Fresh greens start at the left and fill two-thirds of the 60-plus-foot cases. Selections include ching kong choy, long and short bok choy, gai lan, taku choy, yu choy, Chinese celery, sher-li-hon, Napa and Taiwan cabbage, and tan-o as well as green onions, spinach, romaine, green leaf and butter lettuce.

Some 20 feet at the far right end of the case is filled with over-wrapped packages of vegetables, such as brown and white crab mushrooms, snow peas, sugar snap peas, peeled garlic, three types of hot peppers, daikon and bitter melon. Each product is identified in Vietnamese and English on hand-written neon-colored cardboard signs. The same is true of the fruits and vegetables in the five aisles of non-refrigerated tables. Here, the selection spans from both green and ripe mangos and papayas to root vegetables, durians, bell peppers, green-skinned avocados, tamarind and fresh bean sprouts.

“Local farmers will cater to the restaurant chefs. Even if they did grow what our customers wanted, like some of the greens, they wouldn’t have the volume and the cost would be too expensive. Twenty-percent of our customers are food stamp shoppers. We want to make sure fresh produce is affordable for them.”

— Cliff Davis, Owner of Hong Kong Food Market

A section that is notably absent is ‘locally grown’. Why? “Volume and price”, Davis explains. “Local farmers will cater to the restaurant chefs. Even if they did grow what our customers wanted, like some of the greens, they wouldn’t have the volume and the cost would be too expensive. Twenty-percent of our customers are food stamp shoppers. We want to make sure fresh produce is affordable for them.”

One way the Davises keep prices low is through strong relationships with wholesalers who apprise them of special deals. Other methods are 0 to 30 percent margins on fresh produce and merchandising tactics designed to keep shrink low and customers coming in store. One of these strategies are bargain bins of produce at the inside entrance to the store and right in front of a wall of 25-pound bags of rice. In mid-October, there was jackfruit,



Texas oranges, watermelon, fuyu persimmons and Korean pears.

In addition, Davis explains, “We bag up some of the produce at the end of the day, set it out in two shopping carts and sell it for 99-cents per bag. Customers will come in to see what’s for sale. If something like a jackfruit is starting to turn, we’ll cut it up, package it and sell it up by the cash registers. Our waste is minimum.”

It’s not only the fresh produce that’s fascinating. There’s huge tanks teeming with tilapia; over 500 kinds of tofu; whole aisles of Asian spices, sauces and seasonings; a noodle section to die for; deli with whole sides of roast pigs and Peking ducks; housewares like rice cookers, and even stranger items such as pints of pork blood and duck heads. An entire Hispanic food aisle was added last year.

The Hong Kong Food Market is definitely not a Mom and apple pie market, unless that is, your Mom is Vietnamese. **pb**



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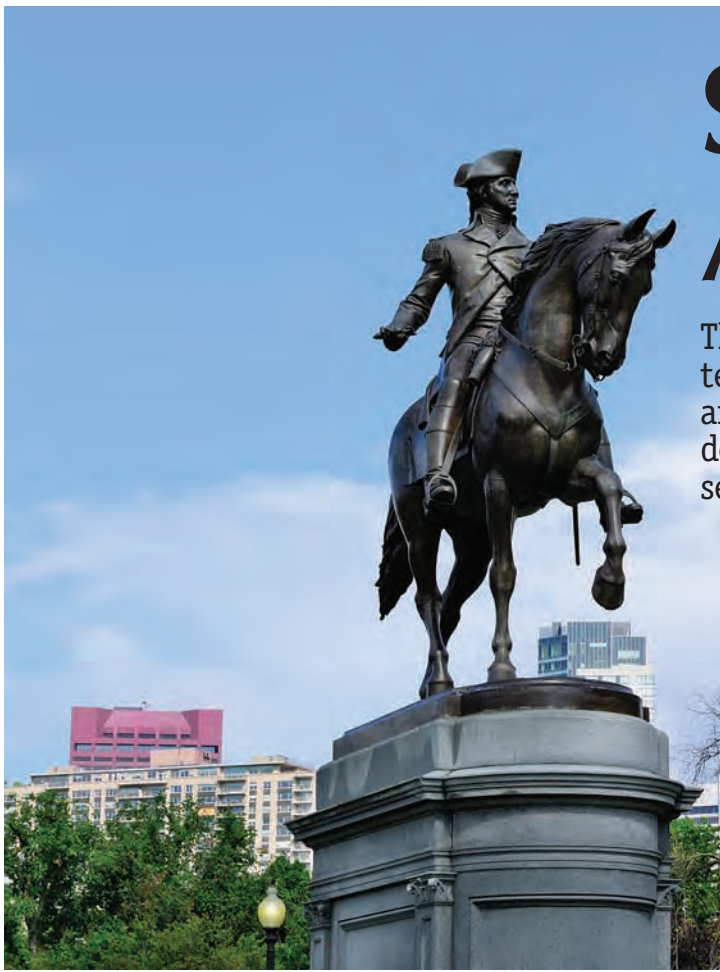
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Scratching A Niche

The wholesalers on the Boston produce terminal markets have developed, maintained and grown their businesses to meet the demands of the area's retail and foodservice sectors. **BY JAN FIALKOW**



Every company needs a niche — or a corner of the marketplace — in order to survive. If the business finds a comfortable niche, it can thrive.

Produce terminal markets exist to serve the retail and foodservice segments in their locales, and the merchants on those terminals vie to fill specific slots within the marketplace. Fortunately, on the conjoined New England Produce Center (NEPC), Chelsea, MA, and Boston Terminal Market (BTM), Everett, MA, the competition is friendly. The merchants have worked alongside each other for years — many decades and several generations in some cases — with each house finding its own niche to drive business.

In an earlier time, before big chains bought direct from growers, the terminal markets were the only game in town for food retailers who carried fresh produce. It was, one might say, a captive niche. The retail world has changed; major chains do still buy product off the Boston terminal markets, albeit in lesser amounts than in the markets' heyday, but the bulk of the business is done with small-to-medium-sized local retailers, many of which cater to specific immigrant populations. The merchants on the markets have had to evolve to the changing conditions.

The evolution raises an interesting question: Does a company create its own niche or does the existence of a niche help create a company?

"Sometimes niches evolve because no one else thought of them," says Anthony Sharrino, president and director of Eaton & Eustis Co., a firm that sells garlic, onions, dried fruit and ginger among other commodities, located in the NEPC. "Niches are very important. You

have to work at them and build a reputation for them. People need to know they can count on you."

But identifying a specific niche is just the beginning. "A niche needs to reach critical mass before it can be met," says Peter John Condakes, president, Peter Condakes Co., a full-line produce distributor in the NEPC.

Some businesses have always seen their mission as catering to a specific niche. According to Kevin Maher, vice president of Coosemans Boston, Inc., a specialty produce distributor in the NEPC. "Niches are very important to our business. The business evolved around niches. You have to flex enough to develop around what the customer wants."

Ken Cavallaro, director of John Cerasuolo Co., a produce distributor in the NEPC, sees finding the right niches as crucial to success. "We have to work very hard to find them, and then it is even harder cultivating them. It is extremely important to find the right places to go with the right product. It is even more important to have the right shippers to work with us in order to keep our customers happy and profitable. If we don't satisfy both those needs, they don't need us."

Finding The Niche

Each merchant has carved out its own berth, whether a single commodity such as tomatoes, ethnic items, or a value-added angle



Johnny Condakes of Peter Condakes Company



George Salis of Peter Condakes Company



Mary Jane Maher of Coosemans Boston



Maurice Crafts of Coosemans Boston



Dominic Cavallero III of John Cerasuolo Co., Inc.



Butch Fabio, John Bonafede and Gene Fabio of J. Bonafede Co.



David Patnaude, Sean Murdock and Mike Katrinelis of Coast to Coast Produce



Patrick Burke of Garden Fresh Salad Company



John Whitney of Garden Fresh Salad Company



Chris Rodes of Community Suffolk



Jackie Piazza of Community Suffolk



Craig Wiley of Travers Fruit Company

such as processing. In each case the reason behind the decision was to establish itself with customers as a reliable source.

"It's important to have something no one else has so customers will come to you," says Patrick Burke, buyer for Garden Fresh Salad Co., NEPC. "In our case, it's processed items. People come to us for our overall body of items. We can custom-blend so if they call in the morning, we can have it in the afternoon."

"We've developed a niche in the melon category," says Dave Patnaude, office manager at Cheshire, CT-based distributor Coast to Coast Produce. "When mini watermelon became available about five years ago, we jumped on it. It's a consumer-driven item. Watermelon is more popular than ever, especially since the development of the seedless watermelon 10 years ago, and now the mini means increased demand.

"We've also developed a transportation

niche," he asserts. "We can pick up and deliver anywhere in the United States."

The constantly growing and changing ethnic mix in the Greater Boston area presents both an opportunity and a challenge for J. Bonafede & Sons, NEPC. According to Butch Fabio, treasurer, "Our niche is Hispanic and Southeast Asian specialty. We serve the trade in the marketplace. As a population grows, we add lines so they can do business with us. Sometimes they ask us for products. Then we'll look for a source. If it works, we stay with it. If the quantities we have to buy are too large to meet the demand, we don't continue."

On the other hand, some niches have histories going back nearly a century. Such is the case with garlic at Eaton & Eustis. "I'm third generation in this business," says Shar-rino. "My grandfather and his brothers bought the company from Eaton and Eustis in 1910. In the '20s and '30s, they sold

garlic, citrus, pineapple and concord grapes. Garlic was an ethnic item, a side item, an accommodation." Today garlic is the company's hallmark.

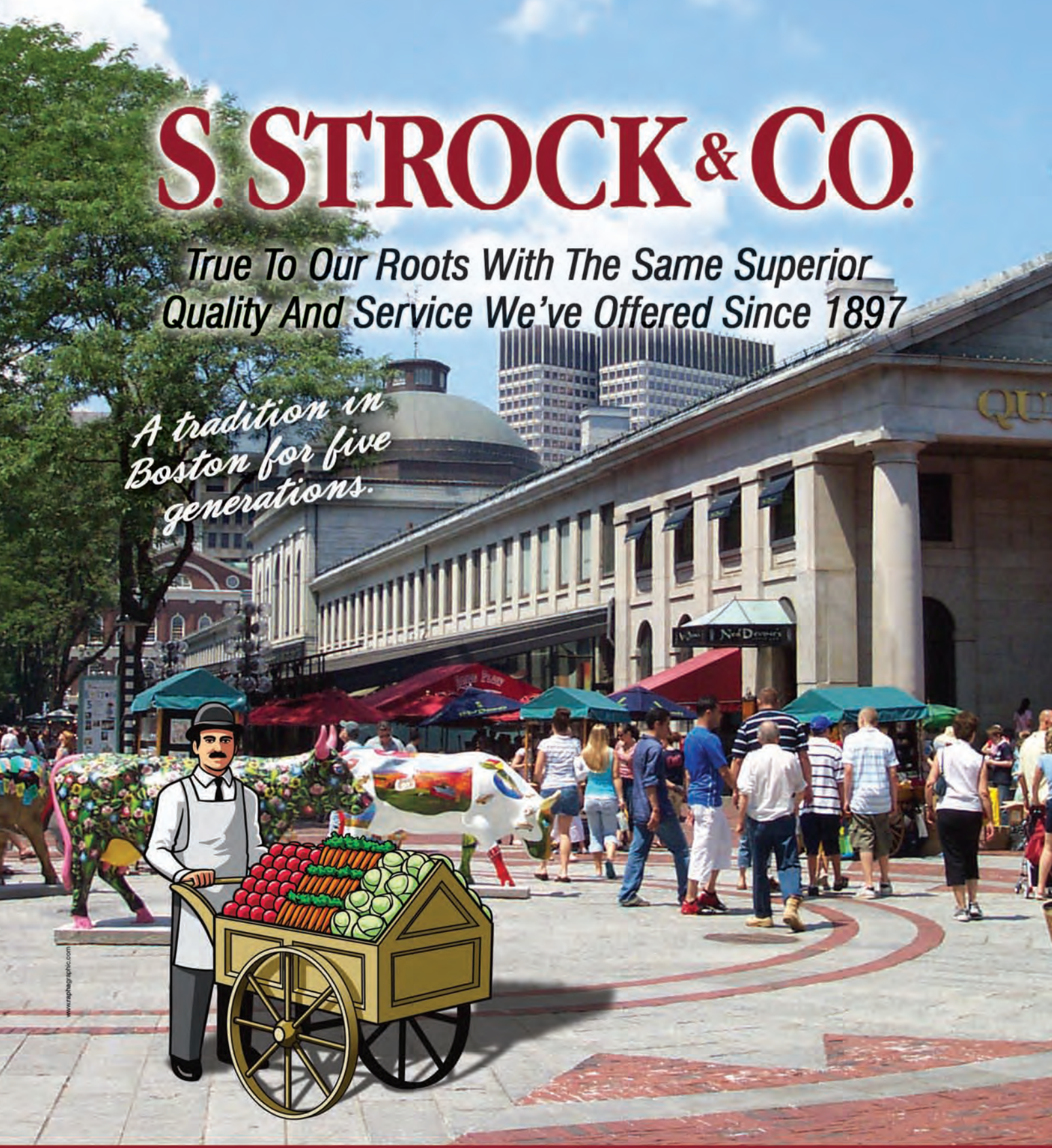
Sometimes the niche finds the company. Ruma's Fruit & Produce Co., located just off the market in Everett, MA, which long specialized in gift baskets and wooden pallets, is now known for fiddleheads and Maine wild blueberries. "The gift basket part of the businesses occurs mainly fourth quarter. It's essentially economy-driven," says Jim Ruma, president. So when an opportunity for something completely new presented itself, he was quick to jump on it.

"About 20 years ago, some Canadian pickers showed up with a load of fiddlehead ferns in a truck," he recalls. "The businesses on the market had already closed up for the day. We were open but getting ready to leave. Fortunately, we stayed and spoke to them. We had never seen fiddleheads before, but we

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Stephen Fauci and Butch Fabio of J. Bonafede Co.



Franco Chilante and Bobby Nano of Boston Tomato

packaged them in 10-pound bags and wholesaled them to the people who knew what they were. Ramps are a natural outgrowth of fiddleheads — they have the same season — and our customers asked for them.

“We got into the Maine wild blueberries when we were visiting accounts for wooden pallets in Maine,” Ruma says. “There are a lot of wild blueberries there. We lined up farmers to ship us fresh low-bush blueberries. Most of their product had gone to frozen. The season is short — July and August — and the product goes to the chains.”

Peter Condakes Co. is dedicated to tomatoes, a commodity item that has been experiencing huge growth in the specialty arena. “All heirlooms and specialty tomatoes have become a nice business, not a big business,” notes Condakes. “There’s not an overwhelming request for them, but people come in for them and buy other things. They’re a nice complement to the business. Since February of this year, we’ve been handling clusters, yellow cherries, heirlooms, yellows, Campari types, heritage packages [three in a package] and greens.”

Every business on the market goes through changes that can refocus its mission. For Bobby Nano, president and managing member of Boston Tomato and Packaging, LLC in the NEPC, personal history provides a viewpoint different from that of the multi-generational houses on the markets. “I started in the Haymarket [open fruit and vegetable market near Boston’s North End

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and Faneuil Hall Marketplace] with a pushcart," he says. "I came to the Chelsea Market to buy produce from DiMare Fresh [a tomato company with land in Florida, North Carolina and Texas]. They offered me a sales job because they thought I had the personality to sell. I didn't know a tomato from a potato. That was 20 years ago. About 12 years ago, Boston Tomato was up for sale. The new owner offered me a job but I wanted to be a partner. I did the work and he bankrolled the company. About three years ago, I bought him out and brought in Franco Chilante as my partner.

"Franco has a full line of specialty items

such as baby spinach, arugula, herbs, baby turnips and leeks. I have a full line of tomatoes. It's a good fit. We now have six bays."

"I was looking for a niche to fill," adds Chilante. "I hooked up with a lot of foreign countries, like Israel and Spain. I surrounded myself with smart people and learned from them."

According to Sam Maglio, owner of Milwaukee, WI-based Maglio & Company (which is also in partnership with Boston Tomato on a new venture in New England called Boston Fresh), "Understanding customer niches is huge to our business. We are a value-added wholesaler, which means

we focus on identifying the specific interests and needs of each customer then meet that challenge with product solutions that can really impact the success of their business.

"We have found that each customer relationship presents new opportunities for us to grow as a company and expand the value that we offer," Maglio says. "Tomatoes are oftentimes an entry point, but seldom our only touch point with a customer. The produce business is an inherently challenging environment, and we are flexible enough to solve most any challenge that comes our way."

The newest company on the NEPC is Travers Fruit Co., which opened its doors in 2012. But brothers Paul (company president) and Richard (company treasurer and secretary) Travers spent the better part of their careers on the market. When they decided to open their own business, they knew they had to give customers a reason to shop with them.

"We took our old business [what they'd been doing for other companies] and fine-tuned it for the customer. You have to stay with the times," says Richard. "Our niche is to keep customers competitive in price and quality. Six, eight, 10 years ago, everyone was price-conscious, but value was important. With a down economy, price takes precedence."

Not every business views itself as niche-oriented. "We operate by word-of-mouth, not by niche," says Steven Piazza, president of Community-Suffolk Inc., with one location in the BTM and one location in the NEPC. "The sellers find us. When they're successful, they expand. Families spread the word about a business, and the business moves from the city to the suburbs to follow the immigrant populations. The major entrepreneurial groups in the area right now are Cambodians, Vietnamese and Russians."

Although Community-Suffolk may see itself as a commodity house, Jackie Piazza, director of citrus sales, established his own specialty within the corporate structure.

"I started in the business unloading rail cars," he recalls. "Then I was put in the office for a month. I had to spend time doing every aspect of the business. I was a kid and foolishly asked my father why I had to do that. Now, of course, I know. My father put me next to my brother Tommy selling radishes. I couldn't stand it. I said let's bring in some lemons because I had watched someone selling lemons. It was just going to be lemons, but then we added limes and oranges."

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Doug Gordon and Kevin Maher of Coosemans Boston

Adam Strock, director of food safety at S. Strock & Co., Inc., NEPC, is a member of the fifth generation in his family's business. The company holds the oldest active PACA license. Strock does not see the company as filling a particular niche, but rather as a full-service partner. "Our business revolves around meeting the needs of every customer, without a focus on any specific niche," he says. "With a large team of specialists, we're able to do that very effectively.

"We're able to provide our customers with just about any service or product in existence," he says. "We're happy to go the extra mile whenever we can. I think that's something that sets us apart. We take on every challenge our customers throw our way, because the demands of quality, safety and price from the end-consumer extend all the way up the supply chain. Ultimately, we're all mutually focused on end-consumer satisfaction. So we know that the more we help our customers, the better the end-consumer will be served."

Filling The Niche

Once a company has staked out its territory, it must meet the demands of the customers it serves. The merchants on the NEPC and BTM have an extensive and impressive history doing just that.

"The market is the lifeblood for both segments of the marketplace [growers and

retailers]," says Steven Piazza. He says it is important for Community-Suffolk "to have staple items for immigrants who have found and developed their own niche markets. They've taken over abandoned stores. We offer staple items at a reasonable cost, items everybody uses. These kinds of stores don't have warehouses so they come to us."

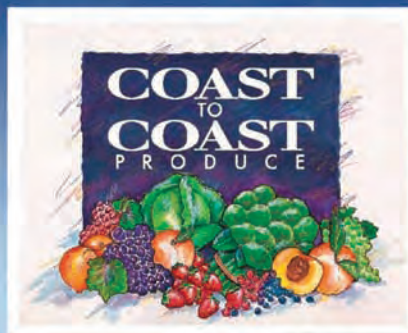
According to Gene Fabio, president of J. Bonafede & Sons, a receiver on the NEPC market. "The whole food genre has changed. High-volume items are almost all direct to

store. The ethnic specialty items are no longer brand new so now supply is competitive. These items might have been high margin in the past but the Korean wholesalers sell close.

"Almost all niche items have sporadic availability," he says. "They're growing on terminal markets along with a growing awareness among consumers. Twenty years ago, mangos and avocados were obscure items; now they're mainstream."

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Kim McNeely and Dominic Nano of Boston Tomato

explains Paul Travers. "It's brand new. It helps our customers be successful because it maintains the cold chain. The refrigeration technology is 100 percent important for growing and maintaining the company."

Earlier this year, Baldor Boston, an affiliate of Baldor Specialty Foods in the Bronx, NY, moved to a new 30,000-square-foot facility in Chelsea, just down the street from the NEPC. The new state-of-the-art building has nine cold-chain managed bays to serve its mainly foodservice clientele. "We buy some items locally," says Glenn Messinger, general manager/fresh buyer. "There are some retail items — like extra large green peppers — that New York doesn't carry. We're

still mostly foodservice, but Boston is more retail than New York."

Messinger describes keeping foodservice customers happy as a balancing act. "Chefs have trends," he explains. "Do you jump on them? Or does the grower develop something and then the chefs jump on it? It's hard to tell and can work both ways.

"Growers get things into our hands first because we're so big," he continues. "Some work, some don't. I don't know that we develop a market, but we certainly have things early. We constantly give chefs information about what's in, what's good, what's available. Maybe it's us getting things in early. Maybe it's chefs being creative. Maybe

it's growers trying new things."

According to Coast to Coast's Patnaude, customer service is key to maintaining his customer base. "We can fill our niche because we provide consistent supply — imports and domestic. We're continuously in the supply chain to fulfill our customers' needs."

Hiring additional staff is part of this equation. "We recently hired Mike Kastrinelis, a recent graduate of Massachusetts Maritime Academy, to work in produce transportation. His addition better enables us to exploit our transportation niche."

Innovation maintains customers, says Jackie Piazza of Community-Suffolk. "If there's a new item — like the Midnight

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Orange — you try to be the first in. That way you can keep customers coming back. It's important to stay informed of what's new — products, standards, whatever — so you can educate customers."

A successful merchant knows his or her strengths and capitalizes on them. "Some people may want to lead, but I'm not one of them," says Condakes of Peter Condakes. "I led once. I brought cherry tomatoes here a long time ago and had my head handed to me on a platter. Nobody wanted them back then because they were too new and too pricey.

"Now the heirlooms have a broad enough base to make them worthwhile," he says. "There are enough customers to create additional business for yourself. Customers see you have them so they can buy more items from you. Conversely, the specialty folks who come in may buy more mainstream products.

"We're pursuing different retail niches — not just big chains," Condakes adds. "Smaller stores that purchase on the market want the same items and specialties — such as heirlooms and on-the-vine — so it's worth it to have them.

Seeing the importance of local production, Condakes does take advantage of New England's seasonal production. "During the growing season, a lot of niche items are grown by local growers but food safety can be an issue. The chains need to know farmers are certified — or at least making good faith steps — toward GAP and MAP/third party certification."

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New Bedford, MA, was once well known for its thriving whaling industry. Today it is still the No. 1 fishing port in the United States, but it also claims another area of distinction: Sid Wainer & Son Specialty Foods, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2014. A leader in produce and specialty foods, the company services 23,000 restaurants on a daily basis in North America, operates a thriving retail outlet in its hometown and is committed to sustainable agriculture, including preserving open farm land utilizing inner city space.

"We've stayed focused on produce. When everything is so competitive, Sid Wainer is still focused on doing what our chefs expect — and what they expect is that everything is perfect all the time," says Dr. Henry Wainer, president of the company his grandfather founded.

To that end, the company has established its own test greenhouse and farm. The test greenhouse occupies property that had once been a box factory, which was abandoned for more than a decade. After being tested in the greenhouse, items then go to growers.

The company's farm, Jansal Valley Farms in nearby South Dartmouth, MA, is the first GAP-certified farm in the United States. The property had been a farm since the 1800s but was going to go into

development, according to Victor Simas, vice president. Henry Wainer met the owner's price and kept it as a farm. When some acreage became available across the street from the farm, that land was purchased as well.

"The greenhouse is 95 percent clean," says Warren Silvia, greenhouse manager. "It uses biological insecticides. It's used to test items that traditionally had to be flown in to see if they are commercially viable locally. We do the R&D here. If an item meets our quality, we give the specs to farmers. If they can meet the specs, we do business with them.

"We try a few dozen experiments each year and grow a few hundred items a year," he says. "One is the deliciously sweet and juicy Hakurei turnips."

"We started a living vegetable program for restaurants. Restaurants get their [micro greens and mixed greens] that were grown in the greenhouse within eight to 12 hours of being picked." Silvia does 99 percent of the picking himself.

Service is Sid Wainer's calling card. "We service our customers to death," says Wainer. "We're getting better and better all the time — that's our competitive edge. We can get anything for anybody."

"We're going to continue to do what works," says Simas. "We continue to listen — if someone wants something, we'll find it."

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The growing focus on food safety has impacted the way companies do business. "We also have our partnership with Boston Fresh," explains Nano of Boston Tomato. "It's a new niche that focuses on food safety and traceability. We also deliver direct to the door. Supermarkets and the big foodservice distributors – such as US Foods — like it. We do pre-cut fruits and vegetables. And we'll do private label if it's wanted."

"Food safety requirements — including traceability, labeling, mock recalls and such — are a great example of an evolving supply-chain challenge that every produce company has had a unique journey with," says Boston Fresh's Maglio. "We have responded to this challenge with major facility upgrades to remain in compliance while looking beyond today's expectations to the future of food safety."

"Managing the ever-changing diversity of customer specifications is [important]," he continues. "Customization is very beneficial to our customers who need to establish clear points of differentiation, but at the same time there are definite operational challenges throughout the supply matrix to manage."

"Each time you touch a product, you

need to add major value to it. That philosophy has been a natural fit for attracting customers who need a strategic partner more than they need another supplier on speed dial. Sometimes our value is product-specific and other times it is relationship-specific, helping our customers to educate their own sales force on how to properly serve their end users with the correct products and services," says Maglio.

Garden Fresh sees a competitive edge in the freshness it delivers. According to Garden Fresh's Burke, "Our products are fresher; they're not sitting in bags for days. And retailers are not tying up inventory. Machines make it quicker and easier to process produce. The base machine can be customized to do what we want. For example, we recently added a carrot stick maker."

Coosemans' Maher believes maintaining quality is key to maintaining business. "You have to develop suppliers that can provide quality. Today Idylwilde [Farms, Acton, MA] came in with beautiful Romanesco. Chefs come to us to see what's new. Sometimes a customer who has eaten at a specific restaurant will come to us for what they had."

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Tommy Piazza, Steven Piazza and Ron Dugas of Community Suffolk

ness. "We're getting more Asian customers from high-end sushi bars," he adds.

Taking a core business and adding value also extends the reach in the market. "Our niche is fiddleheads and wild blueberries," says Ruma of Ruma Fruit. "These items are at the mercy of the weather but our volume is up 25 percent this year. We have new suppliers and new customers. We're trying to develop 4- and 8-ounce clamshells of fiddleheads to give customers the option of bulk or pre-pack."

Giving Back

One of the most significant — but least heralded — aspects of the produce industry

is its commitment to giving back to the communities that support it. The merchants on the two Boston terminal markets are exemplars of this charitable bent.

"When you have, you have to share," asserts Richie Travers of Travers Fruit. "We give direct food aid to folks from orphanages, churches, drug rehab centers, halfway houses, groups that help abused women. We also give to the Special Olympics and hospices.

"We give direct food aid to the Little Sisters of the Poor, 52 weeks a year, and we make monetary donations to them," he says. "Giving back adds to our integrity and to our success as people and as a company. We give

donations; these people [who are part of the charities] have given their lives.

"Our families have been in the produce business for [several] generations," says Maglio of Boston Fresh. "Giving back is a way of life and will continue to be. The bottom line is people do business with people; companies are just a congregation point for the people. We need to treat each other like we would want to be treated."

Nano of Boston Tomato echoes this sentiment, saying, "We're really grateful for what we have, so we give back. What goes around comes around. About three years ago, we created the Boston Tomato Charity Foundation. After the Marathon bombings, we put



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Mark Ruma and Jim Ruma of Ruma Fruit and Produce

One Fund and Boston One stickers on the boxes and donated a portion of the proceeds. A percentage of cherry tomato sales goes to the Special Olympics. I have an intellectually challenged niece, so this hits close to home. We also support Breast Cancer Awareness Month."

"We've been supporting some organizations for 50 to 60 years," says Steven Piazza of Community-Suffolk. "We give direct food aid once a week. One hundred percent of the product goes to the people who need it.

There are no administrative costs.

"We also give to the Little Sisters of the Poor, when they come to the market," adds Piazza. "The Italian Home for Children started as an orphanage for Italian children but now it serves kids and adults regardless of ethnicity. The Greater Boston Food Bank has a state-of-the-art 30,000- to 35,000-square-foot warehouse. The building was donated to the food bank."

The nuns from the Little Sisters of the Poor hold a special place in the hearts of the

merchants. "Everyone helps the nuns. The swearing stops and the guys load their car," explains Jackie Piazza.

"It's the old adage, 'It's better to give than receive.' Of course, we give to the nuns who come on the market looking for donations. I was educated by them for 12 years," says Sharrino of Eaton & Eustis. "We give direct food aid to the Boston Food Bank, the Italian Home for Children, the Little Sisters of the Poor and a variety of substance abuse houses. They come and pick up once a week."

"Giving back is what life is all about," says Bryan Strock of S. Strock and Co. "We like to help as much as we can, when we can. The world is a much better place when everyone is giving back to the world rather than taking away from it. We support ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) and cancer research associations throughout the year. On a weekly basis, we also support local churches, temples, and food drives for the homeless and those in need."

All of the terminal market companies interviewed by *PRODUCE BUSINESS* give direct food aid to the charities that look to the market for donations several times a week. These include Little Sisters of the Poor, Greater Boston Food Bank, Italian Home for Children, Loving Spoonfuls and Fair Foods, which is a mobile food pantry that goes out into neighborhoods rather than having people come to it.

In addition, several companies offer financial support to charities, such as the Red Cross; sponsor community events, such as road races and triathlons; or donate to schools and organizations to help in their fund-raising activities.

"We do it because we're able to," says Sharrino. **pb**

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Deuxave Restaurant And Bar



Produce shines on the menu of this friendly Boston restaurant.
BY JAN FIALKOW

Known for generations as The Hub — short for The Hub of the Universe — Boston has become a hub of fine dining. Gone are the days when staid Yankee fare was the norm at local eateries, although that can still be found if you look for it. Today Bostonians can choose from a wealth of distinct dining options.

Deuxave is a handsome, well-appointed restaurant in the city's historic, yet trendy Back Bay. As its name suggests, the eatery sits at the corner of two of Back Bay's most prominent streets — Commonwealth Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue, called Comm Ave and Mass Ave by locals.

Deuxave is the kind of neighborhood restaurant that any neighborhood would be lucky to have. The reasonably priced offerings — entrées average around \$30 — combine the best of contemporary French technique with the best of American foodstuff. Executive chef Christopher Coombs has created a sophisticated, yet accessible menu that highlights fresh produce from first course to dessert. Chef Coombs buys his produce from Specialty Foods Boston, a high-end produce distributor located in Newmarket Square.

The omnivore diner looking to indulge his or her love for fruits and vegetables has so much to choose from that it's hard to narrow down the choices. The menu, which changes seasonally, is filled

with delicious combinations that entice meat, poultry and fish lovers as well as vegetarians.

In late September, when *PRODUCE BUSINESS* visited Deuxave, the menu featured late summer and early autumn produce items in a cornucopia of seductive dishes.

Among the first course dishes, one could choose local Scituate lobster with potato gnocchi, mushrooms, green grapes, curried walnuts and pearl onions in a citrus fricassee. Carnivores could opt for Crispy Duck Confit with Late Harvest Tomatoes — a duo of green tomatoes, piperade and marinated local cherry tomatoes — or seared Hudson Valley foie gras with warm corn custard, smoked and marinated chanterelle mushrooms, bourbon-corn butter and huckleberry, blueberry crumb. Fall Vegetable Salad featured Equinox Farms baby greens, poached heirloom apples, spiced cauliflower, olive oil-poached Georgia candy roaster squash, choucroute, roasted pepitas, rosemary cider vinaigrette and potato tulle. One of Deuxave's signature dishes is 9-hour French onion soup topped with a beef bone marrow crouton and superb French Comté cheese.

The entrée portion of the menu was also produce-friendly. Pan-seared local scallops were accompanied by truffled sweet potato agnolotti, duo of kale, braised endive, red currant gastrique and crispy shallots. East Coast halibut was served with Ward Farm sweet corn, red bliss potatoes and celery, Prince Edward Island mussels,



caramelized fennel, roasted tomato purée, fennel nage and gremolata. Crispy Skin Giannone Chicken & Prosciutto — organic chicken from family-owned Volaille Giannone in Quebec, Canada — was paired with balsamic-glazed cipollini onions and black mission figs, Holland leeks, Robochon potatoes and pickled peach.

For those who just cannot get enough vegetables, four sides were also offered: corn custard with fresh corn and scallion ragu, basil butter and grilled cipollini sour cream; heirloom tomatoes with grilled Romaine, homemade smoked Ricotta cheese, bacon jam and focaccia; French fries “au canard” with herbs and Parmesan cheese; and wild mushrooms.

Despite indulging in so much delicious fare, we still managed to save room for dessert. The late summer/early fall menu offered huckleberry frozen parfait consisting of sweet corn cake, lime and coconut frozen cream, cilantro and huckle-

berry sorbet; and Bourbon Ginger Dulcey Ganache — spiced chocolate cake, black mission figs & orange gingersnap crumble, aerated frozen dark chocolate and chocolate hazelnut praline glacé.

In addition there was warm Kouign-amann, a trendy pastry pronounced queen-a-mahn. Kouign-amann is crusty Breton cake made by layering bread dough with butter and sugar, similar to puff pastry, but with yeast dough. It is served with toasted coconut cream, dark rum-braised pineapple, drunken raisins, cashew and brown powder powder and rum glacé.

The wine program at Deuxave offers something for every palate and every course. Jason Irving, general manager and sommelier, was with Four Season’s Aujourd’hui before its 2009 closure, where he gained recognition as one of Boston’s most respected wine enthusiasts. The wine list he’s put together for Deuxave offers both affordable and rare bottles, including two-

dozen wines available by the glass.

The restaurant also has a creative cocktail and beer program under the direction of bar manager Christina Doris. The cocktail list features classics and original libations, many featuring fresh seasonal ingredients. The beer list encompasses local and regional craft breweries as well as seasonal selections. **pb**

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Roch's Fresh Foods



Owner, Ray Roch Jr., and Retail Manager, Joe Bonner

Unique family arrangement works to fill a retail niche for generations of Rhode Islanders. **BY JAN FIALKOW**

Roch's Fresh Foods is the tale of a family that has managed to stay close while going its separate ways.

Ray Roch Jr., the company's current owner, says the company has been in family hands for more than 75 years. His grandfather, Joseph Roch, founded the original company, Roch's Brothers Market. At age 18, Ray's father, Ray Sr., took over the produce part of the business. In the 1950s, Ray Sr. established it as a separate entity.

"There was a gentlemen's agreement between my father and his brothers," Roch Jr. says. "They don't carry each others' items." Ray's uncles' side of the business currently offers meat, deli, bakery and prepared foods.

The arrangement proved amicable; the two separate businesses occupy the same building in West Warwick, RI, where consumers routinely exist one door and walk the few steps to another door.

Roch opened a second store in Narragansett, RI, about 10 years ago. "The retail store in Narragansett is a full store. My uncle and cousin buy the meat and deli for it," he says, confirming that the arrangement his father and uncles set up more than 50 years ago is still going strong.

"The West Warwick store [which is 6,000 square feet including the back room] has been in this location for 30 years," explains Roch. "We remodeled 15 years ago. This store has a mostly working class clien-

tele. The [4,300-square-foot] Narragansett store is higher end with more organic produce. It draws a lot of vacationers." The company also opened a wholesale distribution center in West Greenwich, RI, about a year ago.

The Retail Side

"Our niche is that we're a small, hometown market," says Roch. "Our customers see the value in the quality we carry. We're 20 percent less expensive than the chains."

Roch relies on the two Boston produce markets — the New England Produce Center in Chelsea and the Boston Terminal Market in Everett — for most of the fresh produce sold in his retail and wholesale operations. "I buy 75 percent of our produce at the Boston Terminal Market. A tractor-trailer goes to the markets Monday through Friday.

"I act as my own broker," he adds. "It gives me a reason to get up in the morning. I do 90 percent of the buying."

Roch's also takes advantage of local produce items. "During the short local season, we buy direct from about 15 farmers. We buy sweet corn, tomatoes, green and yellow squash, green peppers, cherry tomatoes, McIntosh and Macoun apples, and peaches."

In addition to fresh produce, the stores carry produce-related items. Roch's makes its own strawberry preserves in-house, and this



past season turned 100 cases of strawberries from Quonset View Farm in nearby Portsmouth, RI, into the consumer favorite. Braswell Food Company, Statesboro, GA, makes many of the company's other private-label prepared items. Roch's also packages its own dried fruit, nuts and candies.

Roch's customers are loyal both because of the quality of the produce and because of the company's philanthropic bent. Made-to-order fruit baskets are an important part of the business, bringing in numerous repeat customers. Roch's often donates these popular baskets to raise money for local organizations and charities.

Loyalty is a hallmark of Roch's staff. The epitome of this is Joe Bonner, the retail manager of the store. He has been with the company for 31 years — and he's 48 years old!

The Wholesale Side

While Roch's maintains and nourishes its retail operations, future growth appears to

be on the wholesale side, which Ray Sr., who died three years ago, started 45 years ago. The company has "20 little trucks on the road," says Ray Jr. "Seventy-five percent of my business is wholesale. We deliver to restaurants, schools and institutions. We're HACCP-certified and have third-party auditing."

Roch's Wholesale has two sales people on the road taking orders that can range from \$25 to \$10,000. The company's reputation spurs business. "A chef starts buying from us, moves on to another restaurant and takes us along," he explains.

"The distribution facility is just a year old," he adds. "It took me 15 years to open it. My dad was very conservative.

"I grew up in the store," he says. "My father always knew I'd come into the business. When I went to St. Michael's [College] in Vermont, my father said, 'Enjoy your vacation. When you come into the business, you'll be getting up at 3 a.m.!'"

Ray Jr. has never regretted his decision to

enter the family business. And, he says, it looks as if his son Zach will be coming into the business as well. **pb**

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Breaking The Almond Barrier

Industry breaks through seasonal and snacking nut stigma with new uses and merchandising versatility in produce departments. **BY MICHELE SOTALLARO**



PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT FARMS

Marketers suggest capitalizing on holidays and sporting events by highlighting almond varieties for salad and pizza toppings.

Every day we learn more about the increasing health benefits of nuts, especially almonds. From heart health, to weight management, to cancer prevention, almonds are more than a snacking option or booster item for holiday sales. With so many almond variations such as almond milk, paste, flour, butter, oil, or meal, there are endless possibilities for produce rings.

The National Almond Board expanded the opportunity for sales even more by establishing National Almond Day a few years ago. In conjunction with February's American Heart Month, National Almond Day is February 16. "National Almond Day would be a great merchandising opportunity for retailers to do events and promotions," says Larry Griffith, Midwest business manager with Mariani Nut Company, Winters, CA.

Marc Seguin, vice president of marketing for Paramount Farms International in Bakersfield, CA, agrees with this tactic. "Our sales team promotes bins of almonds in the produce department during this time [the month of February] to ensure that retailers are outfitted with Paramount's Wonderful Almond displays to leverage the moment in time. We also promote National Almond Day on our social channels and use PR to generate

conversations about almonds."

Going Nuts Seasonally

Because of the expanding uses for almonds, the nut has become a staple in a variety of seasonal consumer shopping habits. "If one had looked at a seasonality chart six to eight years ago, the bulk of the sales would have been in the fourth quarter and under the baking and holiday category," says Griffith. "If you look at the seasonality chart today, there are larger sales in the fourth quarter, but numbers are almost even in the other quarters."

"Back-to-School is often a busy time of the year and on-the-go snacks become increasingly important for both parents and kids," says Seguin. "Almonds are the perfect portable yet healthy option to send to school with kids, or for parents to snack on while they go about their busy days."

Stephanie Blackwell, founder and president of Aurora Products, located in Orange, CT, agrees sales rise in October, November and December and merchandising is key. "There is a spike in almond sales for the fourth quarter."

The company packages natural and organic dried fruits, nuts, trail mixes, salad toppings, and granolas. Since many holiday recipes call for almonds in both baking and cooking, Aurora developed a "Baking Pallet" for the

holidays that includes Aurora Whole Almonds, Sliced Almonds and/or Slivered Almonds. Retailers can place the pallet in Produce and have an instant baking section.

Keith Cox, produce category manager from K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc.'s Food City in Abingdon, VA, believes using these types of shipper displays works well for the stores. "During larger event times, we use shipper displays throughout the store. The shipper contains a mix of almond flavors. We always try to include these in high traffic areas.

"Our banana tables have wing displays of almonds on each end and we use this setup year-round," adds Cox. "Then once we get into the holiday season — New Year's and Super Bowl — we'll do some extra displays for almonds. These events would have typically included the inshell peanut, but with the health benefits that we now know about almonds, people are progressing over to almonds.

"For back to school, we do a lunchbox-sized package that contains about a 1.5 ounce single-serve package of raw, salted and roasted almonds — which makes for a healthier alternative to a candy bar," explains Cox.

Sunrise Natural Foods, which is a wholesale distributor of nuts, dried fruits, seeds, spices, party mixes, snacks, bakery supplies and more, out of Sugar Land, TX, supplies all 58 Fiesta

Marts (a wholly owned subsidiary of Grocers Supply Co., Inc., Houston, TX) with a variety of almonds year-round. Sales representative for Sunrise, Ellie Hernandez, says that year-round supply is steady for the store, but the fourth quarter is still best for almond sales.

Merchandising By Usage Options

“Consumers’ mindsets change throughout the year; but, regardless of the season, healthy snacking is always a top priority,” says Paramount Farms’ Seguin. Paramount supplies Food City with the single-serve snack packs

that Cox says do so well.

“The snack packs come in a 24-count display case, and we’ll use them at check out as well. It’s a good grab-and-go item,” says Cox.

“We have a line of flavored almonds, and within those sales, the natural almonds are the most popular,” asserts Mariani’s Griffith. “I sell twice as much natural as I do roasted or salted, but the biggest increase for use in produce departments has been for salad toppings. We sell mostly our sliced in Produce for salad toppings.”

Paramount Farms also sells almonds for

salad accents. “Consumers are absolutely using almonds in non-traditional ways. Wonderful Almond Accents are pre-sliced almonds giving retailers versatility in the almond category,” says Seguin. “Consumers use Almond Accents, whether it’s chopped in a salad, sprinkled on yogurt, or as an accent on dessert.”

Paramount also suggests using almonds as part of a stuffing recipe, which includes wild rice with ruby-colored dried pomegranate and sweet almonds for a pilaf or poultry stuffing. Another idea is to create a butternut squash and almond grilled pizza, which includes tomatoes, goat cheese, and fennel.

“In addition to using almonds in salads, casseroles and baking, they can be eaten as a nutritious snack,” says Aurora’s Blackwell. “Aurora Natural offers delicious flavored almonds that are roasted and seasoned fresh every week. Our latest developed offerings are Dry Roasted Almonds coated with Tuscan-infused Olive Oil and Basil-Onion Flavored Almonds.”

“It’s a good time to be in the nut business,” says Griffith. “The industry is growing so much that people are looking for new varieties and new flavors.” Griffith says that Mariani is working on growing its Marcona almond line.

“The Marcona almond is grown in Spain, and there was a crop failure in Spain, so prices on the almond have been more expensive,” asserts Griffith. Marcona almonds are sometimes referred to as the “Queen of Almonds” and almost all of the production is from Spain. They are sweeter, fatter and rounder than the typical California variety. In Spain, they are usually blanched and then quickly sautéed in fresh extra virgin olive oil.

“Marcona is also grown in California, and we’ve been able to acquire those, bag it and sell it to Publix Super Markets [a grocery chain with more than 1,000 stores based in Lakeland, FL],” says Griffith. Publix will stock the roasted and salted flavored Marcona almonds beginning this month.

J. Marchini Farms of Chowchilla, CA, also grows a proprietary variety similar to the Marcona. It blanches well and has a soft shell according to the company’s sales coordinator, Marc Marchini. The company only sells it through its handler and bakers.

Dispelling The Raw Controversy

Regardless of the season or variety, one element remains true for all almonds: they must be pasteurized, and it’s important to display raw almonds appropriately. Visit ProduceBusiness.com for further details on merchandising raw almonds.

pb

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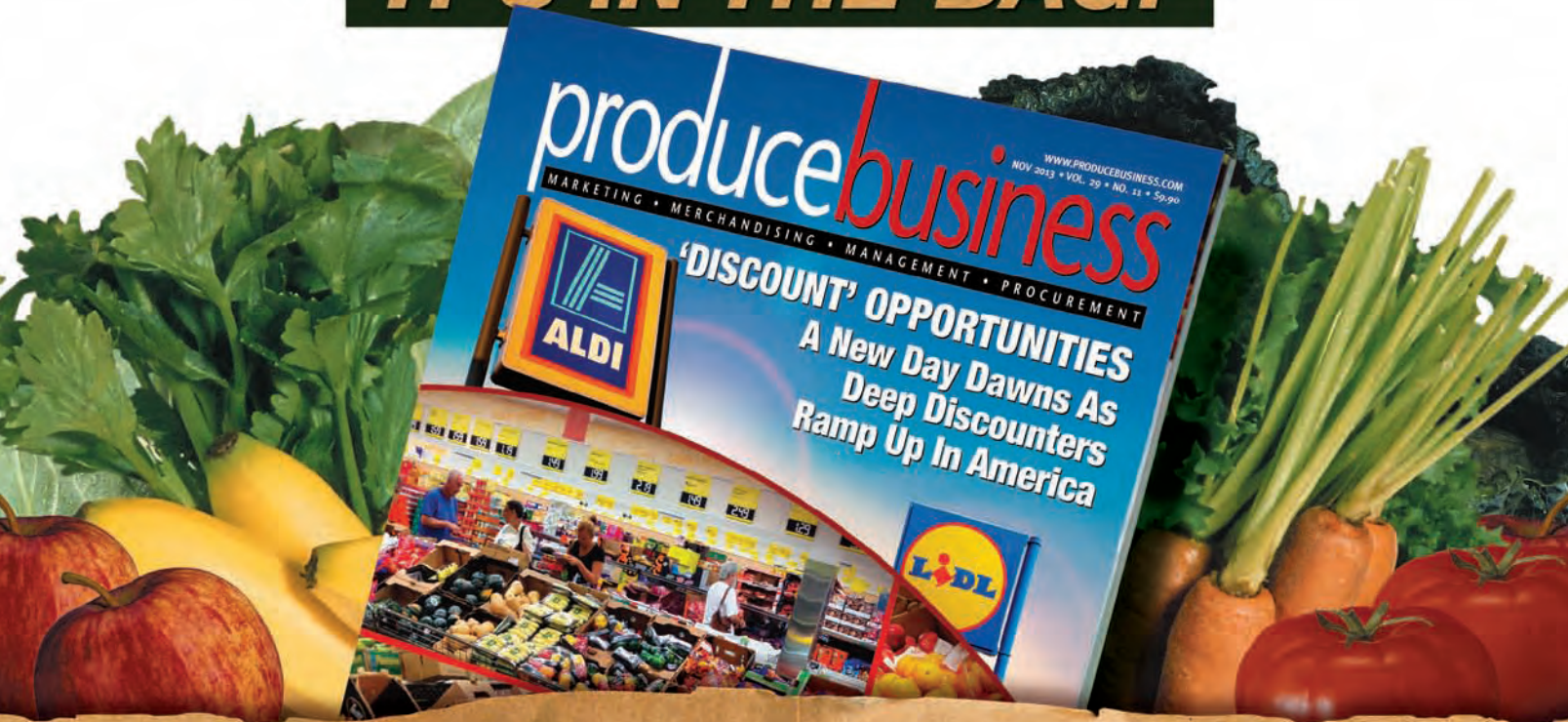
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'RULES OF RETAIL'

(PART III)



In this section of our continuing look at the “Rules of Retail,” I will examine the next three guidelines and their impact on a successful retail operation. These three rules are ignored more often than the previous six and are not “rocket science” but are just as valuable and crucial to the success of the retail operation.

Rule #7: Know Who You Are: Many retailers have a hard time finding out exactly

what they stand for. They try to be “everything to everybody” and are rarely successful. Trying to appeal to every customer has several pitfalls — including the fact that you may not reach or fulfill the needs of any of the customers. You must know what you do well and how that appeals to the customer. By doing what you do best, you will find your market. Once you find out who your customer is and what you represent, you can then adapt tactics to satisfy your customers, as well as enhance your reputation and standing in the marketplace. Being able to deliver what your customer wants — and be identified as the one that does it best — ensures continued growth and success. As a retailer, you have to stand for something and then consistently deliver the promise to the customer.

Rule #8: Your Employees Are Your Biggest Assets: No truer words have ever been spoken. In the world of retail, your direct contacts with consumers are your employees. They carry the message and provide the service to the customer that your programs are designed to deliver. They reflect the commitment and attitude of management to customers. It goes without saying that positive, enthusiastic and helpful employees mean more to the reputation of the retailer than any high-minded initiatives or slick advertising campaigns. Your employees are “mirrors” into your culture, and they reflect how they are treated and valued by management.

The impact that your employees have on the customers cannot be exaggerated. Employees who are highly valued and feel important or empowered by management are, as they say, “worth their weight in gold.” They can advance the retailers’ image with consumers; promote sales in the store and good word-of-mouth on the street. No amount of advertising can create this type of value with your customers and in the mind of the general public. Employees provide a very pleasant

shopping experience for the customer and project a positive image for the entire store or chain. In addition, these satisfied employees are happy with their work, and the presentation in the department illustrates their pride.

Conversely, unhappy or disgruntled employees can have the opposite effect. They can make the shopping experience a real chore and unpleasant for the consumer. Even worse, they may express their “problems” directly to the consumer, which only adds to the damage. If they do not express their displeasure, their work in the department is basically the minimum amount of effort, and they do nothing to go above what is expected to improve the presentation. Their “body language” shows that they do not want to be there and are simply going through the motions of their particular tasks.

The responsibility for developing and keeping motivated, satisfied employees rests with management. They must instill a sense of

belonging and investment with the employee that is contagious and spreads throughout the store or department. Consistently showing and recognizing the value of the employees to the success of the operation must be demonstrated in order to accomplish this. A positive atmosphere and appealing work environment are key to developing and keeping the best employees for your operation. Any retailer that ignores his employees’ well-being and mindset invites mediocrity in presentation and ultimately failure of his operations.

Each of these rules has a number, and none is expressly more important than the rest. Each has its key and vital aspects, which affect the success of the retail operation. They are designed to act in concert with one other, each building upon the other to drive the growth and financial advancement of the operation.

Rule #9: The Customer Is Always Right: This has always been the universal truth in all of retail. Regardless of the goals or policies of any retail operation, this rule should always supersede any others. Any retailer who puts his own interests above those of the customers is doomed to failure. The focus must always be on the customers’ needs, wants, and desires above all other strategies. The needs of the organization depend on servicing and providing the customers’ desires. The consequences are obvious; retailers who don’t adhere to this rule are the ones that will fail and disappear from the market. No matter what the situation or motivation, the satisfaction of the customer must have the highest priority for the retailer to succeed.

Each of these rules has a number, and none is expressly more important than the rest. Each has its key and vital aspects, which affect the success of the retail operation. They are designed to act in concert with one other, each building upon the other to drive the growth and financial advancement of the operation.

pb

By Don Harris

Don Harris is a veteran of the produce industry for nearly 40 years, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY



PRODUCE BUSINESS wants to be involved with incredible industry enhancing events. Its slogan, since its founding almost 30 years ago is, “To Initiate Industry Improvement.” This is why, during one of our regular discussions about doing something meaningful for the industry together, Jim Prevor and I came to the conclusion that the natural extension of The New York Produce Show and

Conference would be to develop a sister event in the only city in the world that matches the Big Apple for iconic status — London.

I’ve known Jim since I was editor of Fresh Produce Journal (FPJ) in the U.K. and managing director of its then publisher Lockwood Press. This is the largest

trade publication focused on the fresh produce market in the U.K. He and I chewed the fat on many occasions in the past few years and even debated whether a show of this kind in London was the way to go. Neither of us felt that the climate was quite right at the time.

Earlier this year, we changed our minds. That climate has transformed dramatically in the past five recession-hit years. The dynamics of the U.K.’s produce industry have moved on for growers, buyers and sellers alike. As the supermarkets, wholesale markets and foodservice sector adapted to an evolving competitive commercial environment and the fast-changing needs of the multi-cultural British consumer, the suppliers at every link in the supply chain have had to sharpen their foci on becoming leaner and fitter, fiercely customer-focused, and increasingly aware of consumer trends and demand.

Therefore, it makes perfect sense that in London, we should provide the U.K. market with a show that reflects its current position. In year one, we will sell only 150 booths to give every exhibitor the opportunity to be seen by every visitor. Each booth will be the same size — an egalitarian approach that we feel will afford exhibitors of all sizes a chance to shine and deliver their own, unique messages.

There will, of course, be plenty of supermarket buyer presence and participation. The rising influence of supermarket chains at both the discount and premium end of the scale has put the pressure on the U.K.’s famous “Big Four” supermarket chains (No. 1, Tesco; No. 2, Asda; No. 3 Sainsbury’s; No. 4, Morrisons). It’s undeniable that how they react will dictate the future shape of the U.K. supply chain. In their own way, each of the “Big Four” is taking greater ownership of the sourcing process, pursuing the precious online dollar, and restructuring their in-store offer to satisfy a produce-savvy shopper and maximise returns per square metre of floor space.

However, the shape of early interest means we already know that there will be a strong emphasis on the non-supermarket side of the business, with wholesale and foodservice given a platform they have never experienced previously at a trade event in the U.K. — a platform that reflects the estimated two-fifths of the industry that these sectors still represent, despite the undoubted dominance of the multiple retail chains.

The three London wholesale markets alone have a combined annual turnover of around \$2.8 billion. The catering scene (any establishment that serves

out-of-home meals to the public, such as restaurants, public houses, cafes, street sellers, etc.) in England’s capital city is as vibrant as anywhere in the world.

Any evolving market is by definition rife with opportunity, and our major objective as a co-organiser in London is to ensure

that we cram as many of industry players as possible into this show. For an international supplier, this will be the venue to find new business partners and avenues, or to develop an existing business in the U.K. market.

Those who participate in The New York Produce Show and Conference won’t be surprised to hear that we’ll have chef demonstrations and workshops on the show floor in London. We’ll also bring the British consumer and national media face to face with the trade, and host a student programme that highlights the incredibly diverse and fulfilling career opportunities that the fresh produce industry offers.

As in New York, we’ve partnered with the local trade association to make this happen. In the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC), we will be working alongside an organisation of great integrity, which in its midst and on its executive board and committees, has a breadth and depth of experience and knowledge of the produce business that would be tough to rival.

PRODUCE BUSINESS and the Eastern Produce Council are rightly proud of what they have shared with the industry in New York since 2010. We’re sure that three years from now, the FPC and PRODUCE BUSINESS will have created an equally successful event on the other side of the Atlantic.

We measure success by the contribution the event makes to the trade in: education, networking, opportunities to build business, and opportunities to serve a broader community. Whether it is bringing cutting edge university research to the trade, helping to inspire the next generation of produce employees, or establishing a community of produce executives and entrepreneurs that can help move the industry forward, we are in this to make a difference. **pb**

It makes perfect sense that in London, we should provide the U.K. market with a show that reflects its current position.

By Tommy Leighton

Leighton is managing director of Phoenix Media Network, Ltd., based in London. The London Produce Show and Conference will be held on June 4 to 6 at the Grosvenor House in the Mayfair district of London. More information is available at londonproduceshow.co.uk.

THE PATH TO PTI: HOW TECHNOLOGY VENDORS ARE ADDRESSING PRODUCE TRACEABILITY INITIATIVES



There is a swarm of marketing hype within the food industry surrounding the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) and the different (or best) approaches to meet compliance standards. Some believe the propaganda is necessary due to that fact that an estimated 85 percent of produce supply companies are not prepared for standardized case labeling and product track and trace efforts. Fortunately, there are technology solutions and operating procedures an organization can implement to ensure their product is not in danger of being rejected by retailers.

Fortunately, there are technology solutions and operating procedures an organization can implement to ensure their product is not in danger of being rejected by retailers.

Background

PTI, sponsored by Canadian Produce Marketing Association, GS1 US, Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh Produce Association, has outlined a course of action to achieve supply chain-wide adoption of electronic traceability of every case of produce. The mandates for third party logistic companies, distributors and growers are designed to a) create transparency in the supply chain and b) strengthen consumer confidence in produce quality industry-wide.

As the industry heads down the path to compliance, technology vendors are supporting supply chain suppliers and approaching PTI in a variety of ways.

Slap and Stick

Most software vendors are approaching PTI in a similar fashion as the RFID compliance requirements several years ago. The industry coined it “slap and stick labeling.” This type of solution is typically developed as a GS1 or PTI add-on module requiring a user to manually key in the GS1 detail information, print a label and slap it on the outbound shipment. It is a messy and painstakingly manual process, but it generates a compliant label for customers. A module or “slap and stick” solution can add to operational costs given the required labeling must be generated and applied manually at the time of shipment.

Less Manual

A more streamlined solution is to have the module interface with an organization’s inventory control system, such as a paper-based ERP or Warehouse Management System (WMS.) This too is a messy process; however it is less manual and eliminates the need for a member of the workforce to key in traceability details. A module or add-on printer program to generate a GS1 label will not address a company’s supply chain inefficiencies, but it will help with compliance.

Custom Code

Another approach is to write custom code specific to existing systems. This is usually the least preferred method as it is usually the most expensive solution. It is not uncommon for additional problems to surface using this approach, altering the project scope from a medium-sized custom project to a large nightmare.

Single Scan Traceability

Some technology vendors offer an approach that encompasses an organizations’ entire WMS application, therefore allowing single scan traceability of a GS1 label throughout the entire warehouse. For example, let’s say an organization receives a GS1 labeled pallet of apples and the GS1 bar code contains the Global Trade Item Number (GTIN), quantity and lot number. In order to capture all of this information with a typical WMS or inventory control system, it would take a minimum

of three scans. With single scan traceability software, an organization scans the GS1 label once and the software automatically parses out all of the embedded data into the WMS. By automating data with a single scan, company data becomes 99 percent — plus accurate while reducing scans by 300 percent or more. This approach

does not require an add-on module to a WMS and can add real value throughout a company’s supply chain as well as downstream for the customer.

Do All Vendors Have A Solution?

Now that PTI is a reality, many vendors will claim to support GS1 and PTI. But, buyers beware. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to strategically design and develop software without a complete understanding of the requirements associated with emerging initiatives, such as PTI.

Very few software vendors are members and active participants on the PTI technology steering committee, which means PTI initiatives and standards, are new for many supply chain software vendors. It’s best to partner with a vendor who has a pulse on trends affecting the space and has been proactively designing and developing how to support GS1 and PTI requirements.

It’s also important to note that some technology vendors loosely interchange the terms GS1 and PTI as meaning the same thing. They are not the same and add confusion. Compliance with one does not automatically mean compliance with the other. It is imperative to verify what the module supports — is it just GS1, or is it GS1 and PTI? Addition questions to ask prior to making an investment should include: How adaptable is the solution since the requirements will likely continue to expand in the coming years? What added license costs are involved? Is there added maintenance and support costs? If there is an interface, how does this affect any upgrading of my other systems? **pb**

Fortunately, there are technology solutions and operating procedures an organization can implement to ensure their product is not in danger of being rejected by retailers.

By Mark Miller

Mark Miller is vice president supply chain at Phoenix, AZ-based AFS Technologies, Inc., a provider of business automation solutions for the food and beverage industry ó providing ERP, TPM, WMS, OMS, EDI and BI solutions to over 1,200 customers.

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AN AMERICAN DREAM STORY

Sal Vacca came to America from the island of Capri, Italy, in 1949. “I came to America alone from Italy. My parents didn’t like it at the time, but in 1949 America was everything,” says Vacca, president of Bronx, NY-based A. J. Trucco, Inc. “After the Second World War, America was something to dream of, so when I was offered the job with an Italian food importing company, without consulting my parents, I said yes. They felt it would be good for me even though the departure was sad for all of us.”

The food importing company that Vacca began his journey with was Domenico D’Agiola, Inc. He lived in a boarding house in Manhattan’s famous Hell’s Kitchen, and had this photo taken of him in the backyard of the house in 1951. “Hell’s Kitchen was not such a good neighborhood back then,” says Vacca.

Moving to America proved to be a prosperous venture. Vacca worked for Domenico for 10 years, and around 1960, he decided to leave Domenico and start his own company, Salvatore Vacca. One year later, “Mr. Trucco [a dried fruit and nut wholesaler at the time and a customer of Vacca’s] and I joined forces in 1961,” recalls Vacca. With the help of Vacca’s import connections, A.J. Trucco Inc. imported and distributed a variety of commodities to complement its wholesale business. In 1965, after a few years of success with Mr. Trucco, Vacca bought out Domenico D’Agiola. Sadly, Mr. Trucco passed away and Vacca purchased A.J. Trucco, Inc. In 1967, A.J. Trucco Inc. was one of the first wholesalers to move to the new Hunts Point Market, where the company continued to grow. In 2000, a new partnership formed with Nick Pacia, a young importer of figs. As the years went on, Vacca and Pacia grew the company, and now A.J. Trucco, Inc. is an importer and distributor of garlic and a vast array of dried fruits and nuts, as well as a national brand marketer of kiwifruit, figs, pears and citrus.

With all that he has overcome and the success that he made for himself in America, Vacca now looks forward to retiring, though he still goes to his office on the Hunts Point Market every day. “I’d like to enjoy life and travel during retirement,” admits Vacca. At 84 years old, he continues to enjoy nights out on the town going to jazz and opera performances.

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Natural Delights Introduces Country's First Pitted Medjool Dates
by Bard Valley Natural Delights™ Medjool Dates
Posted: Friday, July 27, 2012 at 8:38AM EDT

BARD VALLEY, CA— Bard Valley Natural Delights, the nation's top Medjool date brand, offers consumers a convenient new way to enjoy the lusciousness and all-around snackability of Medjools with the introduction of Natural Delights Pitted Medjool Dates, the country's first pitted Medjool date product. Launching this fall, the 12-ounce package will sell for the Suggested Retail Price (SRP) of \$6.99.

"The introduction of Natural Delights Pitted Medjool Dates makes it easier than ever for Americans to indulge in the sweetness of one of the world's most mysterious fruits," said David Androsco, head of marketing for the Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association (BVMGGA).

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by British Columbia Blueberry Council
Posted: Friday, July 27, 2012 at 8:58AM EDT

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