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INTERNATIONAL SOURCING: A Closer Exam of FSMA Offers Prescription for U.S. Imports

SUPPLEMENT



FLORAL BUSINESS

SPECIAL SECTION



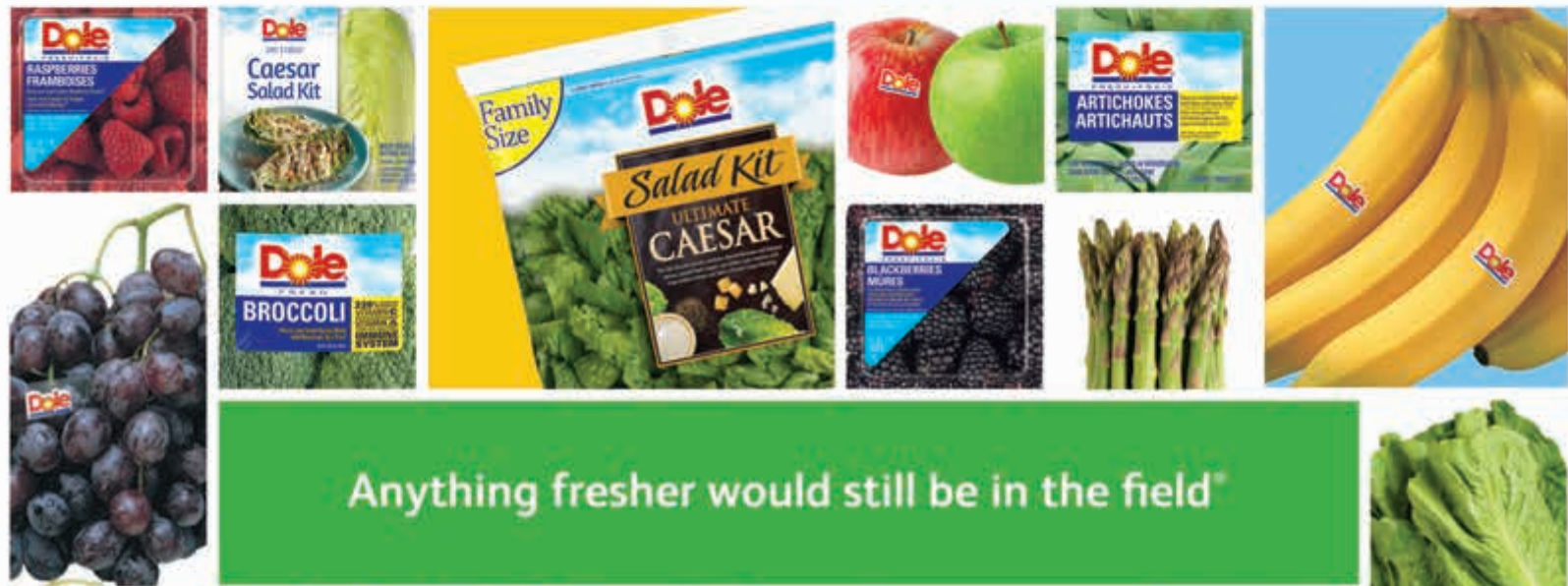
NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

INSIDE

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT ALBERT HEIJN'S FOOD WASTE RESCUE PROGRAM
SUPER BOWL • MEXICAN PRODUCE • CHILEAN FRUIT
FLORIDA STRAWBERRIES • TEXAS PRODUCE • POTATOES AND ONIONS
SOUTHERN COOKING • ORGANIC IMPORTS • VEGETABLE BLENDS
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cover story

26

INTERNATIONAL SOURCING: A CLOSER EXAM OF FSMA OFFERS PRESCRIPTION FOR U.S. IMPORTS

Impending components of the *Food Safety Modernization Act* (FSMA) could affect the landscape of U.S. imports, as importers and exporters are now held liable for the food they market.

commentary

10 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT
Big Picture Industry Perspective Needed On Trump Presidency

138 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE
Year-End Paradox

140 WHOLESALE MARKET
Now Is The Best Time To Take Stock, Strategize For A Prosperous Future

142 EUROPEAN MARKET
Laurence Olins Speaks Out On Brexit And Trump

144 PRODUCE ON THE MENU
Putting More Produce, Particularly Vegetables, In Desserts



features

37

GET IN THE GAME!

Retailers can win big with an effective Super Bowl merchandising strategy.

75

THE NEW DOOR FOR MEXICO'S PRODUCE

Geography, investment and drive intersect to make South Texas a leading player in its importation.

81

MARKETING CHILEAN FRUIT

New varieties and growth will keep the U.S. consumer happy year-round.



85

FLORIDA STRAWBERRY REPORT

Despite challenges, Florida's strawberry business is growing.

107

TEXAS PRODUCE GETS MORE DIVERSE EVERY YEAR

The state fills an essential role in the national food supply.

111

MARKETING POTATOES AND ONIONS EFFECTIVELY

Utilizing multiple displays, recipe ideas and information about health benefits boosts sales.

116

SOUTHERN COOKING CUISINE

How produce is providing the 'lite' side of the rich fare.



special features

43
NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

20
FROM THE PAGES OF PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM
 Instock Innovation On Food Waste:
 Albert Heijn Partners
 To Rescue Food

24
**ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS:
 FAMILY STARTS ALL-ORGANIC MARKET**
 More than just a store, 4th Generation
 educates consumers and promotes organics
 and a healthy lifestyle.

91
BOSTON
**MARKET PROFILE:
 FINDING BOSTON COMMONALITIES
 IN A DIVERSE MARKET**
 Resilient companies in the Boston area serve
 the needs of both new and Old World clients
 amid an increasingly diverse marketplace.

103
**FOODSERVICE PROFILE:
 THE SALTY PIG**
 Blending both Old and New World cuisines,
 the Salty Pig courageously incorporates a
 wealth of unique produce items.



105
**RETAIL PROFILE:
 NEW DEAL FRUIT INC.**
 An Old World Italian grocer takes a produce
 legacy into the future by focusing on
 customer needs, quality and relationships.

in this issue

- 6** QUIZ
- 8** WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE
- 12** PRODUCE WATCH
- 14** RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
- 15** COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS
- 16** FORWARD THINKING
- 146** INFORMATION SHOWCASE
- 146** BLAST FROM THE PAST

insert

FLORAL
 BUSINESS
 MAGAZINE

- Local Floral
- Retail Profile
- Buying Tips
- Voice Of The Industry



departments

ORGANIC MARKETING
**119 ADDRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT
 IMPORTED ORGANIC PRODUCE
 CAN HELP INCREASE SALES**
 If consumers are worried about whether
 imported produce truly meets organic
 standards, be ready to answer their ques-
 tions — then sell them what they need.

FRESH-CUT MARKETING
**124 VEGETABLE BLENDS
 FILL CONSUMER NEEDS**
 These mixes check the boxes for
 nutritious, easy and interesting meals.

MERCHANDISING REVIEW
**128 WINTER SQUASH BRIGHTENS
 PRODUCE SHELVES**
 With an array of varieties, building an
 exciting display not only adds a splash
 of color, but drives sales.

FLORAL & FOLIAGE
**133 FLORAL FOCUS IS
 YEAR-ROUND FORCE**

DRIED FRUITS & NUTS
**136 HEALTH DESIGNATION, RIGHT
 MERCHANDISING CAN INCREASE
 ALMOND SALES**
 Now that nuts can be labeled “healthy,”
 be prepared for an influx of consumers
 looking for year-round supplies.





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to you, we produce
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* Category 35: Broker or Agent

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



GARY RUGGIERO
Associate Category Manager
Raley's Supermarkets
Sacramento, CA

After a 20-year career with Raley's Supermarkets — as a produce supervisor for the past 10 years — Gary Ruggiero became a buyer at the company's distribution center in Sacramento, CA, in June. He knew he would be working in the produce industry ever since he started working at Vallergera's Market in Napa, CA, at age 17.

Raley's is known for fresh, quality produce

and a knowledgeable, professional staff. "We have the best produce in the marketplace and our staff is very well-trained," says Ruggiero.

Ruggiero, who has a passion for building great in-store displays for each season, says his favorite part of the business is using creativity for merchandising.

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 2017 issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

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- 1) What company wants you to Think Blue? _____
- 2) What is America's #1 selling branded apples, pears and cherries? _____
- 3) What organization helps you find your perfect match? _____
- 4) Which ad offers readers a place to donate fresh produce? _____
- 5) What state is the second largest supplier of strawberries? _____
- 6) What website has the greatest reach in the global fresh fruit and vegetable industry? _____

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and Markets**

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at booths 160-165 at the Javits Center.



What Now?



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS,
UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Without question, the astonishing election of 2016 will be analyzed, discussed and debated for a very long time to come. What we know now is that Donald Trump will be our next President and the Republicans will control both the House of Representatives and Senate, albeit by smaller margins than previously. But what does that mean for issues the produce industry cares about the most? While there is still a great deal of dust to settle in order for us to have the most clear picture of what lies ahead, given what we've heard on the campaign trail and in the days since the election, here are a few possible scenarios.

An issue that is widely seen as an opportunity for bipartisan action is infrastructure. With the vast majority of fresh fruits and vegetables being shipped domestically by truck, efforts to improve American roads and bridges are badly needed. It is expected that the new Trump administration will seek funding for infrastructure projects totaling at least \$500 billion over five years to address critical infrastructure needs, including highways, bridges, in-land waterways, seaports and airports. Payment for this new spending is likely to come from a tax and budget deal. It is expected that it will not, however, simply be new stimulus funding that goes without some level of offsetting spending cuts.

In recent years, reauthorization of the Farm Bill has become increasingly contentious. The current Farm Bill expires in 2018. What does the future hold for this critical piece of legislation? At this point in time, it appears that both agriculture committees of the House and Senate will work toward

Watch Vice President Mike Pence, a one-time House Agriculture Committee member, to be a key voice on farm policy.

reauthorization during the year ahead. It also appears that the contours of the current Farm Bill will remain. However, changes to rebalance safety net equity, especially for dairy and cotton interests, will be a priority. Investment in agricultural research, as well as newfound emphasis placed on sustainability and conservation, are policy program areas to watch closely as the new bill takes shape. Consistent with the view that President Trump will leave most legislative details to Congress, watch Vice President Mike Pence, a one-time House Agriculture Committee member, to be a key voice on farm policy.

Trade is one of the key policy issues Candidate Trump focused on extensively. Unquestionably, enforcement of existing agreements will take on newfound importance. However, the Trans Pacific Partnership is unlikely to be considered in 2017, and will not be considered unless significant changes are made to the existing agreement.

Last, but certainly not least, is the issue of immigration. Without question, one of the most controversial issues on the campaign trail, especially in light of well-known comments made by Trump. But what exactly will Trump the President do? He indicated during the campaign an appreciation of what immigration means to the agriculture industry, but has also identified border security as among the first

issues he will work to address upon taking office. We at United Fresh will work with the new Administration and the Congress to ensure we do as much outreach and provide as much information as possible about how essential securing a skilled workforce is to our industry and to the nutritional needs of all Americans. We will work with policy-makers across the spectrum to ensure that any immigration legislation is balanced between the need to secure our borders and the need to enable law-abiding foreign-born workers to stay in the United States to do the jobs that Americans won't do.

These are certainly not the only issues that we'll be keeping a close eye on for the near future. Other issues that are important to our industry are environmental regulations, food safety regulations, biotechnology policy and the reauthorization of child nutrition programs. We'll be working closely with our membership to be sure we are pursuing priorities that really matter to the fresh fruit and vegetable industry and help improve the bottomline for produce providers across the country, while making sure Americans across the country have access to a steady supply of nutritious fruits and vegetables. We've all heard the expression, "may you live in interesting times." We've certainly got that; but we also live in a time of challenge and opportunity. For the produce industry, that means we move onward and upward.

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Big Picture Industry Perspective Needed On Trump Presidency

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

One of the most interesting facets of industry-led government relations programs is because they almost always focus on particular industry concerns, they often fail to deal with the bigger picture.

So President-elect Trump's big initiatives on global trade and immigration, if enacted, are going to cause trouble for the industry. On the other hand, as of the date of this column, the stock market is up 4.5 percent since the election, with the Dow breaking the 19,000 barrier for the first time. The S&P 500 had a market cap before the election of about \$20 trillion, so a 5 percent increase means a trillion dollars in wealth was created – more if you add in broader indexes.

Of course, it is never so simple... bonds are down on fears of more inflation. But the point stands. Although we may think our specific industry concerns are key, in most cases, it is the overall success of the country that will matter more to industry executives.

Of course, the short-term can be very difficult. In the UK, the very legitimate industry concerns over Brexit are, to a large extent, the outgrowth of years of doing business on the assumption of a free European Market. So British growers who invested in say, Spanish growing operations, are used to the idea of being able to move farm and processing equipment back and forth with ease – as the U.S. industry does between Salinas and Yuma.

Yet these things are always complicated. If barriers are put up, it is also possible British growers, now unable to compete with new-crop Spanish items, might actually be able to sell product, perhaps at very high prices, that right now have no market.

In the United States, Trump's announcement that the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal is dead will disappoint many in the industry who hoped for export opportunities to Japan and other Asian markets. And certainly, textbook economics teaches us trade is mutually beneficial and creates wealth.

In his campaign, Trump took a protectionist stance – that he saw these types of agreements, including NAFTA, as leading to a hemorrhaging of good jobs from America to Mexico and other countries. This argument, and the general idea that Trump would stand up for workers who have not obviously benefited from globalization, played no small part in Trump's ability to break through the "Great Blue Wall" and win states that had once been the heart of American manufacturing – Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, among them.

Besides the issue of employing manufacturing workers, the whole Trump phenomenon revolves around sovereignty. Trade agreements that have loopholes allowing foreign countries to upset decisions made by Congress and avoid the U.S. courts are, by definition,

problematic. Issues related to immigration, which touch both on competitive labor markets in the United States and border security, are equally concerning.

In an era when so much communication takes place in 140-character snippets, there is just not much room for subtlety. Many have condemned Trump as racist, etc., but it is also true that, economics and security concerns aside, in a democracy, immigrants or their children ultimately become citizens, and as citizens they become partners in voting on how the country should be run. It is not particularly surprising that many people would be hesitant to bring in "partners" who they feel would vote for a country different from the one they would vote for themselves.

How this will all shake out is still unclear, but there are many reasons for hope. The key is to recognize one can't extrapolate from the present situation to the future when things are changing.

Right now, for example, we have only limited ability to harvest with automated equipment. But if, in fact, labor availability is restricted or the price of labor goes up, then many things that are not even worth studying now suddenly become feasible, and we can expect robotic harvesting technology to blossom in our fields.

Charles Erwin Wilson was president of General Motors and was nominated to be Secretary of Defense in the Eisenhower administration. During his confirmation hearings, Senators recognizing his large holdings of General Motors stock asked if Wilson could make a decision that would be adverse to the interests of General Motors. He answered yes, but he also said he could not imagine such a situation "because for years, I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and *vice versa*."

There are many areas that President-elect Trump is interested in, such as reducing regulations and reducing taxes, that the industry will probably support. There are also areas, such as global trade and immigration, where the industry will prefer different policies. In the end though, one suspects that though Charles Wilson was attacked viciously for his comment, he may have been roughly right. If Americans becomes more prosperous, more safe and more free under a Trump administration, that will probably outweigh any parochial interests. That is, of course, a big if.

pb

Although we may think our specific industry concerns are key, in most cases, it is the overall success of the country that will matter more to industry executives.

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TRANSITION



RPE

RPE, Bancroft, WI, has named **Tim Huffcutt** marketing director. Huffcutt will oversee all marketing strategies for consumer, trade, local community and internal communication. Huffcutt will also collaborate with RPE's sales, customer service and

new business development departments to execute specific marketing activities. Huffcutt has worked in corporate public relations, communications and marketing roles for most of his career. Most recently, he worked in the healthcare industry with functional responsibilities from market research, planning and digital strategy to customer relationship management (CRM) and new business/acquisition activities.

TRANSITION

TANIMURA & ANTLE

Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA, has named **Jeff Jackson** senior vice president of sales and marketing. He will assist the company in leveraging core strengths while continuing to drive the company's commitment to quality, service and innovation. Jackson succeeds Mike Antle, who has been named an executive director of the board.



TRANSITIONS



Tom Langell

MANN PACKING

Mann Packaging, Salinas, CA, has named **Tom Langell**, director of IT; **Jennifer Lind**, sales operation manager; and **Dylan Eads**, sales analyst. Langell will be responsible for the overall planning, organizing and execution of all Mann's IT functions at the company's various locations. He joins the company from Monterey Mushrooms, Wastonville, CA. Lind will be the primary catalyst for estimates on volume and raw product needs, annual sales and revenue planning, as well as critical support for internal sales reporting. Prior to joining the company, Lind worked for Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA, where she worked as a senior manager in related areas of responsibility. And finally, Eads will be responsible for the collection, analysis and reporting of sales-related data. Eads will develop and track key performance indicators and standardize reporting and analysis.



Jennifer Lind



Dylan Eads



RAINIER FRUIT

Rainier Fruit, Selah, WA, has appointed **Cristy Warnock** brand manager. In her role, Warnock will be working with the business development team to monitor key marketing trends and advance go-to-market strategies for the full suite of Rainier Fruit brands and products. Warnock has worked in operations for both Pink Lady® America and Proprietary Variety Management (PVM), a company that commercializes new fruit varieties. In her role she was part of the commercialization process that included licensing strategies, brand and logo development, coordination of industry stakeholders, brand protection and early promotion.

TRANSITION

EXCELSIOR TECHNOLOGIES UNVEILS NEW FRESH PRODUCE PACKAGING

Excelsior Technologies, Flintshire, U.K., is launching a series of new fresh produce packaging solutions. The new products include Snack&Go, an environmentally friendly pouch design; PouchFresh, with a grab-and-go handle and re-close clip; CookFresh, which features SteamFast valve technology to cook in the pack; PeelFresh, a range of lidding products for retail trays; Lunch&Go for food-to-go counters with CookTECH technology; and Grab&Go, for portable snacking solutions.



ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT



MANN'S VEGE TRAYS GET SEASONAL LOOK

Mann Packaging, Salinas, CA, has unveiled new seasonal graphics for its 18-oz. and 40-oz. vegetable trays for the United States and Canada.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MARIE'S NEW REFRIGERATED DRESSINGS

Bria, CA-based Ventura Foods' Marie's Dressings — a line of refrigerated foodservice dressings made with premium ingredients — has added eight new flavors to its line of yogurt dressings: White Balsamic Shallot, Blueberry Pomegranate, Creamy Ranch, Super Blue Cheese, Chunky Blue Cheese, Creamy Caesar, Italian Vinaigrette and Honey Mustard. The dressings contain no artificial flavors, colors, preservatives, high fructose corn syrup or gluten.



ANNOUNCEMENT

PURPLE SWEET POTATOES GO MAINSTREAM

Los Alamitos, CA-based Frieda's Specialty Produce has reported increased sales of its Stokes Purple sweet potato. Aside from its unique bold color, the Stokes Purple Sweet Potato differs from other sweet potatoes and yams in its flavor and texture, offering a favorably dryer, denser and richer taste with well-balanced sweetness. The potato is grown in California and is non-GMO.



LITEHOUSE'S BACON DRESSING EXCEEDS \$1M IN SALES

Last year, employee-owned Litehouse Inc., Sandpoint, ID, expanded its refrigerated salad dressing line with three bacon-inspired dressings: Bacon Vinaigrette, Bacon Blue Cheese and Avocado Ranch with Bacon. In one year, sales of the company's Avocado Ranch with Bacon dressing have exceeded the \$1 million mark. According to IRI data, avocado flavor accounts for nearly 25 percent of the total refrigerated salad dressing category dollar growth (52 weeks ending Aug. 14, 2016), and strong sales of Avocado Ranch with Bacon are contributing to the overall category growth.



ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT



POTANDON ADDS ORGANIC POTATO SUPPLY POINT

Potandon Produce LLC, Idaho Falls, ID, has announced immediate availability of organic red and organic yellow potatoes from the Red River Valley. Potandon is the first company to market organic potatoes grown in North Dakota for the retail community. The red varieties are Norland and Red Ruby, and the yellow is Agata.

SEASONS EATINGS WITH AFM

Marketing firm Avocados From Mexico (AFM), Irving, TX, has kicked off its *Season's Eatings* program, scheduled to run through Dec. 31, 2016. Through the program, AFM is promoting unique appetizer recipes featuring avocados. All of the recipes highlight alternative ways to incorporate avocados into traditional holiday meals. The campaign kicked off in November with a "Buy One, Get One Free" consumer incentive offer through www.Coupons.com and Catalina (in-store via the back of register receipts). AFM is utilizing eye-catching merchandising and multi-channel media support, including in-store radio and social and digital outreach.

ANNOUNCEMENT



ANNOUNCEMENT

TASTEFUL SELECTIONS ANNOUNCES WINNERS

Bancroft, WI-based Tasteful Selections has announced the winners of its 2016 #RescuedMoments Sweepstakes. The four-month, consumer-centric campaign ran from July 1 to Sept. 30. The sweepstakes was an opportunity for Tasteful Selections to promote its bite-sized potatoes while inspiring consumers through useful cooking tips and videos to "rescue their moments and spend more quality time with their families by creating delicious time-saving recipes." During the campaign, select retail stores throughout the country featured Tasteful Selections displays, point-of-sale materials and brand ambassador interactions with shoppers. More than 14,000 consumers entered the sweepstakes. The grand prize winner, June Chapman, Las Vegas, won a \$4,000 kitchen makeover. Lee Barnes of Lincoln, IL, took second place and won a KitchenAid Mixer; Amanda Stover of Elkton, MD, took third place and won a Kitchen Aid Knife Set. The winners also won branded Tasteful Selections cookware sets.



ANNOUNCEMENT



GROW FUND, PRODUCE FOR KIDS FEED THOSE IN NEED

The GROW Fund, a non-profit program developed by San Diego-based Organics Unlimited, partnered with Produce for Kids to encourage families to take a pledge to pack healthier lunch items during the back-to-school season. For each pledge, GROW and other sponsor brands collectively donated \$1 to Feeding America to provide meals for families in need. Through its *Power Your Lunchbox* campaign, Produce for Kids collected 21,674 pledges, surpassing its goal of 20,000. Produce for Kids was able to donate enough funds to Feeding America to provide 238,414 meals. This is the third year Organics Unlimited has partnered with Produce for Kids. The *Power Your Lunchbox* campaign took place from Aug. 8 to Sept. 23, 2016. The campaign consisted of promotion through social media, parent and food bloggers, e-newsletters, media placements and a NatureFresh Greenhouse Tour visiting 36 grocery stores and nine schools to create awareness and encourage people to sign the pledge.

CORRECTION

In the October 2016 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, the article on page 143 titled, "Clever Year-Round Merchandising Can Put Apples In Baskets," referred incorrectly to New York Apple Sales utilizing aggressive promotions that shifted consumer purchases from one apple display to another. The paragraph referencing New York Apple Sales was inadvertently inserted by the writer. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* regrets the error.

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Produce As Wingman: Can Drive Deli Sales, Traffic

BY ANNE-MARIE ROERINK, PRINCIPAL, 210 ANALYTICS AND RICK STEIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF FRESH FOODS, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE

Compared with the mature produce category, deli trips, sales and differentiation have significant room for improvement; produce can play an important supporting role. Produce is a Top 3 driver of store choice and trips, and has high connectivity to many other areas in the store.

According to Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group, deli sales reached \$24 billion in mid-2016, with 58 percent of dollars generated by fresh prepared. Furthermore, the deli department is emerging as a driver of growth, with dollar gains of 4.2 percent overall, and 5.5 percent for fresh prepared. But just like produce, where retailers have to make daily assortment decisions and determine their positioning relative to organic, local, ethnic and other items, deli departments cannot be everything to everyone.

Yet, getting the deli right can mean significant payoffs, both for the department, total perimeter and the total store, as found by the Nielsen's best-in-class research. So what are some ways in which produce can help drive deli trips and growth? The Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) report, *The Power of Fresh-Prepared/Deli*, explains.

While market factors are promising, one significant hurdle for retailers to aggressively grow deli/fresh prepared is trip frequency, which has fallen for the total store, including the deli. As is, only about one in 10 store visits includes deli/fresh prepared. As the No. 2 driver of store choice — versus deli at number 15 — produce can help draw shoppers to the store. After that, the key will be growing deli trips and sales.

Current meal preparation trends show increasing reliance on the mixing and matching of scratch ingredients with semi- and fully-prepared items. Convenience-focused produce items, such as salad kits, microwaveable packaging and value-added produce can be cross merchandised or advertised with deli items to complete the meal solution for the shopper.

An important step in growing deli trips is through a strong reputation and image as a viable restaurant alternative. With some noted exceptions, reputation is precisely where many grocery stores struggle. As a result, even though 96 percent of shoppers purchase deli/fresh prepared once per year, few shoppers think of visiting the deli with regularity when deciding what to do instead of cooking dinner (12 percent). Duplicating the ways in which retailers build and maintain their strong reputation in produce may translate into the deli becoming a more top-of-mind alternative come dinnertime.

One of the consumer perceived drawbacks of fresh prepared deli food is that shoppers deem it less healthy and nutritious than home-cooked meals. With fresh produce's health halo, an increased focus on fresh fruit and vegetables in fresh prepared may help elevate its nutritional profile.

One noted benefit of deli/fresh prepared is that it introduces shoppers to new ingredients and items they haven't had or prepared before. This was long seen as a key benefit of meal kits that touted the use of local and unusual produce ingredients. Clearly, retailers too can leverage produce variety and innovation to pique shopper interest in new deli offerings.

Consumers mostly compare deli/fresh prepared to the fast-casual restaurant segment, both in terms of price and quality. This includes restaurants such as Panera Bread, Jimmy John's and Chipotle. The fast-casual segment has seen aggressive growth in sales and store counts with a focus on fresh, quality ingredients and enhanced ambience. Produce's quality and fresh image can provide an important boost to bring the deli a step above the fast-casual segment in shopper choice.

Within deli/fresh prepared, there are many different solution types, ranging from self-serve stations to made-to-order meal stations. Across the population, the meal solutions that draw the highest interest are fresh-prepared and pre-packaged meals and

meal kits. Produce is a key ingredient and may help successful positioning of these offerings.

Mega trends that are driving significant sales growth in other parts of the store are highly desired features for deli/fresh prepared as well, according to shoppers. More than one in five shoppers would like to see locally sourced/grown food and organic items. Programs built surrounding these trends in produce may help carry over interest to the deli and drive growth in these higher margin offerings.

While some cuisines have universal appeal, many of the more ethnic cuisines see much higher interest among Millennials. Cuisines with a fairly broad appeal include American, salads, Italian, Mexican and Chinese. Produce plays an important role in all, and the use of local or organic items may provide an interesting twist to a proven favorite.



Food Marketing Institute is a trade association that advocates on behalf of the food retail industry. FMI's U.S. members operate nearly 40,000 retail food stores and 25,000 pharmacies. Through programs in public affairs, food safety, research, education and industry relations, FMI offers resources and provides valuable benefits to more than 1,225 food retail and wholesale member companies in the United States and around the world.



Source: The Power of Fresh Prepared/Deli 2016 — Shopper research by the Food Marketing Institute. Commissioned by the FMI Fresh Foods Leadership Council and made possible by Nielsen, Hussman and Shelby Reports. Research conducted by 210 Analytics

Produce Is Key Ingredient To Fresh-Food Department Vibe

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

The problem with discussion of deli departments at retail is that there is less of a continuum of quality and assortment ranges than there is a bifurcation of departments. On one side of the bifurcation are the deli departments that focus on sliced meats and cheeses, typically have a service or self-service option for wet salads and, if they are ambitious, a rotisserie and/or chicken program — perhaps an olive bar, and maybe a sub sandwich program. This is the deli offering in the vast majority of supermarkets today.

On the other side of the bifurcation is a panoply of service options: wok stations, soup bars, pasta stations and pizza programs, massive salad bars, wing bars and much more — all with substantial seating areas.

Walk into a large Wegmans or Whole Foods Market, immerse yourself in their prepared foods sections, and one instantly realizes whatever these people are doing, they are not in the same business as a retailer with meat and cheese behind a glass case with a paper plate sign indicating that ham is on special this week.

I question the statistic that deli is only No. 15 in terms of driving consumer store choice. When the store offers an incredibly differentiated foodservice and deli offering, our assessment would be that it is No. 1, ahead of meat and produce; and when the retailer offers a basic sliced meat and cheese selection, it is probably near the bottom.

The statistic that only 12 percent of consumers think of delis when deciding what to do instead of cooking may just correspond to the percentage of delis that really do a great job with foodservice. We would really love to see if this statistic holds up in areas with, say, large Wegmans stores. We doubt it. So we would be inclined to say it is a mistake to think meat, produce or dairy can rescue deli. The deli needs to offer a unique array of cooked foods that make it a desirable place to buy dinner — or

By maintaining the look and feel of the produce department throughout the fresh-food departments, retailers can hope consumers buy into the vibe for all fresh foods.

even eat dinner at the store.

But produce helps the store in important ways beyond direct sales and profits. When Dick Spezzano — now president of Spezzano Consulting Services and then the vice president of produce and floral for the Vons Companies — was describing Vons' Pavilions concept back in the late 1980s, he explained the “12 types of tomatoes, 15 varieties of apples, 14 types of melons and the purest organic fruits and vegetables” were on display not just because Vons hoped to sell these items, but because the halo effect of this cornucopia would attract consumers to the store — even if they never bought any of these extra items.

Another thing Spezzano used to do was urge producers to find places in salad bars for their products. Back when Sizzler and its salad bars were a force to be reckoned with, I remember Spezzano telling a convention of pistachio growers that, if need be, they should give their pistachio nuts away to Sizzler to get the consumer trial that would come from having placement on the salad bar.

This makes us think that it is not so much that trial in the produce department will lead consumers to buy at the deli but *vice versa*. Consumers, who never thought of putting pomegranate arils on a salad, could buy a “health salad” in the deli, find they like the taste and start buying packages of arils in produce.

One well-recognized problem is

consumers do not eat departmentally — they eat meals. So, many a consumer who is buying fried chicken in the deli department might also buy a green salad, a vegetable side dish and a juice — if we didn't make them run back to produce to get these things.

Many prepared food offerings at even the best deli counters are out of sync with the organic and local showcase that goes on in produce. Many retailers promote these concepts and promise things such as, “organic, when possible,” but this turns out to be almost never in prepared foods.

The reason: cost. We could make fresh organic lasagna, but the cost would be such that retailers wouldn't buy it. So for those store executives who think organic and local is a marketing win, turning to fresh produce to carry this flag makes a lot of sense. They can have a sign that details loads of organic or local items in produce, and by maintaining the look and feel of the produce department throughout the fresh-food departments, the retailers can hope consumers buy into the vibe for all fresh foods.

This works best when stores have integrated fresh areas that include produce, foodservice and prepared food options, meat, seafood and bakery. These integrated areas, which Wegmans has really pioneered, serve to create the kind of offer that makes consumers think of a supermarket when they are not sure what is for dinner tonight.

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Instock Innovation On Food Waste: Albert Heijn Partners To Rescue Food



James F. Prevora

JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The issue of food waste is top of mind for many now. Indeed in many iterations of *The London Produce Show and Conference* and *The New York Produce Show and Conference*, scholars have addressed the issue in seminars and workshops such as these:

Solution To Food Waste? Italian Professor Proposes Getting Consumers And Retailers To Disregard Cosmetic Standards When Selecting Produce

Can Labeling Impact Food Waste? Is Zero Waste The Optimal Standard? Cornell's Brad Rickard To Present New Research At The London Produce Show And Conference

UNIVERSITY HEAVYWEIGHT PUTS SCIENCE BEHIND OPTIMIZED GLEANING SCHEDULES: Cornell's Miguel Gómez Talks About How The Produce Industry Can Put Itself On The Side Of The Angels By Reducing Food Waste While Helping The Hungry
What's in A Word? Sell By, Use By, Best By And Fresh By. Can A Word Alter Food Waste Significantly? Cornell's Brad Rickard Speaks Out

So in researching happenings in Holland before The Amsterdam Produce Show and Conference, we heard about a new approach supermarket giant Albert Heijn is supporting that just might make a difference. So we asked Pundit Investigator and Special Projects Editor Mira Slott to find out more:

Instock, an innovative food rescue project to combat food waste, operates through a partnership with Albert Heijn Supermarkets, where food waste is collected from its retail stores and incorporated into menus at Instock restaurants and take-away locations in Amsterdam, and more recently in the Hague, while an Instock food truck serves street food at festivals and events. Instock was founded by four former colleagues who worked together at Albert Heijn, and is supported by the leading retailer's board of directors.

Instock collects all its fruits, vegetables and bread designated as food waste from Albert Heijn Supermarkets in Amsterdam, and works with other vendors in the supply chain for its meats,

fish, drinks, and other sustainable resources. "We call ourselves a social corporate enterprise. We're a foundation with two goals, first to reduce food waste, and second to re-invest any profit back to Instock and sustainable projects," says Selma Seddick, an Instock co-founder, at the grand opening this summer of the first Instock restaurant in the Hague.

Pundit sister publication *PRODUCE BUSINESS* had a chance to connect with Jan Ernst de Groot, chief legal officer and member of the executive committee at Royal Ahold Delhaize, during the Instock launch in the Hague. "We are the linchpin to educate our customers and to help address the serious problem of food waste," he says. "One billion people around the world go hungry. This is not only wasteful but unethical," he says. "Our retail brands serve millions of customers in the United States and in Europe, and we have a platform to make a difference," he explains, adding, "Superfluous food in the stores can be rejected because it looks ugly. Instock was created by our own associates to rescue this food, and to look at the problem with different eyes, and now we support them," he says.

"An electric food rescue truck goes around Amsterdam to the different stores and collects the rejected produce because of shelf life or appearance, but it is still perfectly edible," says Seddick. "Working for Albert Heijn, we saw a lot of waste and wanted to take action," she continues, describing the problem she and her associates witnessed as the impetus to start Instock. "We are very lucky to work with Albert Heijn."

Instock collaborates closely with Albert Heijn to resolve logistical issues. "A big challenge is to train employees in Albert Heijn on how to select and sort the items," explains Esther Slegwagem, day manager at the Instock restaurant in Amsterdam, during a separate visit.

The restaurant menus change constantly, as chefs are challenged to spontaneously create dishes based on what food waste is rescued each day," she explains, noting patrons can also purchase products at the restaurant to prepare at home, such

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as zucchini, cucumber, tomato soups, and a mushroom farm kit.

"We make our own beer from surplus potatoes, and we brew it in local breweries. The granola is made from the grain at the end of the beer process," says Seddick. Chefs have to be resourceful and highly flexible. "In a regular restaurant, chefs have a set menu and can prepare in advance. Here, the chefs don't know what they're getting each day, so they combine elements that work really well together and develop new flavors," she says.

Instock's food rescue concept, while in its infancy, has great potential, according to Jan Ernst de Groot of Royal Ahold Delhaize. "Instock serves as an eye-opener for building innovative strategies to reduce global food waste."

This is not the first time we heard of supermarkets culling their own shelves and back rooms for produce to donate.



Instock collaborates with Albert Heijn to resolve logistical issues associated with food waste.

A piece that was done on Kroger and another on Price Chopper, in Pundit sister publication, PRODUCE BUSINESS, for example detailed efforts to donate produce in this manner.

In this case, however, Instock is a specialized chain of food trucks and restaurants built to use this product.

It is all very interesting, but we will see how the economics work out.

There is a risk on the supermarket side that employees, anxious to do good, may give away produce that could have been sold.

Another issue is many supermarkets are now using this exact selection of produce in their in-store prepared foods operation. If the avocado is getting soft, it can be donated, or a store can make guacamole. As stores try to capitalize on what is really a kind of "free" source of ingredients, it is not clear that the amount of produce available for such donations won't decline.

And there is the cost of collecting and repurposing these items. The produce supply chain is very efficient. One big California-based shipper happens to have an affiliated operation in the Midwestern United States. Many East Coast buyers want the product, thinking it is more local than the California product. Yet, very often the cheapest way to distribute that product is to have a full trailer of the Midwest product brought out to California where pallets of the product can be added to full loads going out to the Eastern retailers!. So having to send vans and trucks to pick up product from every store may not be efficient.

Will consumers want to support restaurants and food trucks that are promoted as using this product? Maybe — many people may feel good about avoiding food waste. But others may think it is less sanitary or just may want a more predictable menu.

This is a unique effort to do something good for the world. We wish them every good fortune in this endeavor and salute Albert Heijn for trying to make it work.

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Family Starts All-Organic Market

More than just a store, 4th Generation educates consumers and promotes organics and a healthy lifestyle.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD



PHOTOS COURTESY OF 4TH GENERATION ORGANIC MARKET & CAFÉ

Having an organic section in the produce department is pretty standard these days. Grocery store shoppers are increasingly on the lookout for organic foods; in fact, according to the Organic Trade Association's *Produce Deep Dive* report from October 2016, consumer spending on organic produce has increased 123 percent in the past five years.

Having a produce section that's entirely organic is another story entirely. But it's the path that leaders at 4th Generation Organic Market & Café in Boca Raton, FL, have chosen to travel. Everything in the store — from produce and dry goods to deli items and catered foods — has the organic designation.

It's an unusual business strategy, but it seems to be working. The business recently opened a second, larger location to better serve its loyal customer base. Produce sales in both stores continue to climb, demonstrating that its strategy for selling fruits and vegetables is working.

"4th Gen," as they sometimes refer to themselves, is owned and operated by Ben Litowich & Son. The business's experience with the produce industry dates back to 1910. Ben Litowich was just 16 years old when he started a produce company in Michigan. Over time his import and distribution business expanded and opened warehouses throughout the United States.

In the 1960s, Bud Litowich, who took over the company after his father's death, opened a seasonal office in Florida. Two years later, he moved his family there and made the Sunshine State the company's permanent headquarters.

Ben Litowich & Son had no retail presence until 2008, when Ashley Litowich, a fourth-generation member of the family, suggested opening a juice bar. That idea grew into a store that would serve multiple needs for health-conscious consumers in southeast Florida. In 2009, 4th Generation Organic Market & Café set up shop in east Boca Raton.

"We're not just another fresh market,"

says Richard Lewis, who has been the store's general manager since it opened. "We're really out there every day trying to educate consumers and promote organics and a healthy lifestyle."

4th Gen offers groceries, produce, meat and seafood, supplements and other wellness products, prepared foods, and a catering service. The deli serves up sandwiches, veggie burgers, salads, pâtés and raw nut-based cheeses. A hot case has dishes such as lasagna, jambalaya and meatballs. The dessert bar is famous for its brownies, raw vegan ice cream and cashew-based cheesecakes. A juice and smoothie bar serves fresh-made beverages.

The produce department accounts for 16 to 20 percent of the store's total sales. The number is increasing, says Lewis, and he intends to keep it that way. "If that department starts to shrink, I'm in trouble," he says.

Lewis and the store's produce manager work together on purchasing. "We work with a lot of local organic farmers, as well as several



farms in California,” he says. “In South Florida there’s no consistency in organic produce, so we have to rely on California growers to get organic produce year-round. Unfortunately, that’s the nature of the business we’re in. If we can’t get the product organically, we just can’t get it.”

The team sources specialty items as they’re available. A local farmer is growing jackfruit, and 4th Gen put several of his fruit in the store. The farmer visited to chat with customers about the best ways to use it, and the store gave out samples and did demos. The staff also ran a contest and encouraged customers to guess the weight of a single jackfruit (which was 7.5 pounds).

Besides standard and specialty items, the produce department has machines for making fresh nut butters, and a spiralizer for creating noodles from beets, squash, carrots and other vegetables. In addition, the store focuses on ready-to-cook items like soup mixes and kabobs.

Produce items are displayed primarily on air-flow racks, Euro and other types of tables, and refrigerator tables that can be turned on or off depending on what’s sitting on them. 4th Gen’s staff sometimes uses shippers or produce boxes from suppliers to build displays.

“We’re very creative with merchandising,” says Lewis, noting that the freedom to use his imagination is one of his favorite things about the job. “We try to work with the seasons.” In the fall, the team created attractive displays with pumpkins and hay bales to advertise seasonal items.

The wide variety of departments in the store also gives Lewis plenty of opportunities for cross merchandising. He often puts fresh berries near the smoothie bar to remind shoppers they can blend up drinks at home,

“People always think organic is expensive, but we try to be very price conservative.”

– Richard Lewis, 4th Generation Organic Market & Café

or sets bananas in the cereal aisle.

4th Gen is Boca Raton’s only all-organic gourmet food store. Besides feeding consumers’ interest in organic, the store caters to a variety of trending values and dietary choices. “We can basically call ourselves a GMO-free store,” says Lewis.

The catering and deli businesses cater to vegetarians, vegans and people who follow the raw diet. There are ample gluten-free items throughout the store. The store also places a strong emphasis on healthy food and cooking to draw in consumers interested in living healthier lifestyles. To do this, it hosts regular sampling events, educational seminars, and cooking classes and demonstrations. Customers can try samples of new foods (like hummus with kale) nearly every day. Speakers address topics such as using organic food and acupuncture to fight inflammation in the body, and how diet can be a factor in warding off chronic conditions.

4th Gen’s team of chefs does regular cooking demonstrations, often focused on vegan and/or raw cooking. Lewis says the store is in the process of updating its website, and one of the things they’re planning to add is more recipes. An improved social media presence will also allow 4th Gen to distribute recipes and cooking tips to shoppers.

Although everything in the store is organic, Lewis says they still clearly label items with a combination of professionally printed and handmade signs to remind customers that what they’re buying is free of pesticides, GMOs and other things they may be trying to avoid.

One thing that is very important to 4th Gen is keeping prices low. “People always think organic is expensive, but we try to be very price-conservative,” says Lewis.

Food safety and customer service are also top priorities. Given that Ben Litowich & Son has been in the food business for more than 100 years, it has long-standing quality control procedures that follow industry best practices.

Lewis brings more than 30 years in the natural food industry to the company, and he seeks out staff members who have worked in the industry for a long time. “They come from some very well-established companies, so they’re very experienced,” says Lewis. “They are very well-versed in food safety. They’re also educated about the products they sell, which means they can do a great job of answering questions and provide a high level of customer service.”

Giving back to the community is also part of 4th Gen’s mission. The company regularly donates oranges, bananas and other healthy items to charity walks and runs. An animal rescue organization recently hosted an adoption event at one of the stores.

All of this is creating a winning formula. In 2015, 4th Generation Market opened a 12,000-square-foot outlet in the west part of Boca Raton. With more space, Lewis and his staff can carry a wider selection of foods, offer more chances to educate and interact with consumers, and enjoy more opportunities to get creative with merchandising. **pb**

International Sourcing:

A Closer Exam Of FSMA Offers Prescription For U.S. Imports

Impending components of the *Food Safety Modernization Act* (FSMA) could affect the landscape of U.S. imports, as importers and exporters are now held liable for the food they market.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS



PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE COURTESY OF DON LIMON

In 2011, the U.S. government enacted the most comprehensive food safety legislation in over half a century, the *Food Safety Modernization Act* (FSMA). The new regulations cover a wide berth of requirements and for the first time hold U.S. importers responsible and liable. “This is the first time since 1938 that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated the United States’ food safety regulations,” says Peter A. Hill, operations manager Americas for Zespri in Newport Beach, CA.

These unprecedented regulations place new responsibilities on entities trading internationally for the U.S. market, in some cases redefining roles. “These new regula-

tions are revolutionary, and if implemented and enforced as written, will have a major impact on the safety of produce,” says Domenic Veneziano, former and recently retired FDA director of the division of import operations (DIO) and consultant to Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg in Miami. “It represents an immense paradigm shift. Not only will importers of these products play a major role in the prevention of outbreaks by ensuring suppliers are in compliance with the new produce rule, but it will impact the entire supply chain.”

FSMA represents massive change greatly impacting U.S. fresh produce imports, agrees Valerie Hannig, food safety and government relations administrator for Oppenheimer in



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Newark, DE. "It shifts the focus from reacting to food safety events, to prevention across all phases of growing, harvesting, packing, shipping and receiving," she says. "FSMA also holds corporate executives criminally liable for failure to comply with FSMA regulations and requirements."

Though some may be opposed to these new rules, Robert Colescott, president and chief executive of Southern Specialties Inc. in Pompano Beach, FL, believes it to be a positive step due to the shift from reaction to prevention. "All parties involved throughout the supply chain —from seed to shelf — have a responsibility and role in controlling contamination hazards and in-turn, being required to support those efforts with written documentation," he says. "In other words, say what you do, do what you say, and then validate what you do and say."

A QUICK OVERVIEW

While the new regulations are a Pandora's box of requirements, exceptions and compliance dates, the general focus for imports revolves around a few key provisions. "For the first time, importers are required to verify their foreign suppliers have adequate preventive controls in place to ensure safety," says Megan Arnold, director of food safety for Robinson Fresh in Solvang, CA. "Now importers are fully liable for the products they import into the United States and have a bigger stake in the game."

According to Leanne Skelton, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) liaison to the FDA on FSMA with USDA in Washington, D.C., there are three principal provisions of the law pertaining to produce imports. "The importers must meet the Foreign Supplier Verification Rule and within that rule, their suppliers must meet either the Produce Safety Rule or the Preventive Control Rules, depending on the makeup of the operation," she explains.

The regulations require substantial record keeping and verification. "Companies will be responsible for maintaining a number of food safety plans as part of their Quality System File/Food Safety Documentation," explains Shelly Garg, attorney, FDA practice group at Sandler, Travis & Rosenberg. "This includes the Risk-Based Preventive Controls Plan, Sanitary Transport Plan, Recall Plan, Traceability Plan and Product File. These documents are being required not only by FDA, but also by large retailers."

The law threatens major consequence for non-compliance. "FDA could suspend a food

THE NEW RULES OF THE GAME FOR IMPORTERS

The Foreign Supplier Verification Rule requires importers perform certain risk-based activities to verify food imported into the United States has been produced in a manner that meets applicable U.S. safety standards. Under this new rule importers must:

- Determine if they're covered under the Rule
- If covered, then develop a Foreign Supplier Verification Plan (FSVP) for whatever foods they import
- Perform Hazard Analysis
- Evaluate risks associated with the foods they're importing and the supplier they're using
- Conduct supplier verification activities based on written procedures they have developed. Use only suppliers they have approved.
- Take corrective action if necessary
- Maintain records (written plan, supplier verification, reviews, etc.)

Source: FDA

facility registration, which in effect prohibits a company from doing business in the United States," says Garg. "Failure to comply with FSMA rules is also prohibited under the *Food Drug & Cosmetic Act* (FDCA), punishable by fines and other remedies."

Frank A. Ramos, chief executive at The Perishable Specialist Inc. in Miami cautions importers failing to comply with FSMA requirements will face suspension of food facility registrations. "If your food facility registration is revoked, you cannot import, since all importations require Prior Notice of which the registration number is a key component," he explains. "Failure to file a Prior Notice results in confiscation by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) of the imported product along with monetary penalty. Importers might also be placed on FDA import alerts and/or suffer product recall."

PRODUCE SAFETY AND PREVENTIVE CONTROL RULES

The first components of the regulations, the Produce Safety Rule and the Preventive Controls Rule, fall on the shoulders of the exporter. "The Produce Safety Rule formalizes the requirement that all farming operations have at least one person trained on and knowledgeable of food safety," says Arnold. "Additionally, all growing and packing operations must be in compliance with the food safety practices of this rule, which emphasizes employee training, water microbiological analysis and the safety of food contact surfaces utilized at a farm."

For packaged and processed food, Arnold explains the Preventive Controls Rule requires at least one person from the operation be a "qualified individual" through training on the rule, which details the food safety

process steps within the facility. "Many produce and food importers already have robust supplier approval processes in place, but it's anticipated others will need to more formally document their supplier-approval processes and the food safety aspects of their import supply chains," she says.

Veneziano emphasizes exporters must understand their responsibility. "If they are responsible for Preventive Controls or Produce Safety and are not in compliance, it could impact all shipments with their customers," he says. "They also need to know who is handling their shipments (i.e., importers and brokers) since they impact whether shipments are admitted into the United States or delayed or refused at the border."

In the past, Colescott of Southern Specialties contrasts, retailers and food-service operators depended on suppliers to provide food safety measures based on their word. "Now, all growers must have verifiable certifications," he says. "This includes field and facility audits supported by proper recordkeeping and risk analysis conducted to identify potential hazards with the assurance of critical control steps being followed."

Each rule has different compliance dates, and within each rule, the compliance dates are staggered based on business size. "Exporters must comply with whatever regulations apply to their operations," says Jennifer McEntire, Ph.D., vice president for food safety and technology at the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, D.C. "For example, a large fresh-cut processor exporting to the United States would have needed to be in compliance with the Preventive Controls Rule by Sept. 19, 2016. A small grower would need to comply with the Produce Safety Rule by January 2019.



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If the exporters aren't the ones actually growing or processing produce, they don't have a regulatory requirement, but their supplier — the grower or processor — still does if that food is destined for the United States."

Though FSMA may present a new framework, globally savvy exporters report confidence in already meeting many expected requirements. "Most, if not all, global growers have third-party audits due to exporting to Europe," says Mayda Sotomayor, chief executive of Seald Sweet in Vero Beach, FL. "Meeting FSMA needs may be less difficult for global growers because they are prepared and have many of these accreditations already."

Overseas suppliers for I Love Produce, based in West Grove, PA, already comply with some aspects of the new law. "All our overseas partners have been registered with the FDA as food facilities for the past two years and are re-registering now as part of the biennial process," says Jim Provost, president. "FDA offices and staff around the world have been making surprise visits to food facilities at our partners in China and Peru over the past two years."

Likewise, growers for Don Limón — a

grower, shipper and importer to the United States from Guatemala — are third-party certified through Global Gap, Primus Labs or GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative). "For us, the new FSMA regulations are not groundbreaking," says Diego Morales, vice president in Guatemala City. "The new regulations may clear the market a bit since there is now a bigger risk for importers. It is further incentive to take certifications seriously."

FOREIGN SUPPLIER VERIFICATION

Perhaps the biggest shift of the new regulations comes in the Foreign Supplier Verification Program Rule. "It requires whoever imports product in the United States now be responsible for ensuring food produced outside the United States is produced to the same standards as food in the United States," says Jim Gorny, vice president of food safety and technology for Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE.

Under FSMA, importers are required to develop, maintain and follow a Foreign Supplier Verification Program (FSVP) to ensure imported food is in compliance with either the Produce Safety Rule or the

Preventive Controls Rule. "Under the FSVP, importers must verify the food safety of their supply chain," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ. "The importer can be legally liable for any food-borne illnesses resulting from lapses in food safety protocol."

Oppenheimer's Hannig clarifies importers or consignees must perform a hazard analysis on risks per type of produce per supplier and cut off suppliers if they believe produce is at risk of contamination or other issues. "They must also ensure third-party audits are completed prior to shipments, analyze for potential risk, and follow up on corrective actions," she says.

Additionally, Hannig notes importers must monitor potential food adulteration, such as pesticides exceeding MRLs (minimum residue levels) or No Tolerance. "They must ensure preventive controls such as pesticide analysis and environmental microbiological testing are implemented by suppliers, ensure a written recall plan is implemented and tested, and ensure all growers understand and implement FSMA regulations, including the Produce Rule, Preventive Controls, Foreign

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Supplier Verification Program, Transportation Rule and Food Defense," she says.

Gorny breaks the importer's role into several key areas. "Importers must first complete a Hazard Analysis evaluating food risk and the supplier's performance. Secondly, verify what the supplier and/or exporter is doing. Thirdly, be ready to take corrective actions if something goes wrong. And lastly, keep records on all this."

Recordkeeping is a crucial aspect of the regulation and United's McEntire warns the extent of records could be enormous when multiple suppliers or commodities are involved. "FDA doesn't specify the format or prescribe a particular system, but if an importer sources many products from many suppliers, it could be challenging to keep track of," she states. "Importers should also consider if their export partner is considered the 'supplier.' A supplier is defined as the one actually growing or processing the food. An exporter may be sourcing from several 'suppliers' and thus the importer needs to

know, approve and verify all of them."

Ramos of The Perishable Specialist emphasizes an FSVP must be established for each commodity from each supplier. "It should not be category-based, but supplier level," he says. "If you have three suppliers for the same commodity, three separate verification programs should be in place.

THIRD-PARTY AUDITS

Technically, the regulations hold no specific provision requiring all produce items

be accredited by a third-party. "Importers need to assess the risk of the imports and suppliers, and determine appropriate verification activities," says McEntire. "If the produce is associated with a hazard causing a serious adverse health consequence or death (for example, *salmonella* or *listeria monocytogenes*), then FDA expects the importer to require an annual on-site audit of the grower or processor. This can be done by any 'qualified auditor,' including the importer or a third-party. The auditor doesn't need to be

KEY NEW COMPONENTS

The following are among FDA's key new import authorities and mandates.

Importer Accountability: For the first time, importers have an explicit responsibility to verify that their foreign suppliers have adequate preventive controls in place to ensure that the food they produce is safe.

Third-Party Certification: The FSMA establishes a program through which qualified third parties can certify that foreign food facilities comply with U.S. food safety standards. This certification may be used to facilitate the entry of imports.

Certification for High-Risk Foods: FDA has the authority to require that high-risk imported foods be accompanied by a credible third-party certification or other assurance of compliance as a condition of entry into the United States.

Voluntary Qualified Importer Program: FDA must establish a voluntary program for importers that provides for expedited review and entry of foods from participating importers. Eligibility is limited to, among other things, importers offering food from certified facilities.

Authority to Deny Entry: FDA can refuse entry into the United States of food from a foreign facility if the FDA is denied access by the facility or the country in which the facility is located.

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accredited, but must meet the FDA definition of a qualified auditor."

Robinson Fresh's Arnold further clarifies third-party audits are one way of verifying foreign suppliers, but references a provision in the rules allowing for second-party audits. "These are audits conducted by trained, knowledgeable representatives of the importer or a consultant acting on the importer's behalf," she says. "The intent of the audits is to verify the foreign supplier is in compliance with the Produce Safety or Preventive Controls requirements. Various food safety documents can be used such as water testing results, product testing, environmental and food contact testing results, and other relevant food safety records."

While all farms may not require a third-party audit, Skelton emphasizes the importer must conduct some type of supplier verification and highlights a few other alternatives. "You can also sample and test, or you can review a supplier's food safety records," she explains. "If you're importing from a country like New Zealand, where the FDA has a comparability determination between the two countries, you can use that information."

"If managed properly, importers can turn this situation into an opportunity by creating transparency between the farm and customer, both in retail and foodservice."

—Robert Colescott, Southern Specialties Inc.

THE IMPORTER ROLE

U.S. importers and buyers may be surprised to learn FSMA redefines who is the "importer" under the new regulation, moving responsibility from the "importer-of-record" to whatever entity actually owns the product when it crosses the border. "For the purposes of FDA and this regulation, the importer is defined as the owner of the product when it crosses the border," explains PMA's Gorny. "Up until now, a number of different entities or people may act as 'importer-of-record.' Under this new definition, large entities buying direct may now be liable, regardless of whether they are the actual import-

er-of-record. If they're buying FOB directly and bringing it on a truck, then they own it when it crosses the border and they'll be responsible."

Southern Specialties' Colescott believes this redefinition means an increasing opportunity for traditional importers. "Importers will now act as gatekeepers for fresh produce sourced from foreign sources and be expected to have personnel properly trained and experienced in ensuring foreign supplier standards," he says. "This includes trained, certified staff inspecting farms and packing houses, approving documentation, and assuring mock recalls produce accurate

CHINA'S BERRY EXPANSION

Will increased market access in China for berries affect U.S. availability? BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Continued increasing exports of Mexican and Peruvian blackberries and raspberries to China paint an increasingly competitive berry market in the future. "Once China's economy begins to gain some steam again and their middle class begins to grow, we will feel the impact on all items," says Robert Colescott, president and chief executive of Southern Specialties Inc. in Pompano Beach, FL. "A combination of rapid urbanization, a growing middle class, increasing incomes and changing dietary patterns, has led to greater food demand in China."

Whenever a new market opens, according to Ray Griffin, director of global sourcing for Robinson Fresh in Eden Prairie, MN, it will increase demand from that supply base. "Due to proximity, the U.S. market will feel the impact moreso with Mexican supply than Peruvian," he adds. "With 1.4 billion consumers in China, Mexican berry growers will certainly have options on where to export their product."

However, short-term and long-term effects

may differ. "In the short term, the acceptance of Mexican and Peruvian berries by China could tighten the market over the next couple of years," says Craig Carlson, president and chief executive of Carlson Produce Consulting LLC in Chicago. "In the long term, I would expect the market to expand to meet demand."

Industry experts expect increased production and supply management to fill U.S. demand without significant market interruption. "Most commercial berries in Mexico are grown for export," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ. "With the extreme growth in the category, there should be ample supply to export to other markets."

The Oppenheimer Group views the increased access as good news. "An increase in global berry consumption helps everybody and is needed to absorb the increases in hectares planted in Mexico and Peru," says Matthew Giddings, berry category manager in Tampa, FL. "It should be similar to what we saw out of China on Chilean cherries. The competition for fruit should create

a more stable market and better returns for the grower, and the competition for business should create a better quality and eating experience."

The announcement is also viewed as terrific for Naturipe Farms LLC's Mexican and Peruvian growers. "It will give them greater reach in terms of the world markets," says Clay Wittmeyer, director of international sales, working out of Salinas, CA. "The United States is a black hole of demand for fresh berries and continues to dominate the consumption stats of both domestic berry production and imported fruit. The China volume, while important, is likely not going to have much affect at least for a few years in terms of diverting volumes away from the U.S. marketplace."

Wittmeyer reports the berry category in the United States, as a whole, is leading retail sales in dollar volume (more than \$5 billion) over other fruit categories. "This shows the U.S. consumer will continue to demand a 12-month supply," he adds. "Having farms in Chile, Peru, Argentina and Mexico will continue to be necessary to satisfy that demand."

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information. If managed properly, importers can turn this situation into an opportunity by creating transparency between the farm and customer, both in retail and foodservice."

Importers may be accustomed to dealing with risk, but Don Limón's Morales points out now the liability has increased. "This, of course, is a higher risk," he says. "There will be a higher level of responsibility throughout the supply chain management."

Ramos suggests importers without a quality control program in place hire a third party to assist in establishing quality control and correct deficiencies within the importing entity. "Even if you are exempt from this rule, an importer following good practices will have these verifications and certifications in place," he adds.

COMPLIANCE DATES

Understanding what needs to be done and when is more complex due to FDA's staggering of compliance dates. "Not everyone has to comply at once," says AMS's Skelton. "It's a three-factor piece: the size of the importer, the food being imported and the size of the operation growing or processing the food. Generally, the largest operations must comply first."

For an importer bringing in different types of products from different-sized exporters, United's McEntire points out it may be tricky to figure out their compliance date. "They probably have several," she says. "The earliest an importer needs to comply with FSVP is May 30, 2017. However, since it wouldn't be fair for an importer to verify suppliers until the suppliers comply, importer compliance dates are six months after their suppliers need to comply. This means an importer could have several different compliance dates, driven by the different products and business sizes."

Regardless, former FDA director Veneziano encourages the industry to start working on plans and ensuring compliance as soon as possible. "The Preventive Controls Rules became effective in September and the Foreign Supplier Verification Program takes effect in May," he says. "FDA will begin inspecting facilities and will take appropriate action."

Jennifer Janzen, key account manager for Summit Produce Inc. in Fresno, CA, points out the time an importer needs to implement necessary changes may depend on how many preventive controls they already have in place. "We are in the process of analyzing the standards and implementing changes,"

she says. "Some of our staff have already successfully completed courses in the Food Safety Preventive Controls, and we continue to add more staff as necessary."

However, I Love Produce's Provost expresses concern about obtaining FSMA details and having ample time to comply prior to deadlines, especially relating to recognition of already attained certifications such as GFSI. "The announced regulations provide a skeleton for the final regulations," he says. "But some parts may not

be announced until two years after the initial regulations were signed."

WHAT WILL IT COST?

In addition to the onus of understanding the complex regulations, companies express concern over how much additional cost they add to doing business. In the rule itself, FDA estimates about \$430 million per year for firms to implement it, according to PMA's Gorny. "However, if you divide this by the value of overall food imports, it's a miniscule

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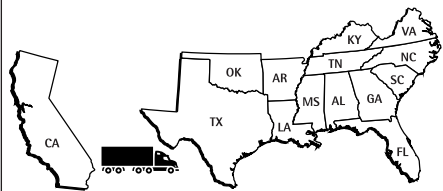
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**“Reputable importers should already
be verifying the food safety practices
of their supply chain partners.”**

— Jennifer McEntire, United Fresh Produce Association

percentage,” he says.

Industry experts note some aspects of implementation are already in place, thus mitigating costs somewhat. “Reputable importers should already be verifying the food safety practices of their supply chain partners,” states United’s McEntire. “They may need to become more diligent around the documentation of these practices; it shouldn’t markedly shift what’s being done today as much as the way it’s substantiated. When it comes to growing, harvesting, packing and processing operations, again, food safety practices should already be in place.”

However, McEntire recognizes some nuances to the new rules could be challenging. “Especially some of the water testing requirements in the Produce Safety Rule and the documented justification and associated recordkeeping in the Preventive Controls Rule,” she says.

Sotomayor of Seald Sweet predicts added costs in the collection and maintenance of documents, as well as the handling of compliancy. Recently, Seald Sweet expanded its compliance system to better manage FSMA required documentation. “This ensures all our growers and partners are compliant with FSMA regulations and further supports our food safety protocol systems and commitment to only working with safe, reliable growing sources,” she notes.

According to Oppenheimer’s Hannig, companies could incur several new costs, including training an employee as a Preventive Controls Qualified Individual and hiring additional staff for the additional administration workload. “There may also be costs involved in obtaining legal advice and travel costs if staff need to verify compliance onsite at farm, storage and pack facilities,” she adds.

GETTING HELP

The seemingly complex nature of the regulations begs the question if companies need to hire a food safety expert. “It really

depends on the operation,” says AMS’s Skelton. “If a company operates something streamlined and simple, maybe not. The best way to answer this question is to talk to trade associations, who have a better idea of what is involved.”

A handful of industry associations and alliances already portend training. “United Fresh plans to offer special training and outreach encompassing what types of records need to be kept, how importers need to evaluate risk and the options available to verify suppliers,” says McEntire. “There are probably many importers unaware FSVP exists and applies to them.”

FDA has committed to issuing guidance to interpret the regulations. “It seems reasonable to assume the components of the plans will be somewhere identified in this guidance,” says Skelton. “The regulation tells you what and the guidance tells you how.”

FDA has also established training alliances for farmers and processors, and is working on training for the importer community. “Importer training is likely to be modules linked to the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance curriculum,” says AMS’s Skelton. “On the fresh produce side, FDA and USDA are jointly funding the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA), a collaborative project between Cornell University, USDA and FDA.”

AMS reports being in the final stages of a joint GAPs alignment project with FDA colleagues allowing USDA AMS GAPs audits to align with the FDA Produce Safety Rule requirement minimums. “So in effect, farmers meeting the USDA AMS GAPs program requirements could conclude they are in compliance with the FDA Produce Safety Rule,” explains Skelton. “We should be offering the revised version next year prior to FDA’s compliance dates.

Skelton recommends several online resources, including FDA’s Imports Page and Fact Sheets, and recommends AMS webinars informing stakeholders and the public on various topics. “There are also Technical Assistance Networks (TANS) established by



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FDA where individuals can submit questions," she adds.

EFFECTS IN THE MARKETPLACE

Perhaps the biggest question hovering over the regulations is what effect they may have on the marketplace both in terms of suppliers and buyers. "FSMA will weed out some exporters who are not careful enough or maybe don't have the resources to implement certain steps," says Don Limón's Morales.

Importers speculate the new regulations

may level the playing field by impeding less than desirable exporters. "Companies investing heavily and wisely in food safety measures will no longer have to compete in price against growers without similar business practices," states Southern Specialties' Colescott.

Fresh Produce's Jungmeyer agrees, since most commercial growers have adequate food safety protocols, FSMA should keep out produce from smaller farms without a demonstrated history of HACCP. "The Produce

Safety Rule, coupled with the FSVP, will limit the fly-by-night imports that have been the cause of some foodborne illness in the past," he says.

Traders such as Summit Produce's Janzen suggest the new standards may affect the number of suppliers an importer deals with. "Since the importers take responsibility for verifying their imports meet U.S. safety standards, the possibility remains for the importers to reduce risk by limiting their exporters," she explains.

The new regulations may even cause some buyers to re-examine if they want to import or not. "Due to the requirements, some companies may see being an importer as a disincentive," says United's McEntire.

Southern's Colescott predicts legal departments of major retailers importing product direct from foreign suppliers may be re-evaluating their business practices based on the risk/reward associated with direct sourcing. "I would think they will soon realize the grower community is a very fragmented industry and requires numerous experienced staff to properly manage efforts of mitigating their risks," he says. "After they fully evaluate risk factors and analyze their business model, supply chains and service providers, they may reassess their business practices and resort back to what they know and do best, fresh produce retailing."

Oppenheimer's Hannig poses the question of whether or not retailers really want to take on increased responsibility and potential criminal liability of acting as the consignee or importer. "Or will they transfer this burden to other service provider companies?" she asks. "A related question for retailers, wholesale and foodservice is how they handle buying 'shorts' on the spot market. Do they want to shoulder the liability and due diligence required to vet out every grower they buy from? Or will they offload this responsibility to a company that can procure fresh produce on their behalf?"

Importers should also bear in mind, cautions McEntire, that their customers may be required to know the "supplier" and also conduct verification. "This will require an unprecedented level of transparency in the supply chain that could stress some business relationships," she says. "The FSVP requirements and supply chain program requirements in the Preventive Controls Rule will substantially change the way business is conducted and maybe even the way supply chains work over the course of the next five to 10 years."

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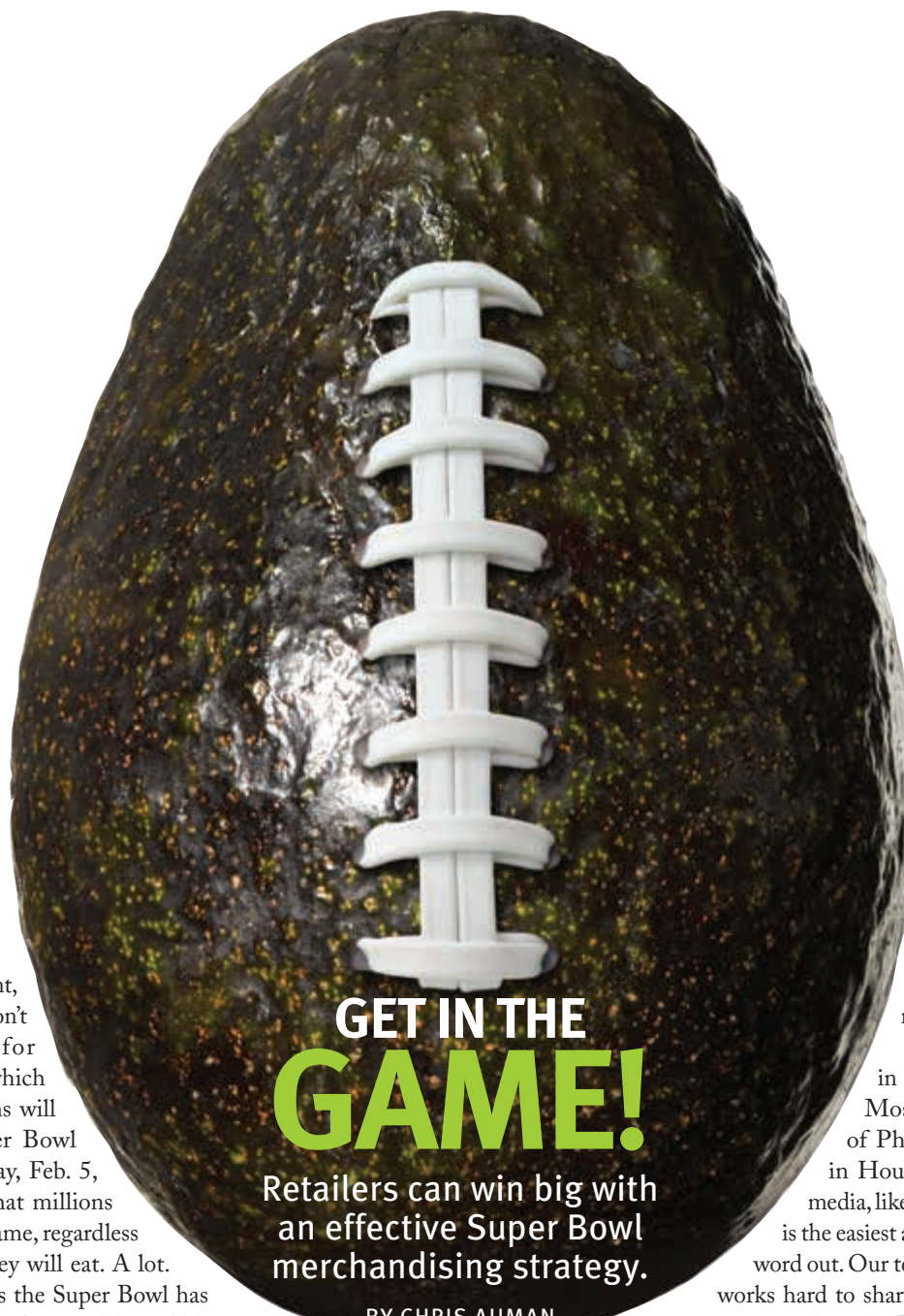
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At this point, we still don't know for certain which two teams will make it to the Super Bowl in Houston on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2017. We do know that millions will be watching the game, regardless of who's in it. And they will eat. A lot. Over the past 50 years the Super Bowl has become an American tradition celebrated like most holidays — with food. So much food in fact, that the average American Super Bowl watcher will consume at least 2,400 calories during the game, according to the Calorie Control Council.

Consumers plan for the Super Bowl like any other holiday meal. Produce managers make sure fruits, nuts and vegetables are part of their game-day planning by highlighting produce through cross merchandising and POS materials. Social media also plays a role for both marketers and retailers.

PRE-GAME PLAN

"The great thing about social media is, if you are prepared, you can turn it on or off very quickly," says Jan DeLyser, vice president marketing for the California Avocado Commission, in Irvine, CA. "We'll evaluate

GET IN THE GAME!

Retailers can win big with an effective Super Bowl merchandising strategy.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

the timing of the California avocado harvest closer to the event and determine what level of activity to use. Last year, the California Avocado Commission created an interactive campaign that reached millions and received accolades for its innovation."

Lori Castillo, brand manager for NatureSweet LTD, headquartered in San Antonio, TX, also recognizes the value of social media in getting football fans pumped up for game day meals.

"Digital and social media leading up to the big game are key components to support sales, along with in-store marketing efforts such as in-store display and POS," she says.

For its part, NatureSweet will once again give consumers the opportunity to win prizes as Snacking MVPs by sharing their favorite

game day recipes through the company's social media channels.

Retailers are also getting in the social media game as Moses A. Abayan, manager of Phoenicia Specialty Foods in Houston, points out. "Social media, like Facebook and Instagram, is the easiest and quickest way to get the word out. Our team of creative individuals works hard to share recipes year-round that are posted on the Phoenicia website. As the Super Bowl is being hosted in Houston this year, expect a recipe or two for crowd-pleasing spreads for game day."

According to Adam Cooper, vice president of marketing for Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds based in Los Angeles, the company will remain active in social media throughout the season, with additional firepower planned for television and other online platforms. Wonderful has invested \$55 million in support of the largest pistachio crop in history. Part of that investment has gone toward its "Get Crackin'" advertising campaign with TV commercials and digital spots featuring Ernie the Elephant.

"This pistachio-loving, health-conscious, somewhat bold, always hilarious, computer-generated spokes-elephant refuses to work for peanuts and is voiced by WWE Superstar

John Cena,” says Cooper.

In addition to these ads shown throughout the season, Wonderful is also airing two spots featuring Richard Sherman, Seattle Seahawks cornerback, as well as a series of “Snack Smarter” digital videos, also featuring Sherman, that will be promoted online and through social media channels to educate football fans on the nutritional benefits of Wonderful Pistachios.

Avocados From Mexico (AFM) is planning another return in 2017 with a Big Game ad, according to Alvaro Luque, president of the Irving, TX-based organization. “We see the Big Game as a key opportunity to promote our brand and product because we know that guacamole is going to be there in front of the TV sharing snack time with other recognized brands that are lacking the nutritional value that avocados add to the occasion,” says Luque. “That’s our big differentiator. We can give avocado lovers the opportunity to consume something fun, delicious and good for them on this day. Promoting fruits and vegetables during football season is a great detour from the traditional salty, high-fat snacks, and it offers consumers the chance to enjoy guilt-free nibbling throughout the game.”

GREAT MERCHANDISING PLAYS

From the August pre-season game through the January playoffs, the NFL schedule is long, but it gives retailers plenty of time to build up to the Super Bowl. “Collaboration and partnerships that bring an experience to the consumer are what makes a great promotion surrounding the Super Bowl,” says Nichole Towell, director of marketing at Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc. based in Oviedo, FL. “Give-aways, including tailgating gear, and in our case, tickets to the Super Bowl in February, create buzz and excitement while offering opportunities for shoppers to engage directly with the brand for months leading up to the Big Game.”

“In terms of merchandising,” says Cooper at Wonderful, “we are unique in that we utilize our in-house merchandising team that works directly with retailers to create the perfect displays and provide merchandising support, including special promotional add-ons that create cart-stopping moments for our consumers.”

Wonderful also provides retailers with high-quality POS materials, balloons, tuck cards and freshness bins to grab consumers’ attention.

“Avocados From Mexico utilizes partnerships, like Old El Paso, to boost awareness and increase sales engagement through usage versatility.”

— Maggie Bezart Hall, Avocados From Mexico

“Avocados From Mexico utilizes partnerships, like Old El Paso, to boost awareness and increase sales engagement through usage versatility,” says Maggie Bezart Hall, vice president trade and promotions for AFM. “Retailers can increase their basket ring by using the same technique in their store display by adding fresh produce items to their Big Game displays.” AFM provides pallet bins with different ingredient sections for creating guacamole destinations.

NatureSweet’s Castillo recommends retailers make use of in-store promotions to

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“We do homemade guacamole, homemade salsas; we do fruit platters — we push that with stands in produce on Sundays, and even more so for the Super Bowl.”

— Moe Issa, Brooklyn Fare Markets

provide shoppers with fresh produce options. “NatureSweet will be tackling sweetness this year with SunBursts MVP, offering consumers easy snacking game day recipes and chances to win prizes. The promotion will be supported by a variety of marketing materials from POS cards, online elements, shipper displays and more.”

KICKOFF WITH APPS

The produce department is the best place to huddle up for Super Bowl starters. “For the biggest game day of the year, Phoenicia has lots to offer to put together the perfect party snack tray,” says Phoenicia’s Abayan. “For veggie lovers, choose from crisp Persian cucumbers, sweet red grape tomatoes, sweet mini peppers, colorful bell peppers and crunchy baby carrots. Or fuel cheering for your favorite team with a beautiful fruit tray of raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, green seedless table grapes, red seedless grapes, pineapple, and even exotic local fruits like crimson prickly pears.”

Moe Issa, owner of three Brooklyn Fare markets with New York City locations in Brooklyn, Manhattan and West Village, puts football promotions front and center in produce so customers see them when they first enter the store. “We do homemade guacamole, homemade salsas; we do fruit platters — we push that with stands in produce on Sundays, and even more so for the Super Bowl.”

Towell at Duda Fresh Farms sees the potential of crunchy veggies as good appetizer options, saying, “Scoop-able veggies with added crunch, like celery sticks and radish chips, are a great substitute for traditional chips because they bring out the flavor of everyone’s favorite dips without the added calories and salt. Retailers should respond to the different needs of consumers during football season by offering options — while many will continue to eat traditional chips, dip, and wings, many will also seek out healthier alternatives that allow for balanced snacking.”

Handing the ball off to snap peas is a great play as well. According to Jacob Shafer, marketing and communication specialist for Mann Packing Company in Salinas, CA, “Mann’s sugar snap peas are truly stringless varieties that are sweeter, plumper and taste

better overall. There is a growing understanding of sugar snap peas, and their many uses in the kitchen and for snacking.”

Snap peas are moving beyond dips as consumers get more informed about their versatility for use in both side dishes and as an ingredient in main dishes. “This consumer education has helped sugar snap peas become the second-fastest growing sub-segment of the core vegetable category,” says Shafer.

SUPER BOWL SUPER STAR

It’s not a Super Bowl party without chips and dips, and the produce department has its own star player in the avocado. “We continue to see strong growth year over year,” says AFM’s Bezart Hall. “For example, in 2015 during the four weeks leading up to the Big Game we imported 169 million pounds; in 2016, our imports went up to 210 million pounds in the same four weeks prior to the game. That’s a 25 percent growth in pound volume. We anticipate continued growth and delivering strong numbers for this coming game in 2017.”



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Jay Alley, vice president of sales for Wholly Guacamole, based in Saginaw, TX, sees big numbers as well. "More than 139 million pounds of avocados were consumed last year, and a majority of that was guacamole." Alley says. That's a whole lot of guac and big displays translate into big sales during big games. "Displays at the front of the departments create excitement and impulse purchases,"

he says. "Retailers that create a party destination for the Super Bowl are sure to see great results."

The ingredients used to make guacamole offer retailers an opportunity to create colorful cross-merchandising displays in their produce departments, as California Avocado Commission's DeLyser points out. "Tradi-

tional guacamole ingredients, including chiles, onions, tomatoes, lemons and limes, help create colorful displays when merchandised with avocados. In addition, party platters of cut vegetables and salad makings are great for Big Game celebrations."

Guacamole has become America's go-to dip, as Alley attests. "Chips and guacamole belong together and they have been a staple for snacking during the Super Bowl for years. We expect that to be true once again for the



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upcoming game.”The way consumers interact with guacamole is expanding, too. Consumers are dipping vegetables in it and using it as a spread to top burgers, wings, hot dogs and even pizza, according to Alley.

DON'T SIDELINE THE HEALTH MESSAGE

The health message should not be sidelined for the Super Bowl. For DeLyser, chips and produce aren't either/or propositions. “Retailers can benefit by promoting vegetables and fruits

as an integral part of Big Game gatherings rather than as a substitute for traditional salty snacks.” She recommends POS materials that highlight a variety of different colorful fruits and vegetables to incorporate into game day parties.

Hummus is another great dip option that's gaining traction. Pairing hummus with guacamole offers a healthy combination for dipping veggies.

“Playing upon their popularity, we've



created a variety of recipes perfect for snacking throughout the game, including Sunbursts Guacamole and SunBursts and hummus on pita. Co-promotions and dual merchandising in-store are winners when it comes to cross promotion,” says NatureSweet's Castillo.

According to Shafer at Mann's, retailers should use the Super Bowl as an opportunity to create healthy destination categories where consumers can find fresh vegetables for snacking trays and more. “Destination categories help consumers find new and innovative products,” says Shafer, “and the addition of a healthy snacking section in produce makes it easy for consumers to try healthy snack alternatives.”

Shafer advises retailers to expand shelf offerings of cut veggies and stresses the importance of understanding the trends driving the category in order to take full advantage of all sales opportunities.

Alan Hilowitz, spokesman for Ready Pac Foods in Irwindale, CA, sees the health trend gaining traction for all occasions. “The past few decades have spurred a full-on revolution in consumers' approach to food,” he says. “Mindsets have shifted in a massive way toward a desire for fresh, simple and less processed foods. What some skeptics initially claimed was a fad is, in fact, accelerating and growing — with Millennials, in particular, driving the desire for healthy, fresh, clean food.”

This healthy eating movement gives produce managers a prime opportunity to score points with consumers all the way up to game day and should be a part of any winning Super Bowl merchandising strategy.

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A little over a year old, the independently owned Good Neighbor Queens opened as a retail grocery store that also offers its members a farm share subscription. Owner Katrina Schultz Richter says it is not a traditional co-op or CSA (community supported agriculture) model, but shares the same mission and values.

"Customers tell us they've waited years for a place like Good Neighbor Queens to open," says Richter, who opened the 1,500-square-foot grocery store in October 2015. "Anyone is welcome to shop at Good Neighbor Queens. We're a grab-and-go specialty food shop with healthy eats for everyone. We also offer a weekly farm share to anyone that wants to join."

Good Neighbor Queens allows subscribers to pay a weekly fee and receive a bounty of fresh local fruits and vegetables with as little as a four-week commitment. Prices vary based on whether customers opt for a small or large share. By pre-ordering a healthy food box, a subscriber maximizes savings by ordering in bulk.

The company works with farmers in Long Island, the Hudson Valley and the Finger Lakes region of New York, as well as farms in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It is not strictly organic, although organic produce is often included in weekly farm shares.

In addition to pantry staples and its weekly farm share subscriptions, Good Neighbor Queens has locally prepared foods to go, pastries, snacks and beverages made daily by nearby businesses. The store carries fruit and fresh juices from Red Jacket Orchards and yogurt

from Ithaca Yogurt and Ronnybrook Farms.

"Our goal is to become a sustainable subscription model that allows us to grow our membership and grow into a true food cooperative model. We need our community support to help us get there," says Richter, who was born in the Philippines and raised in Queens.

She credits her hospitality career, which began in the late 1990s, for increasing her behind-the-scenes awareness of what it takes to put food on the table. While working at Thomas Keller's Per Se restaurant at the Time Warner building, she was inspired by management's thoughtfulness and respect for food and hospitality.

Richter lives in Queens with her husband, Alexander. "The name is part of our mission to offer great local foods while still being good neighbors to our community in Queens. It is the borough closest to my heart."

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Owners of Good Neighbor Queens, Alexander Richter and Katrina Schultz Richter



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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

UPSCALE AND PRODUCE DRIVEN

Every morning, Günter Seeger plans his day's menu by going to the Union Square Market and seeing which seasonal produce is the most beautiful, vibrant and healthful. He buys only enough to use for one evening at his West Village restaurant. The next day he does it again.

Since the produce-driven menu changes daily, so do the vegetable choices. The namesake, chef and owner

of the 7-month-old Günter Seeger NY restaurant bases his multi-course, prix fixe menu on the seasonal ingredients he finds from local food purveyors.

"We do a lot of hand-selected produce at the market," says Seeger. He says "we," but Seeger himself visits Union Square five mornings per week. "We buy smaller quantities just for the day. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. If you want top quality, it can't be produce that's been hanging around for three or four days."

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The son of produce brokers, Seeger grew up going to farms and markets in the Baden region of Germany, aka the "fruit garden of Germany." That background helped him as a pioneer in cultivating the farm-to-table movement in the United States. He is also a founder of the Georgia Organic Growers.

When asked if there is a vegetable dish that received rave reviews, Seeger answers, "Hopefully, we create this every day. We need to serve dishes daily that get people excited. When you have a super fresh product, the vegetable speaks for itself. It's vibrant, fresh and healthy."

One recent example is a cream made from white and orange cauliflower, served together on the plate with fresh, white truffles. "Produce is not a side dish," he says. "Produce is part of the meal; you

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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

need beautiful and healthy produce. It is the essence, basically, of a great meal."

Chef Seeger began his hospitality career in Switzerland where he honed his craft in the kitchen, front-of-house and in hotel management. In 2007, he closed his Günter Seeger restaurant in Atlanta and moved to New York City. Today he consults with large grocery store chains to help improve produce quality and sustainability.

Bathed in lavender and gray tones,

the 42-seat space has a modern but comfortable feel. Open since May, Günter Seeger NY joins thousands of fine dining establishments in the New York area. Still, Seeger doesn't see it as a competition.

"Opening in New York City is a very difficult and very costly proposition for any restaurant," he says. "In the end, you are competing with yourself. You have to find your own niche in the market. You have to find your own dishes and your own customers." **pb**

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Open since October 2014, The Little Beet Table continues to uphold its mission to make healthful and satisfying food accessible to all. Its 75 dining room seats and 12 bar seats create a comfortable and intimate setting for enjoying local, seasonal fare.

"We like to have fun with vegetables while keeping our finger on the pulse of the season," says Executive Chef Adam Starowicz. "The Little Beet Table takes a spin on classic dishes by putting its focus on vegetables. Our unique dishes offer flavors that are simple but bold."

The Little Beet Kitchen menu changes from season to season, and sometimes more often depending on which vegetables are available and enjoyable. The menu also varies from year to year. If one year's crop of sugar snap peas, for example, is particularly good, The Little

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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

Beet Table will feature that vegetable throughout its peak months.

The restaurant sources from both the local Union Square Greenmarket and national distributor, Baldor Specialty Foods. "When we order through Baldor, we can choose organic and hyperlocal items from farmers who are too busy farming to come to the local farmers market," says restaurant spokesperson Jenifer Cerio. "If Baldor can't source a particular item we request, they'll substi-

tute something equally great."

The restaurant's biggest challenge is expanding the vegetable comfort zone of its diners.

"We know that everyone loves broccoli, but they may not have tried cooked radishes," says Starowicz. Menu items that marry familiar with less familiar include a cauliflower hummus made without chickpeas that is finished with toasted seeds, popped popcorn and fennel fronds; a cold-weather vegan entrée with

roasted squash, quinoa, spinach, toasted almonds and cranberries; charred broccoli finished with carrot-miso puree and fried carrot chips; and watercress pesto without cheese or nuts.

The Little Beet Kitchen thrives on the power of restaurant review sites such as Yelp and social media platforms to help spread the word. "Our restaurant is all about having fun and enjoying vegetables; and we want our guests to talk about us," notes Starowicz. **pb**

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Cuisine:
**Modern Vegetarian
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FRUITS & VEGETABLES ARE THE STARS

Vegetarian newcomer NIX, located on the border of Union Square and Greenwich Village, is among this year's most talked-about restaurants. At the helm is Michelin Star Chef John Fraser, who built his reputation at Dovetail and

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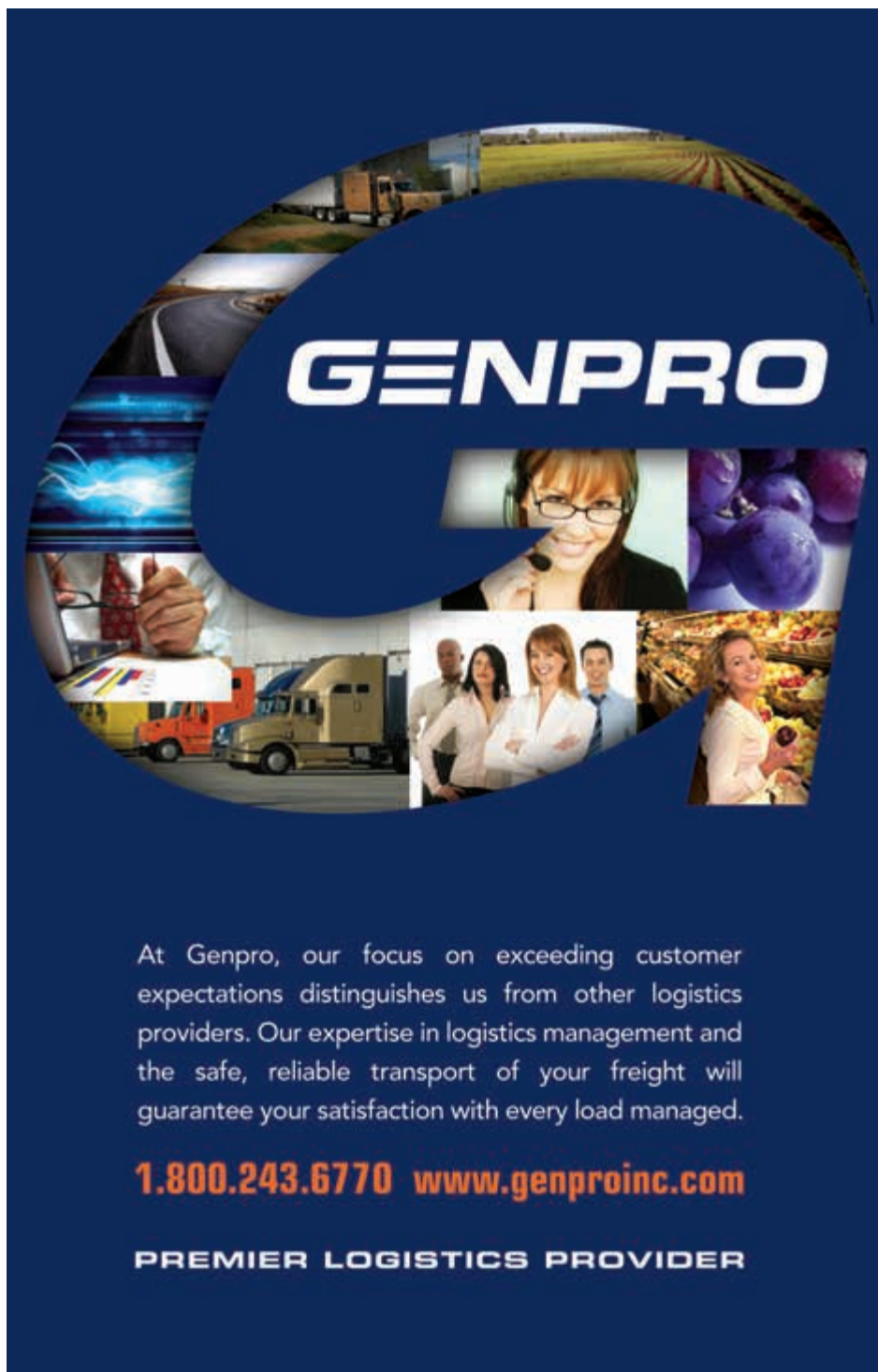
NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

Narcissa, both in New York City. The restaurant seats 72 people in its elegant setting.

"Fruits and vegetables are the stars of the show at NIX, but we use them in a creative way to make them taste good," says Fraser. "Our dishes are both rich and satisfying, and meant to surprise and delight."

NIX divides its dinner menu into three sections: bread, raw vegetables and dips; "lighter" choices such as chopped kale, beets, pistachios and aged goat cheese,

and baby carrots en papillote with cracked bulgur, almonds and Moroccan spices; and "bolder" dishes that include potato gnocchi served with zucchini squash and fine herbs. Chef Fraser notes that the most popular "bolder" dish is the Yukon potato fry bread decorated with sour cream, Cabot white cheddar, shaved scallions, mini broccoli florets and radishes for crunch. The cauliflower tempura with steamed buns and house pickles, along with the shiitake "Cacio



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e Pepe" with green beans and creamy polenta are also popular. NIX's new whole roasted maitake mushroom with braised greens and truffle butter has quickly become a fall/winter hit.

NIX purchases the majority of its produce from the Union Square Greenmarket and alters its menu depending on what is in season. Diners can expect an element of taste bud surprise. Dishes such as jicama ribbons with Fresno chili and blood oranges pair sweet and spicy. NIX also enhances flavors in the wok. "Wok dishes are fun to prepare and provide a new taste for the vegetarian palate. The wok gives a great char on all kinds of vegetables, so we use wok techniques as an element in a number of our dishes," says Fraser.

The weekend brunch menu includes both twists on breakfast classics – egg in the hole, with white cheddar, avocado and pumpernickel toast, and tall quiche with mushrooms, leeks and burgundy truffles – and lunch salads, sandwiches and stir-fries. Vegan brunch items earn a place on their own menu, a growing trend in New York City.

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Cuisine:
Vegetable-forward,
Seasonal American



SIMPLE YET TRENDY

From a single location opened five years ago, the Dig Inn empire recently opened its 13th New York City location on the Upper East Side. What makes Dig Inn stand out is its growing commitment to the purity of “vegetable-ness.”

“When we first opened, we tried to dress up our vegetables with recipes that covered the edges, so to speak,” says founder Matt Weingarten. “We have been on a five-year evolutionary journey since then to cook the most perfect and simplest dishes from the sweetest and best vegetables our farmers can supply.” Examples include Dig Inn’s popular summer dish of five varieties of local summer squash roasted with olive oil, sea salt and lemon thyme; fall Brussels sprouts roasted with organic maple syrup and a touch of housemade sriracha



sauce; and winter kale with curried delicata squash and chickpeas.

“With each dish, we consider the best way to highlight each fruit or vegetable’s moment,” says Weingarten. “Do we want to accent the crunch of an apple, for example, or should we coax out its sweetness through caramelization?” Dig Inn is installing Rational ovens in all its locations to provide dry and wet heat options and the ability to cook fruits and vegetables quickly at extremely high temperatures.

Dig Inn purchases produce by the pallet from more than a dozen local farms. Its procurement team cultivates relationships with area farmers that encourage two-way conversation about what the farmer is growing or wants to grow, and what the chain’s chefs are looking for. “We have amazing and deep discussions with farmers about such topics as a variety of kale we would like them to grow for features such as tenderness, sweetness and the way it curls.”

Weingarten stresses the importance of patience, noting that it may take a year or longer for produce talked about with farmers to become available. “Produce is an investment, not instant gratification. I actually enjoy the tension of having to wait until next year. This is a contribution to the future.”

pb

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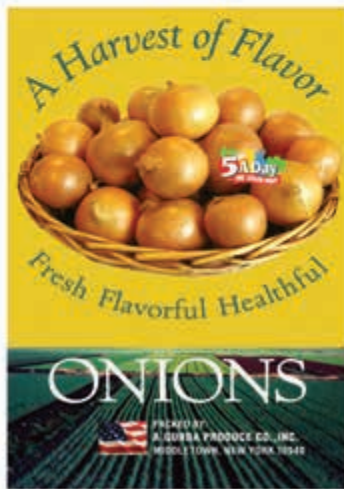
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(212) 674-3623
www.4thstreetfoodcoop.org

Hours of Operation:
Mon – Thurs 10 am – 9:30 pm
Fri 10 am – 8:30 pm
Sat 11 am – 8:30 pm
Sun 12 pm – 8:30 pm

Cuisine:
Organic Produce

members," says Ann Lee, chief graphics officer. "We believe in food for people, not for profit." The Coöp is proud of its 100 percent organic produce offered at one of the best price points in the area for a store its size.

"We have had tremendous success so far in networking with people who are committed to staying closer to their food source and trying to make ethical, as well as practical decisions about what is sold at our store," says Lee. "One of the reasons that people participate in co-operatives is to try to have better health for themselves and for the world."

4th Street orders from a variety of suppliers that range from farmers markets and small farms in the region to large multi-state distributors. The Morning Glory Community Garden in the Bronx, NY, is its closest vendor. The Coöp sources Northern Hemisphere produce during winter, particularly greens and fruit that cannot be found locally at that time of year. "We normally have an abundance of winter squash, root vegetables, cabbage and other produce that is associated with cooler months, most of which we source locally when available. We continue to purchase tropical fruits, such as bananas, mangos and avocados, that are grown in the tropics year-round. Winter is also the time when we get a lot of citrus from California and Florida."

The Coöp recently began a fundraising campaign through YouCaring.com to raise money to repair and replace aging display cases, coolers and other equipment in the store. **pb**

COMMUNITY FRIENDLY

The 4th Street Food Coöp has enjoyed more than 20 years of success in Greenwich Village, building on the prior 20-plus year tradition of the Good Food Coöp, which began in 1973 as a buying club before becoming a storefront food cooperative. The Coöp provides an affordable venue for its New York City community to obtain high-quality organic food and household products. It stocks local and fair-trade goods, and everything in the store is non-GMO and vegetarian.

Shoppers are nearly equally divided between working members, who staff and operate the store, and non-working members. The Coöp is open to the public. "We offer discounts to SNAP recipients, seniors, students and non-working

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24-HOUR PRODUCE STAND

Three Guys, one of the few remaining open air markets in New York City, has called various locations home for more than 45 years and has been at its current Brooklyn location for the past 18 years. The new website describes the store as the “United Nations of grocery stores,” where ethnically diverse shoppers come together to share in great deals and freshness. Founder Stanley Zimmerman established Three Guys so that “everyone



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– both rich and poor – could afford the finest fruits and vegetables, no matter what their budget.” Today, Three Guys continues its commitment to provide high-quality produce at the best prices to the community. It also supplies restaurants and catering halls, and recently added a juice and smoothie bar to meet consumer demand.

Three Guys purchases most of its produce at the Hunts Point Market. Shoppers can find seasonal items, including

Florida citrus, Washington State apples, Georgia peaches and local watermelon at attractive prices, along with a full section of fresh organic fruits and vegetables at Brooklyn’s best prices.

As the community has changed, so has Three Guys. It recently transitioned from print advertising to digital newsletters and mobile weekly ads in a more sustainable process that brings the store closer to its customers. Co-owner Philip Penta mentions efforts to raise aware-

ness of and manage food waste. “We sell produce that is tasty, but might not be pretty, and we offer ‘final sale’ items to keep fruits and vegetables moving. On the store side, we reduce waste by cutting up fruits and vegetables to make them more convenient, or using them in our smoothie bar. Also, zucchini or squash spaghetti is a popular way to process and sell large volumes.”

Penta and his colleagues continue to explore ways to connect with shoppers through social media and the store website. “People come in and ask how to cook different items, so we started posting seasonal recipes with beautiful photos. We hope that this will boost sales.”

The dozens of photos on Instagram – beautiful enough for framing – should turn even the most reluctant shopper into a produce lover. **pb**

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Cuisine:
Fresh Produce

CHEAP AND FRESH

The two words that sum up the success of Stiles Farmers Market in Hell’s Kitchen are cheap and fresh. And the produce is not just affordable for New York City, says owner Steven Stile. It is cheap for any market.

On Yelp, fans rave about getting a wide selection of fresh produce for half the price of other markets. One Yelp reviewer bragged: “I bought two heaping

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bags of produce (grapes, strawberries, spaghetti squash, onions, mushrooms, spinach, thyme, basil) and paid just \$22.”

“I bought an entire week’s worth of groceries for under \$15,” wrote another. One patron posted a photo of a variety of produce bought at Stiles with the caption, “All this for \$45!”



The Stile family has a long history in the produce industry. Stile’s grandfather opened his first market in Brooklyn in 1933. Twenty years later, Steven’s father, Joe, opened his first market, also in Brooklyn. He made the name plural, Stiles, to include all of the Stile family members.

“My father took me to Washington Market when I was 8 and Hunts Point when I was 12,” says Stile, 58. “He taught me: ‘Sell cheap,’ ‘Take care of your customers’ and ‘The customer is always right no matter what.’”



In 1980, Stile bought the Stiles store, now closed, on 41st St. and 9th, from his father. Ten blocks north, in its present location, the no-frills, 2,400-square-foot farmers market has been selling inexpensive produce for 25 years.


“I would have opened more but with the rent in New York – fuggedaboutit,” says Stile. “Rent is just too much. The rent is so high in parts of New York, it is impossible to stay open.”

Manhattan easier. “People say, ‘If it wasn’t for you, I don’t know what I would do.’”

Products are always local when they are in season. Buying local means produce from Long Island, upstate New York and Connecticut. When a commodity’s local season finishes, Stile gets produce from California, Florida, New Mexico, Texas and South America.

Since residents also pay notoriously high rent, they often tell Stile that having an affordable shop makes life in

When a popular item is not available in the Northeast, Stile gets produce from all over the world. He picks up fruits and veggies at Hunts Point market every day. “I only handle the best. And it’s very fresh, so that’s why they keep coming back.” **pb**



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Cuisine: Global Cuisine



VEGETABLE LOVE

New Delhi-born Suvir Saran knows Americans grew up in households where meat was the main dish and vegetables were boiled past the point of recognition and treated as second-class citizens.

It is the reason patrons at Saran's Tapestry restaurant are often thrilled

and surprised to find a vibrant and tasty vegetable on their plates.

"Americans are used to a plate with one big hunk of meat, two or three miserable florets of broccoli, and a gloppy mush of mashed potatoes," says Saran, who opened Tapestry in Greenwich Village in June.

The author of three cookbooks, Saran

wants to hit the reset button on America's memories of vegetables that were gummy, overcooked and tasteless, and help them rediscover the true beauty of okra or green beans.

"People say, 'Eww, green beans' because they have memories of those brown beans that were cooked in pig fat for 20 hours, and are nothing like green

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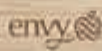
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beans should be – crunchy, crispy, airy and craveable. I can't blame the people who hate vegetables. We have to recondition them."

In October, *Time Out New York* put Saran's roasted cauliflower on its list of the "100 best dishes and drinks in New York City." Saran's Hakka Spiced Roasted Cauliflower is an updated version of his Manchurian cauliflower dish, which was fried and sauced with ketchup, cayenne and garlic. It was served in his previous restaurant, Devi, the first Indian establishment in the United States to earn a Michelin star. When Mark Bittman of the *New York Times* discovered the dish more than 10 years ago, he raved.

Another big seller on the Tapestry menu is the Avocado and Cabbage Slaw. Saran dresses up cabbage with caramelized shallots, cashews, green chili peppers, cilantro, mint lime and cumin. "People are shocked that this humble, modest cabbage, one of the oldest vegetables on the planet, can get



Chef Suvir Saran

a sexy Marc Jacobs-esque makeover at Tapestry with a dressing that is hot, sour, salty and sweet all at once. Everyone who

eats wants to eat more."

Saran is a presenter at the *Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives* conference, a joint project of the Harvard School of Public Health and the Culinary Institute of America, striving to teach doctors how to encourage patients to make better food choices. He is also the only chef on the advisory board of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

"We treat vegetables as a fad, like medicine, like the character that we need in our lives but don't really love," says Saran. "It's a relationship that is doomed to fail. Indian and Mediterranean cultures have a love affair with vegetables. They are the mainstay of life and meat is the 'other.' It's the flip of what Americans are used to."

Tapestry's dishes are not quintessentially Indian, but as Saran says, "Since I am Indian, I put an Indian sensibility into everything I touch and feel, so a dish has some part of me but it doesn't take over its identity." **pb**

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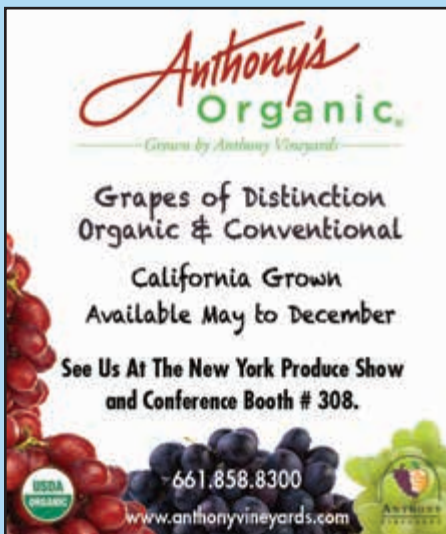
Smoothies and juices are made using organic produce, unless it's not available. Jeff LaPadula, a managing partner since 2014, finds it makes

more sense to go with organic since the price difference is minimal compared to conventional. Local produce distributors deliver the goods to the stores every morning.

The ambience is clean and chic. "Terri is more than just a juice bar," says LaPadula. "It has a quick-service juice bar kind of feel, but it's almost like a "full-service restaurant when you look at what we have to offer."

"We have a niche," says LaPadula, who has known Cochran and Pease for many years. "We noticed that what was missing in New York City was a place where you could walk in and walk out with a quick-service juice or smoothie."

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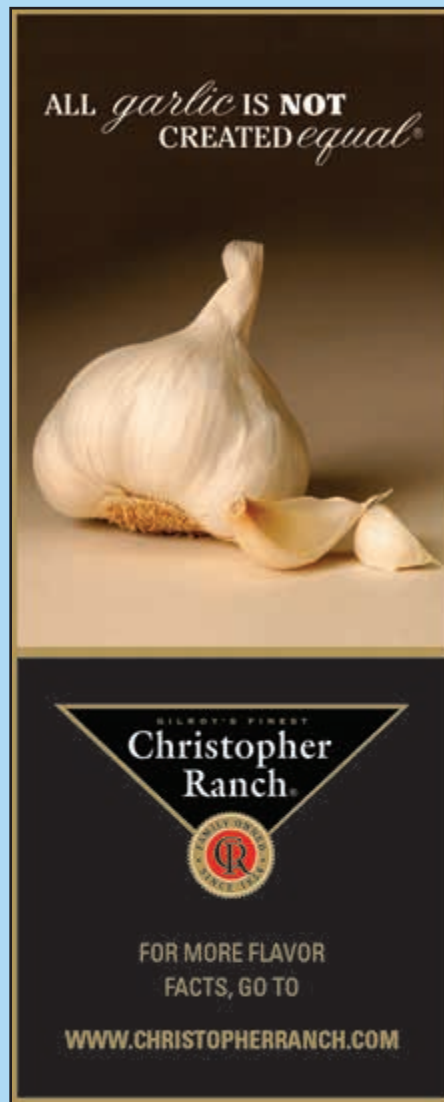


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NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

The three friends have worked at other vegetarian restaurants in Manhattan – Cochran was the original manager at Candle 79, LaPadula worked at Peacefood, and both Pease and Cochran worked at Blossom.

Once Terri gained a following, the owners started serving vegan sandwiches, salads, baked goods and cold-pressed juices. Patrons can even get “juiced” if their pick-me-up of choice holds more caffeine than carrot (Terri also serves locally roasted coffee). “Some people don’t know we are a vegan restaurant; they just pop in for a juice or smoothies,” says LaPadula.

The newest location is in Midtown

East, which opened in February. It joins the other two Terris in the Chelsea neighborhood and in the Financial District. The average size of each store is 600 to 700 square feet. “We don’t need much space,” says LaPadula. That is because there is a 2,500-square-foot commercial kitchen in Queens, where the food and cold-pressed juice prep work is done. Then, the products are packaged and shipped to the locations in the evenings. Within the commissary, the partners have part-ownership in a seitan company called Blackbird Foods, which goes into many of Terri’s sandwiches.

Terri’s most popular juice is the Live Long and Green juice, which is made

with cucumber, spinach, apple, lemon and ginger. An example from the kosher food menu is the vegan fish patty made with hearts of palm and cashews. The Portobello Pesto sandwich features a Portobello mushroom cap, cashew ricotta and tomato jam.

The owners invested in a \$30,000 hydraulic press to make cold-pressed juice in the commercial kitchen. The machine uses 6,000 pounds of pressure to extract the maximum amount of juice, nutrients and antioxidants from the fruit or vegetable. “It produces a better juice because every part of the produce gets used,” says LaPadula. “There is no waste.” **pb**

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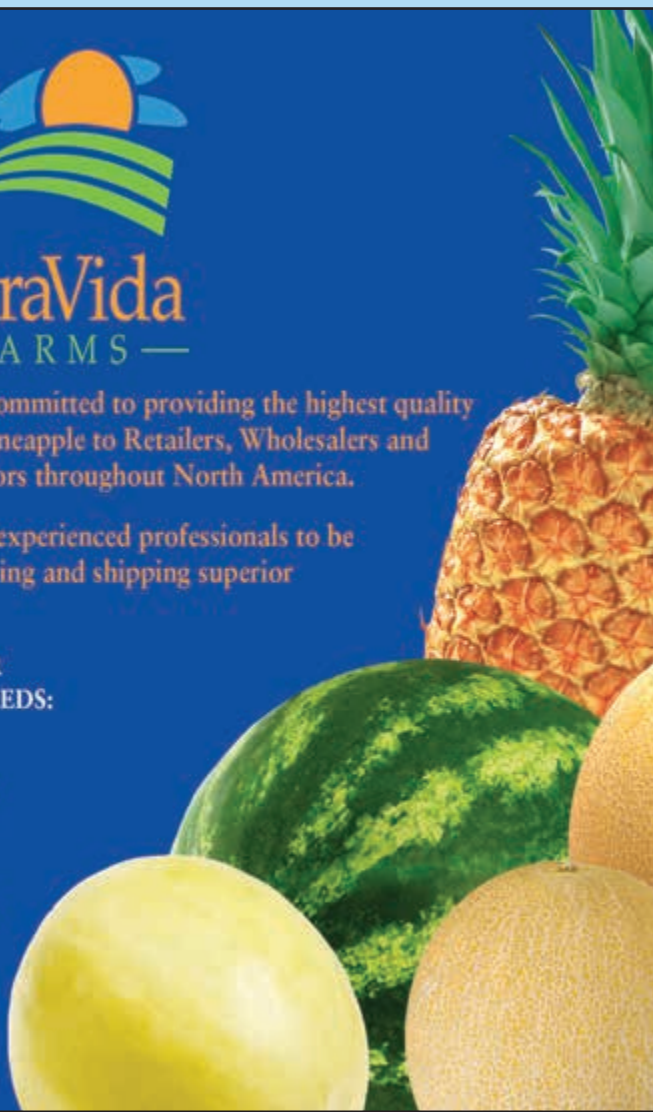
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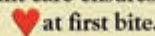


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THE NEW DOOR FOR Mexico's Produce

Geography, investment and drive intersect to make South Texas a leading player in its importation.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS



In a little less than two decades, South Texas has catapulted itself into a prime position in produce trade with Mexico. In 2000, South Texas ports moved only about half the volume — a little more than 40,000 loads — of Arizona, according to USDA trade statistics. By 2011, according to the Texas International Produce Association (TIPA) in Mission, TX, South Texas crossing volumes had more than doubled and surpassed Nogales, AZ, as the leading region for produce crossings (see “Fresh Produce Import Volumes” on next page).

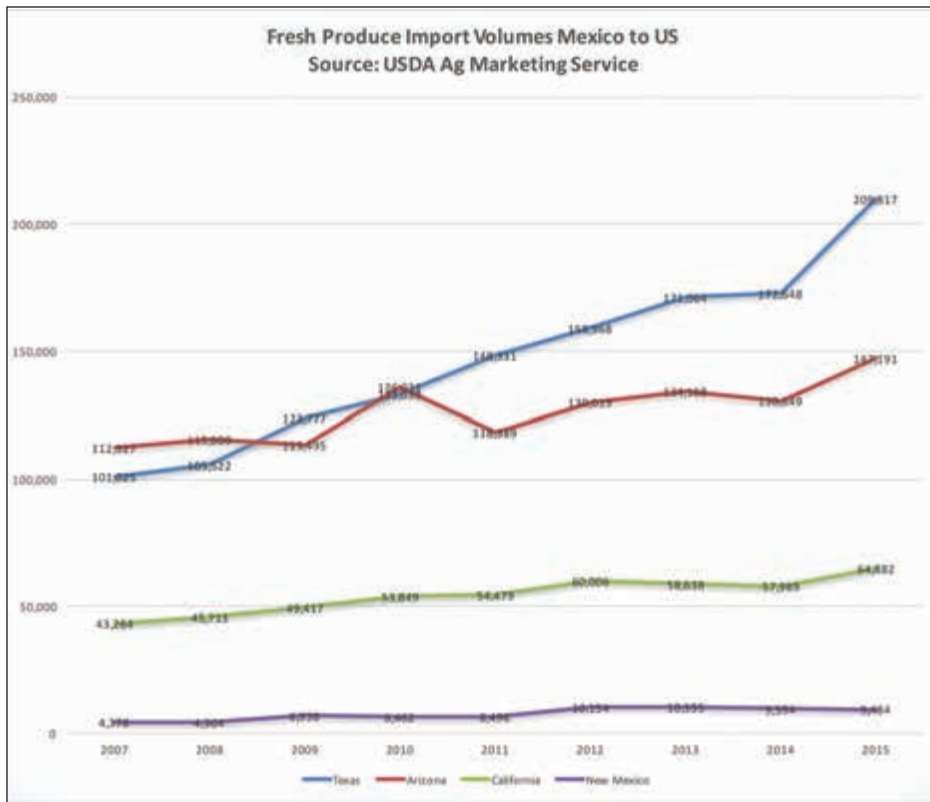
“In the last eight years, the volume of imports of fresh fruits and vegetables coming out of Mexico through Texas ports of entry has grown by about 107 percent,” says Bret Erickson, president and chief executive of TIPA. “In 2015, Texas crossed approximately 215,000 loads of fresh produce. In contrast, Nogales grew by 31 percent. Texas accounted for 49 percent of fresh produce import crossings in 2015, with Arizona accounting for 34 percent, with California and New

Mexico also importing.”

The change is likened to South Texas receiving a major makeover from a top plastic surgeon, describes Luis A. Bazán, bridge director for Pharr International Bridge a department within the City of Pharr in Pharr, TX. “In 1985, the outskirts of these border towns were mostly agriculture and landscape. Now, they’ve changed to more developed spaces. They call this area the RioPlex because of the development taking place on the Rio Grande River — so many cities are enjoying positive expansion.”

The region continues to experience growth in volume, diversity and company involvement. “Every year volume through Texas ports grows, as do companies handling this increased volume,” says Dan Edmeier of Huron Produce in Edinburg, TX. “The variety of commodities being offered, as well as the timeframe they occupy, keeps increasing.”

Importers, retailers and foodservice buyers alike share the benefit of these new entry points. “Markon’s purchases from South Texas



have increased exponentially over the past three years, with this year shaping up to be our biggest growth year-to-date,” says Mark Shaw, vice president of operations for Markon in Salinas, CA.

Farmer’s Best in Nogales imports via McAllen, TX, and has reported an increase in volume every year for the past eight to 10 years. “We see distribution through the Texas ports increasing in the immediate future,” says Steve Yubeta, vice president of sales.

Jose Robles, president and chief executive for Diversified Distributors Inc. in Vernon, CA, notices more emphasis on importing product through Texas. “Many distributors are opening operations in that part of the country,” he says. “This is a result of major national retailers expressing interest in sourcing product from Texas, believing Texas provides a central distribution point for all fresh produce from Mexico. It makes sense.”

Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ, points out Nogales is still a major player in Mexican imports. He says Nogales continues to be the No. 1 port of entry with more than 6.3 billion pounds imported during the last season year (Sept. 2015 - August 2016).

“This is a 6 percent increase from the previous season,” says Jungmeyer. “Improvements in seed varieties and the expansion into new growing microclimates should further fuel

the increase in coming years.”

GROWING INVESTMENT

Texas boasts four primary ports of entry for fresh produce from Mexico. “Pharr moves the lion’s share of produce with approximately 65 percent of the volume of all of Texas crossings,” says Erickson. “Laredo is second, crossing about 23 percent. Then comes Rio Grande City and Progreso, each crossing between 6 to 7 percent. Laredo primarily crosses tomatoes and avocados, with a majority of shipments being direct — meaning they’re crossing and going on to San Antonio or Dallas, or some other distribution hub.”

Development of facilities to support produce imports plays a fundamental role in the increase in volume. “Six or seven years ago, when we really started to feel this shift in the growth of Mexican produce crossing, people didn’t think Texas would have the infrastructure to handle it,” says Erickson. “Now we’ve seen tremendous growth and expansion in infrastructure and facilities.”

Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group in Hackensack, NJ, cites the expansion in the border towns as a key indicator of Texas’ future. “A tremendous amount of new cold storage facilities has been developed and are now open for business.”

Since the completion of the Sinaloa-Durango Highway, Markon’s Shaw has witnessed increased investment into South Texas due to

the viability of the loading location. “Suppliers have been purchasing and refurbishing dated cooling facilities and building new construction rivaling state-of-the-art facilities in both Nogales and Florida,” he says.

Product crossing in Pharr and most of the other Texas ports makes its way to facilities near these crossing points. “In Texas, companies are expanding their footprint and building the necessary infrastructure to handle the increased volumes,” says Erickson. “The Greater McAllen area is now starting to look and operate more like Nogales — a one-stop shop for a wide variety of commodities.”

MUTUALLY INCLUSIVE

While the region experiences explosive growth, importers view Texas and Arizona as mutually inclusive. Huron’s Edmeier considers Texas complementary to Arizona and California ports. “If it were competition, Arizona companies would not be flocking here to expand,” he points out. “It really is no different than technology; when there are good or better options you have to explore them.”

Erickson cites an increasing number of Arizona companies operating in Texas as evidence of collaboration. “We’ve seen many companies with operations in Arizona slowly expanding their presence in Texas because it’s a matter of what makes sense,” he says.

Farmer’s Best represents a good example of one of those companies. “We are adapting to our customers’ needs and providing more value to them by making our fresh produce available out of both areas,” says Yubeta. “In the summer months, most of the produce we sell is grown close to the Texas border, so McAllen becomes our only distribution point for that period. Yet, Nogales’s volume and demand is also increasing. Increased production in Sonora, just south of Arizona, makes Nogales the primary port of entry for many of those items. We continue to see increases in volume through both ports of entry.”

“In our business you always have to consider alternatives,” says Alfonso Cano, produce director for Northgate Gonzalez Markets in Anaheim, CA, with 41 stores. “The Mexican and U.S. border is so big, we cannot expect to not have alternatives. It is not about competition; it’s about logistics and securing deliveries. The U.S. domestic market benefits from Mexican products crossing as soon as possible. Therefore, the U.S. distribution network can plan and prepare accurately.”

TIPA’s extraordinary growth in association membership punctuates the continued climb in international business. “We have nearly tripled

our membership in the past five years,” says TIPA’s Erickson. “This growth has primarily been importers who have come into the Association, along with service providers for the import industry.”

WHY THE SHIFT?

Multiple factors, including geography and infrastructure improvements, have intersected, resulting in Texas’ rising position for Mexican imports. The state’s strategic location between Mexico and the eastern United States provides a natural advantage for import efficiencies.

“The most perishable item in the world is time, and Texas can cut one to two days of transport into the United States,” says Cano. “Mexican growers benefit by reaching States faster and having their sales people give accurate information to their end customer.”

Vision’s Cohen sees use of Texas ports as an additional distribution opportunity. “It is a benefit for buyers, especially those in the middle of the United States and the East Coast when purchasing from Mexico,” he says.

Farmer’s Best moves product from Texas for customers in the Midwest, Northeast and Southeast. “One of the biggest benefits for

“The most perishable item in the world is time, and Texas can cut one to two days of transport in the United States.”

— Alfonso Cano, Northgate Gonzalez Markets

these buyers is that our fresh produce is available to them from a closer shipping point,” says Yubeta. “Our consistent supply of quality produce makes for a more reliable program for buyers.”

Sourcing product from South Texas allows Markon several advantages. “One is the convenience of sourcing from another area — in addition to the Southeast and Arizona — during the fall, winter, and spring months,” says Shaw. “We also find freight savings since moving product [to certain destinations] from South Texas is much more economical than from Nogales.”

Shaw also notes benefit in more competitive prices. “Leveraging the southeastern United States, South Texas and Nogales products against each other allows Markon to achieve the most competitive delivered price into our

Midwestern and Northeastern markets.”

The proliferation of production areas throughout Mexico has also added to Texas’ import volume. “Increasing production in eastern and southern Mexico provides an opportunity to ship via Texas,” says TIPA’s Erickson. “The expansion of production areas in Mexico leads to increased opportunity for new ports of entry.”

Robles of Diversified says importers and their clients benefit from this expansion, particularly as more product becomes available for the eastern part of the United States. “The western part of the nation has always benefited from established and consistent crossings in California and Arizona,” he adds.

One of the largest contributing factors to the increase in Texas crossings, according to Erickson, is the completion of major infrastruc-

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INCREASING VARIETY

Already offering a wide array of available products throughout extended seasons, Grower Alliance continues to build partnerships with a variety of outstanding Mexican fruit and vegetable growers. Currently, Grower Alliance offers tomatoes, cucumbers and greenhouse bell peppers from Nogales and McAllen year-round.

Springtime (late March through the Fourth of July) brings watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green bell peppers, cucumbers and hot peppers into the Grower Alliance portfolio. In summer, the company centers on greenhouse-grown beefsteak tomatoes, Roma tomatoes and bell peppers through McAllen.

The Fall season starts in late September and offers watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, and hot peppers through Nogales. Come mid-November,

the Winter products expand to include watermelons, mini watermelons, honeydews, cucumbers, Italian/grey/yellow straightneck squash, green beans, euro cucumbers, eggplant, and green bell peppers.

EXPANDING SERVICE

To better serve customers and meet future growth, Grower Alliance has expanded distribution and grower operations. Grower Alliance has also expanded product line to include a cucumber, hot pepper and watermelon deal from Baja. The Baja watermelon deal now makes Grower Alliance a year round supplier of watermelons out of Mexico. The company's watermelon deal out of Northern Mexico (Chihuahua and East Sonora) provides product in September so the Baja deal serves as a bridge between the Northern Mexico region and other source areas.

Though Grower Alliance has been shipping from South and Central Mexico via McAllen for the past seven years, the company recently put together additional deals for significant volume increases. With the acquisition of its Nogales building in July of 2011, it began offering in-and-out services to other companies. The company also offers consolidation services for companies outside of Nogales that want to load in one location as opposed to picking up in different warehouses.

A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

The company puts great emphasis on

honesty and integrity in business as well as investment in its people. Grower Alliance continues to expand key staff positions to better support the on-going mission of the company and service customers. A crucial aspect of the Grower Alliance equation is its emphasis on and commitment to food safety. The company employs a field-level food safety specialist to ensure all growers associated with Grower Alliance have their food safety specs and certifications in-line. Through this position, the company provides assistance to growers as needed in the area of food safety programs and audits. All Grower Alliance growers are both GAP and GMP certified, and all fields have been certified for pesticide residue with either Primus Labs or Scientific Certification Systems.

SUPPORTING ITS GROWERS

In today's marketplace where sustainability and social responsibility are increasingly important, it's crucial to do business with companies that adequately support their grower communities. By helping growers expand operations and investing in the growing communities, Grower Alliance ensures high quality, consistent product and good working conditions among its producers. Grower Alliance has been able to purchase and install several cold rooms at growers' packing sheds. The company has also assisted its growers in the acquisition of more land. It also supplies growers with drip irrigation systems and cover for their plants and assists them with the purchase of shadehouse systems.



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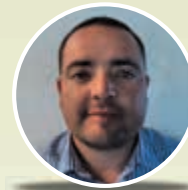
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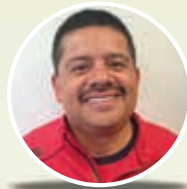
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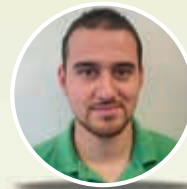
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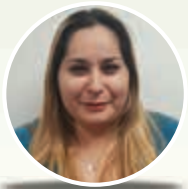
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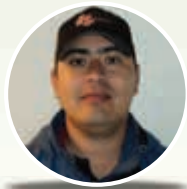
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ture projects in Mexico. “Of primary importance is the SuperVia Highway, connecting the west coast of Mexico to Texas,” he says. “It’s basically a pipeline linking Sinaloa to South Texas. With the completion of the new highway system and new bridges in Mexico, produce companies delivering product to the Midwest or the East Coast find it more efficient and faster to get product to market via Texas and for less cost.”

The infrastructure changes have opened the door to new options. “The now completed Mazatlan-Durango Highway from western Mexico to the Texas ports has made the trip shorter and more cost-effective, so more product is crossing to Texas versus the Arizona or California ports,” says Vision’s Cohen.

These major road improvements have significantly impacted Farmers Best’s production grown and packed in central, eastern and western Mexico. “The opening of this new highway has helped with logistics challenges we had faced for years,” says Yubeta.

INCREASING PRODUCT DIVERSITY

Products and production areas continue to evolve along with the infrastructure to support increased volume in Mexico-Texas crossings. Texas has long been a primary port for limes, mangos, onions, pineapples and lemons, according to Cohen. “Limes are sourced primarily from Veracruz,” he says. “Mangos are grown in all Mexican states. Pineapples come principally from Veracruz and Tabasco, and onions and lemons from Tamaulipas.”

Edmeier recalls when Texas catered more to eastern Mexico production, but now sees areas widening. “Products come from nearly every state in Mexico,” he says. “Items include

“By 2023, Texas should have between 330,000 and a half-a-million truckloads coming through its ports of entry.”

— Bret Erickson, TIPA

tomatoes, bell peppers, limes, chili peppers, squash, melons — and the list goes on.”

Erickson notes among the Top 10 items shipped via Texas, the No. 1 item in 2015 was tomatoes. “Tomatoes accounted for about 64,000 loads,” he reports. “These were mostly from western Mexico. Avocados were second and accounted for about 44,000 loads — all from Michoacán. The remainder of the Top 10 includes cucumbers, watermelon, chili peppers, limes, bell peppers, squash, mangos and other miscellaneous tropicals.”

With the increasing potential in Texas, both sides of the border look to take advantage. “Since there is more focus on crossing product in Texas, many growers in Mexico are taking the risk of exporting more product from different areas,” reports Robles. “Even from as far as Chiapas, the southern tip of Mexico.”

Diversified Distributors is partnering with a grower in Mexico, with a distribution facility in Texas. Farmer’s Best recently added a growing facility in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, allowing the company to increase the volume it ships through McAllen. “This includes year-round supplies of cucumbers, green peppers and Roma tomatoes,” says Yubeta.

FORGING AHEAD

Though Texas has posted some significant volume increases in the past decade, industry

members look to even greater progress in the future. “The future for Texas’ border ports is limited only by the infrastructure to cross the type of numbers we will see in the future,” says Huron’s Edmeier.

To ensure adequate resource and infrastructure investment continues, TIPA and the Texas industry have been very active in lobbying agencies to provide additional resources for the ports. “We still have some growing to do in terms of filling the capacity, but we are light-years ahead of where we were years ago,” says Erickson.

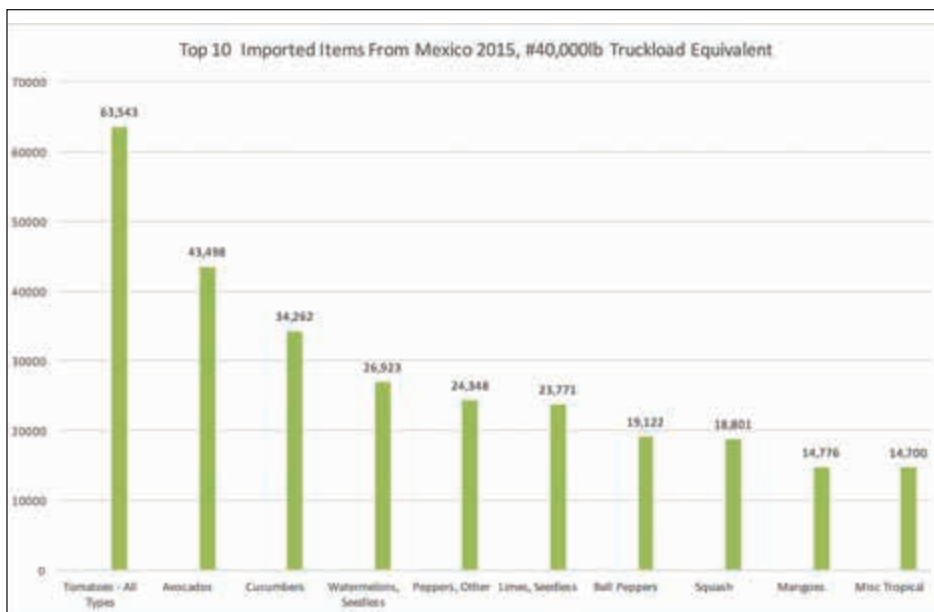
To get a better handle on the future potential for Texas, TIPA requested that the Center for North American Studies at Texas A&M University extrapolate the state’s growth for the future. “They concluded that by 2023, Texas should have between 330,000 and half-a-million truckloads coming through its ports of entry,” reports Erickson.

Local and state agencies are also support development. “Within our cities there is a tremendous amount of work going on with the Texas Department of Transportation to expand roads to handle truck traffic,” says Erickson. “Our government and companies are investing in infrastructure and facilities.”

Industry has already taken steps with government to pave the way for even greater future possibilities. In 2013, the industry successfully pushed for the development of an overweight corridor to operate in South Texas. “This allows us to cross an overweight load within a designated corridor stretching through Mission,” says Erickson. “It’s similar to what Arizona has and is significant to allow for efficiency in shipping.”

While the future for Texas’ ports looks bright, it likely will not be at the expense of other already established import strongholds. “Texas will be an important state for imports,” says Robles. “The state holds a necessary location for the importation of product from Mexico. However, all entry points continue to be important. It is highly doubtful Texas will be able to provide specialized items attained in the California market, such as cactus pears, cactus leaf, epazote, huauzontle, xoconostle, habaneros, red fresnos, jicama, fresh garbanzo and others.”

pb





MARKETING CHILEAN FRUIT

New varieties and growth will keep the U.S. consumer happy year-round.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER

Customers expect to find their favorite fruits on supermarket shelves on a year-round basis. Imports from Chile during the winter months helps to make this possible. In fact, North America is this South American country's largest export market, with a growth of 3.1 percent in tonnage last season, according to data supplied by the San Carlos, CA-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA). The remainder of Chilean products are shipped to Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

"North American retailers have been buying Chilean products to satisfy consumer demand when domestic products are not available due to seasonality," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, N.A., Inc., headquartered in Coral Gables, FL.

What's more, and in keeping with a greater demand by consumers for organics, some regions in Chile are now pre-cleared for shipping organically grown fruits to the

United States, according to Eric Coty, executive director of South American imports for the Oppenheimer Group, in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. "Chilean growers face the same challenges as potential organic growers everywhere: finding the balance between the investment involved in becoming certified to grow a lower yielding product with the possible returns."

The main fruits imported into the United States from Chile during the 2015-16 season were grapes (39 percent), citrus (24 percent), apples (13 percent), stone fruit (9 percent), blueberries (8 percent), kiwifruit (3 percent), Hass avocados (2 percent), pears (2 percent) and cherries (1 percent), according to the Fruit Exporters Association of Chile (ASOEX), in Santiago. Of these, some of the more popular fruits shipped mainly during the winter months are grapes, stone fruit, blueberries and cherries.

GRAPES

"We see volume sales of Chilean grapes during the winter on par with California fruit

during the summer," says Will Wedge, owner of Will's Shop'n Save, in Dover Foxcroft, ME, and former director of produce for Hannaford Supermarkets, a 179-store chain headquartered in Scarborough, ME. "That's because of the high quality and high brix of the Chilean grapes and seamless transition between countries."

Chile is the Southern Hemisphere's export leader in table grapes, with 47 percent of the country's crop shipped to North America.

"Chile was way off last season in grapes due to weather conditions," says John Pandol, director of special projects for Pandol Bros. Inc. in Delano, CA. "We think there will be about 10 percent more grapes and for North America about 15 percent more. The bigger 'slice of the pie' is largely a strong U.S. dollar and weakness in some other markets."

Importers are expecting a five- to 10-day earlier start to Chilean grapes this season.

"Pending vessel schedules to North America, we should have Chilean grapes into U.S. and Canadian retailers for the important

December holiday season,” says Coty.

A federal marketing order requires all imported grapes to meet U.S. No. 1 standards by April 10.

“The focus at the end of the Chilean deal is on red grapes such as Crimsons, because we have confidence of achieving U.S. No. 1 at this time,” says Brad Cantwell, vice president of sales for the Dole Fresh Fruit Co. Inc. in Westlake Village, CA.

Development of new grape varieties to be grown in Chile has been slower than what has occurred in California or Peru, says Steve Monson, category manager for sourcing, at Robinson Fresh, in Eden Prairie, MN. “Chile has been very careful to test varieties to make sure they will make sense from an economic standpoint. Many of the new grape varieties that work well in California and Peru do not work well in Chile. We have seen an increase over the past two to three years with the testing of a limited production of some new red and green seedless varieties in Chile. While mass production is still many years away, we should see limited volume of these new varieties over the next one to two years.”

“This season, consumers at store level will start to see small volumes of new grape varieties such as those of the Candy flavor lines, and new red varieties where the size, crunchiness and flavor are much better than the old varieties,” explains Victor Arriagada, general manager for Fresno, CA-based Summit Produce, the U.S. arm of large Chilean exporter, Gesex. “We have been participating in several breeding programs in California, Spain, Israel, South Africa and Chile to find the right varieties for our production conditions and final market requirements.”

New varieties and packaging can help imported grapes compete during February to

“This season, consumers at store level will start to see small volumes of new grape varieties such as those of the Candy flavor lines, and new red varieties where the size, crunchiness and flavor are much better than the old varieties.”

— Victor Arriagada, Summit Produce

May, a highly competitive timeframe for the snacking fruit category, says Gina Garven, director of sourcing for Robinson Fresh. “One way to make grapes more convenient for consumers is through packaging.”

For the first time this season and due to customer demand, Robinson Fresh will pack 1.5-pound fixed-weight bags of grapes in Chile.

BLUEBERRIES

The majority — nearly 70 percent — of Chile’s fresh blueberry exports are destined for North America.

“We’ve seen tremendous growth in fresh blueberry exports from Chile,” says Karen Brux, CFFA managing director for North America. “In just seven years, fresh blueberry exports have risen by 119 percent, from 41,532 tons in 2008-09 to 91,038 tons in 2015-16. The estimate for 2016-17 is around 94,000 tons, about a 3 percent increase over last season.”

Chilean blueberry growers are shifting to newer varieties in search for better shelf life, taste and productivity, according to Lorenzo Venezian, president and chief executive for Berry Fresh LLC, in Dominguez Hills, CA. “Due to level of competitiveness, older varieties and poor quality fruit have already been taken out of the market. Transitioning to newer

varieties is an ongoing process that has been happening for some time with a more generalized impact at the consumer level to be seen in the years to come.”

Among the company’s biggest efforts, adds Venezian, are advising retailers on the correct pack sizes and opportunity for successful promotions. “Thus, we see some retailers carrying at least two pack sizes and promoting from the end of December through February,” he says.

The retailers who are most successful with their Chilean blueberry promotions are the ones who get most creative, says Brux. “One retail customer built a blueberry display with a Willy Wonka theme. Remember the girl in the movie who turned into a giant blueberry? In store, retailers had a likeness of her floating above the display with little Oompa Loompas marching around it. It was definitely eye-catching, and it generated double-digit sales increases.”

STONE FRUIT

Last season, Chile shipped 63,204 tons of stone fruit to North America between November and April, up 2.6 percent from the prior season, according to ASOEX data. Nectarines represented 38.6 percent, followed by plums at 35.7 percent and peaches at 25.7 percent.

This season, according to Summit Produce’s Arriagada, parent company Gesex will have new lines of nectarines, red fleshed plums and flat peaches.

“Stone fruit was one of the highlights of last year’s Chilean season. More retailers than ever promoted it to their customers. In-store demos and contests took place during February and March,” says Brux.

However, according to Brux, considerable retail education is still needed. “There are still some retailers who don’t carry stone fruit during the winter months because they don’t feel the fruit is juicy or flavorful enough. Earlier this year, we ran first-time-ever peach demos at a major national club store. Even though there was a display of considerable size, many

■ SHIPPING TRENDS & HANDLING TIPS

The Chilean industry, say importers, is continually looking for better, faster, eco-logic and cheaper ways of transporting fruit to market.

“With the widening of the Panama Canal, which will allow larger ocean vessels to travel through, we might see a shift from break bulk shipments to more container shipments from Chile,” says Steve Monson of Robinson Fresh. While there is no guarantee this will happen, in discussion with a few Chilean growers/exporters, they did indicate it was possible over the next three to five years to see a transition to more container shipments to

the United States during the Chilean grape season.

Container shipments allow shippers to better maintain the optimal temperature and therefore fruit quality.

“On the handling side, cold chain control and distribution center rotation are by far the most important effort we try and transmit to our customers. We also educate about quality control aspects to highlight what issues or defects they should focus on to avoid poor consumer experiences,” says Lorenzo Venezian, president and chief executive for Berry Fresh LLC, in Dominguez Hills, CA. **pb**



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consumers just walked by it and headed to the customary winter fruits. Of those who tried the peaches, most were pleasantly surprised and bought a large clamshell. This coming season, if we can deliver that same quality, I expect we'll see more retailers carrying and promoting Chilean stone fruit. Chile's quality has been improving year on year, plus many retailers are bringing in 'jet fresh' or airfreighted stone fruit to deliver the best eating fruit to their shoppers."

CHERRIES

Chile is the world's largest exporter of cherries in terms of value, with 86 percent of the crop headed to Asia and China, although volumes during the 2015-16 season decreased 19 percent mainly due to freeze and spring rains, according to Brux.

"Rains in mid-October generated estimated losses of 15 percent of the Chilean cherry crop, affecting mainly early varieties. The outcome of this situation for the U.S. market is probably similar overall volumes to last year or around 1 million (11-pound) cartons," says Arriagada.

Some fruits warrant specific handling. For example, says Oppenheimer's Coty, "Some stone fruit from Chile is tree-ripened, meaning it matures longer on the tree before harvest and then air-freighted to the market under special protocols. This fruit typically commands a higher price and delivers a better eating experience. It's important that store-level employees recognize the difference and can explain this to shoppers."

SUMMER IN WINTER MERCHANDISING

Chilean products such as stone fruits can add a taste of summer to the Produce Department in the winter, says Brux. "There's not a great variety of fruits available during the winter months, so Chilean stone fruit, for example, if displayed in a prominent position, will grab shoppers' attention and pull them into the department. Retailers can use distinctive varieties, like the lemon plum, which is unique to Chile, to draw attention to the category and samples will generate purchases."

Coty says one way retailers can educate customers about where fruits, traditionally considered for warm weather eating, come from during the cold months is to use point-of-sale and social media posts showcasing the story of the grower and the pristine beauty of Chile. "Adding a 'human' touch tends to minimize the miles in the mind of the shopper and engage a connection with the grower," says Coty.

"As for display at retail, we recommend



bright, festive displays focusing on the abundant harvest Chile has to offer the United States," says Megan Schulz, director of communications for the Giumarra Companies, headquartered in Los Angeles.

When it comes to display size, Pandol Bros.' Pandol says, "The golden rule of 'never build a display bigger than can be maintained' is especially critical in the winter. One must be more thoughtful about non-refrigerated secondary displays. If I could wave a magic wand and make the department 20 percent smaller in winter and add an extra helper to tidy up displays, that would be the approach."

Del Monte's Christou encourages retailers to develop secondary displays at checkout. "We find this helps to generate impulse buys and definitely plays a beneficial role in cross-merchandising. Whether the display is near the checkout lanes or next to a specific product that pairs well with Chilean fruit, our secondary display program has proven to be a success."

Attractive pricing is a potent tool to move Chilean fruit in the winter.

"Fifty-eight percent of shoppers buy grapes at least once a week, with price being the number one purchase motivator. We've started seeing retailers run 'per pound' advertisements on fixed-weight items to create a low-price perception. It's likely that we'll continue to see advertising pricing get creative as our retailers introduce packaged items into their promotional mix to differentiate themselves," says Robinson Fresh's Garven.

Beyond price, some retailers get creative with promotions. For example, last season, General Produce, a Sacramento, CA-based produce distributor that handles retail services for chain stores, independent markets, warehouse stores, specialty retailers and military commissaries in four western states, ran a

two-week promotion inviting followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to show favorite ways to enjoy Chilean blueberries. The winner won a Fitbit fitness tracker.

"We were looking for ways to engage both consumers and industry on social media and what better product to do it than with Chilean blueberries, which in season, are a demand item with great versatility and promotional qualities," says Linda Luka, director of marketing and communications.

"We also ran blueberries in retail ads, merchandised them on end caps, displayed Chilean blueberry point-of-sale materials and had ad cards, recipes and in-store demos. As a result, we had great success in increased case movement over the prior year, fun social media engagement and a lift in our digital branding," adds Luka.

The CFFA, which assisted General Produce with its promotion, is an excellent resource for promotional assistance. For example, the Association produces a brochure with a chart of what's available from Chile and when. In 2016-17, the CFFA will continue its successful partnership with Tajin, a chili-lime seasoning produced by Tajin International Corp., in Houston.

This year, the Chilean Blueberry Committee is partnering with U.S. Marketing Services, Tucson, AZ, to monitor blueberries at the retail level from November through March. Committee members will visit key regional and national retail chains in Boston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Sacramento, Toronto and Montreal.

Information gathered will include everything from pack sizes, price, country of origin and brand, to size of display, positioning in the produce department and types of blueberries (conventional and/or organic) sold. **pb**

FLORIDA **STRAWBERRY** REPORT

Despite challenges, Florida's strawberry business is growing.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER

A week without strawberries is a time of lost sales for the produce department. After all, berries are the No. 1 fruit category in dollar sales, according to the *2015 Fresh Produce Report*, published by Bakersfield, CA-based Gruszka Consulting, with Fresh-Look Marketing/Information Resources data ending Dec. 27, 2015.

Strawberries represent the largest slice of the berry category pie. While California supplies the United States with approximately 89 percent of this sweet red berry, it is Florida that corners the market from November to March. This fact has earned the Sunshine State's Plant City the title of "Winter Strawberry Capitol of the World."

"What Florida does for retailers in New England is to help us provide our customers with a seamless supply of fresh strawberries of very high quality, excellent size, color and flavor," says Will Wedge, owner of Will's Shop'n Save, in Dover Foxcroft, ME, and former director of produce for Hannaford Supermarkets, a 179-store chain headquartered in Scarborough, ME.

THE INDUSTRY

Florida is the second-largest U.S. supplier of strawberries, with nearly 11,000 acres in cultivation producing a farm-gate value of approximately \$400 million and total economic contribution of about \$1 billion, according to the article, *Top Challenges Facing the Florida Strawberry Industry: Insights from a Comprehensive Industry Survey*, published in Nov. 2015



PHOTO COURTESY OF C&D FRUIT & VEGETABLE CO.

by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Services, Gainesville, FL. The state typically produces around 40 million flats of eight 1-pound clamshells of strawberries during its season.

"We're seeing more and more consolidation," says Sue Harrell, marketing director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA), in Plant City. "Not as far as big companies buying growers out, but the large farm families buying out smaller ones. Our strawberry industry here in Florida is made up of third- and fourth-generation farmers. Not only do they grow strawberries, but spring vegetables as well."

Last year's season presented challenges when an extraordinarily warm December halted the flowering cycle of the plants, thus creating an unprecedented supply gap in January and February. This pushed the season late, which resulted in devastating returns for grower's industry-wide. This, along with a damaging freeze in 2010, are weather exceptions rather than the rule during Florida's strawberry harvest, say growers.

"I'm optimistic this season we will have more consistent and regular volume for retail promotion from mid-December through all of March," says Vince Lopes, the Salinas, CA-based vice president of West Coast sales



for Naturipe Farms LLC, headquartered in Estero, FL.

Florida growers started harvesting strawberries in early November ramping up to truckload volumes by month-end.

“The first peak is typically mid- to late December, with retail promotional opportunities for the holidays,” says Gary Wishnatzki, president, chief executive and owner of Wish Farms, a 1922-established operation in Plant City, with growers located along a 100-mile stretch down the southwest side of the state.

The second — and major peak — availability of Florida strawberries comes in January and February, according to Jim Grabowski, director of marketing for Watsonville, CA-based Well-Pict Inc. “We pick in Florida as long as we can, although by the end of March we’re usually winding down the Florida deal and transitioning to California.”

The weather determines the true end of Florida’s strawberry season.

“If we have a mild March, with temperatures in the 50s and 70s, then we can maintain excellent quality into April,” says Shawn Pollard, sales manager at Astin Strawberry Exchange, in Plant City, one of the largest operations in the state with 1,400 acres.

While the California industry is made up of nearly 100 percent proprietary varieties, according to Grabowski, this isn’t the case in Florida. “We’ve tried California proprietary varieties in Florida, and it hasn’t worked out well; we haven’t found a proprietary variety yet that grows well in Florida. Our grower

primarily grows the Radiance.”

Florida’s climate and season is much different than that of California, therefore research by the University of Florida has come up with competitive varieties for the Sunshine State, according to the FSGA’s Harrell. “We grow mostly Radiance and a small percentage of FL 127.”

FL 127 is a cultivar released from the University of Florida in 2013 and is marketed



Tom O'Brien, president of C&D Fruit & Vegetable Co.

as the Sensation. The Sensation has WinterStar parentage.

“The Sensation is the newer variety and produces a nice size, very sweet berry with good shelf life,” says Tom O’Brien, president of C&D Fruit & Vegetable Co., Bradenton, FL.

Many Florida growers cultivate a mix of varieties.

“Most of our acreage is Radiance, which has good flavor and shape, but can vary in size during the season. Sensation holds its size, shape and sugars throughout the season and we’ve started planting it more heavily. We also have a little acreage of WinterStar. It doesn’t quite have the yield of the other two, but it has a deep red color and holds its sugars well. These three lead the charge for us,” says Wish Farm’s Wishnatzki.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

In 2013, Florida strawberry growers were asked by researchers at the UF/IFAS, in cooperation with the FSGA, to rank the top challenges of the industry for the November 2015 published article, *Top Challenges Facing the Florida Strawberry Industry: Insights from a Comprehensive Industry Survey*. The top three were Mexican competition, government regulation and compliance requirements, and labor shortages.

“Mexico has become our biggest competitor due to cheaper labor and few regulations,” says C&D’s O’Brien.

According to the article, fresh strawberry imports to the United States reached a record

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Harvest CROO Robotics, Tampa, FL, has developed a strawberry picking robot that crawls through the fields and harvests fruit based on an advanced vision system.

351 million pounds in 2012, almost exclusively from Mexico (99.7 percent). This sizable import volume depresses the market price and squeezes market share and profit margin of Florida strawberries.

“Mexico is a growing problem because they are in the market at the same time as us,” says Jake Raburn, director of marketing for Hinton Farms in Plant City. “Acreage in Mexico continues to increase, but what we continue to see is confidence by consumers and retailers in U.S.-grown product. Plus, we can get berries to the market faster and with less freight cost than Mexico.”

Strawberry growers rely on migrant workers, most of whom hail from Mexico, to harvest their crops. Tougher U.S. immigration laws and improved economic opportunities in Mexico have decreased the migrant labor supply in Florida, according to the article. One grower has seen this challenge as an opportunity.

“We are three years away from commercialization of a strawberry picking robot,” says Wish Farms’ Wishnatzki, who is also co-founder of the four-year-old company, Harvest CROO Robotics, based in Tampa, FL. “This is a mobile platform that crawls through the fields day and night, with downtime during the heat of the day. It gently and selectively harvests fruit based on an advanced vision system. The platform has multiple picking heads and can pick 25 acres over a three-day period.”

Wishnatzki foresees the advent of robotics as leading the industry away from a traditional

“We are three years away from commercialization of a strawberry picking robot. This is a mobile platform that crawls through the fields day and night, with downtime during the heat of the day.”

— Gary Wishnatzki, Wish Farms

one-piece clamshell to a two-piece package with a film lid, a move that could potentially reduce use of plastic by up to 30 percent.

One of Florida’s biggest opportunities lies in its relatively close proximity to a sizable portion of the U.S. market.

“About half the crop is sold in Florida; we have a strong local customer base. The rest we ship primarily east of the Mississippi and to eastern Canada. However, we have sold our strawberries into Texas and even Colorado,” says Wishnatzki.

Florida strawberries arrive in the Northeast in a day-and-a-half compared to up to five days from California, says Will’s Shop’n Save’s Wedge. “This makes a quicker turnaround from field to fork.”

Florida growers are trialing technology to prolong the shelf life of berries by reducing

mold and fungal growth. The tool involves a sachet-like pouch adding during packaging.

‘BERRY’ GOOD RETAILING

Successful retail merchandising of Florida strawberries begins with sourcing.

“Buyers should talk to Florida salesmen daily to ensure product and availability. Early in our season fruit supplies may be tight. Holiday shipping may be interrupted due to truck scheduling. The weather also may play a key role as to shipments arriving on time,” says FSGA’s Harrell.

Correct temperature plays a key role in quality.

“We maintain the cold chain from our cooler to your stores,” says C&D’s O’Brien.

Display strawberries in refrigeration at store-level for best shelf life and quality, growers recommend.

At Publix Super Markets, a Lakeland, FL-headquartered chain with 1,131-stores in six southeastern U.S. states, “Florida strawberries are merchandised within the produce department, while there are also secondary displays in the stores — whether in our front lobby displays or perhaps in the bakery near our delicious angel food cake. We encourage our managers to be creative,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations.

Harrell recommends retailers tout the nutritional benefits of Florida strawberries by cross-merchandising with commodities such as salad greens, and including recipes at point-of-sale. The Association offers recipes on its website. This is an especially good theme in January, when consumers are making New Year’s resolutions to eat more healthfully.

“Once we get to March, I believe California can complement Florida with 1-pound Florida strawberries on display with 2-pound California product co-merchandised. It’s a great way to set up for the transition to spring berries from the West,” says Naturipe’s Lopes.

This season, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ (FDACS) marketing and development division in Tallahassee, FL, working with the FSGA, will undertake a new \$400,000 promotional campaign for the state’s grown strawberries. The campaign will include television advertising in the Florida market in January and February, outdoor billboard advertising in January, and digital and social media messaging reinforced with digital buys and retail e-coupons. The integrated message, touting keywords like fresh, local and delicious, includes signage on supermarket shopping carts.

“The idea is to not only remind people that



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strawberries are in season, but also about their health benefits, the industry's growers and to drive consumers in-store to buy," says Jackie Moalli, the FDACS's senior marketing and development manager. "After all, strawberries are Florida's first winter crop and they, like other of the state's crops, have a tight selling window."

Last month, FSGA launched its new website. The site is consumer focused, with information on the season, grower members with photos and recipes to share.

"The new site's social media campaign will focus on industry events, farm community events, our growers, our partnering with the local restaurants and getting the word out about Florida strawberries. Our new tagline

"We also advertise our Florida strawberries with in-store signage, as well as ad support in our weekly flier and radio and billboard spots."

— Maria Brous, Publix

is a 'Taste of Florida Sunshine all Winter Long'," says Harrell.

Local is an important promotional theme at Publix Super Markets.

"We promote our Florida strawberries and their growers, recipes and nutritional information through our 'At Season's Peak' program. We also advertise our Florida strawberries with in-store signage and ad support in our weekly flier, and radio and billboard spots. While we source fruits and vegetables year-round, we always try to source locally first — and local to us means sourcing our products first in the states in which we operate," says Brous.

Beyond local, winter holidays are potent themes for promoting Florida strawberries.

"New England retailers depend on Florida growers for strawberries for Valentine's Day promotions. It's a holiday in which we see a huge spike in sales," says Will's Shop'n Save's Wedge. **pb**



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Finding Boston Commonalities In A Diverse Market

RESILIENT COMPANIES IN THE BOSTON AREA SERVE THE NEEDS OF BOTH NEW AND OLD WORLD CLIENTS AMID AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE MARKETPLACE.

By Jodean Robbins

Historical Boston was a meeting of worlds with immigrants from the old countries paving the way for a brave future in the new. Boston's crossroads served to promote innovative and even rebellious ideas, an environment remaining today as evidenced by the city's diverse retail and restaurant sectors.

Case in point, according to Chain Store Guide's *Retail Market Share Report*, the area's largest portion of retail market share is held not by a major corporate conglomerate, but by hold-out independent DeMoulas Market Basket — with 24 percent of the retail market. However, corporate chains Stop & Shop and Albertsons/Shaw's follow closely on DeMoulas's heels with 19.5 percent and 11.8 percent, respectively. Though these three chains together control half the market share, the rest is divided among more than 17 other retail formats, including superstores, club stores, smaller inde-



BOSTON MARKET PROFILE

pendent chains, dollar stores and corner stores.

“Chains are growing and there is probably more consolidation coming,” says Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustis Co. “Yet, Boston remains a diverse retail arena. The independent grocers are doing well because they concentrate on what they do best. The Old World corner stores are still a key part of the business. They have carved out a niche.”

As well, Boston’s foodservice scene is punctuated with a cross-section of restaurants, according to Glenn Messinger, general

“The backbone of our market business is everyone all together. The diversity of customers is our stability.”

— Jackie Piazza, Community-Suffolk

manager of Baldor Boston LLC. “The food-service climate in Boston is very diverse,” he says. “There is great variety — from white tablecloth to fast-casual — in this city. Boston’s restaurant industry is strong and we anticipate

continued growth.”

Dominic Joseph Cavallaro III, general manager in charge of sales at John Cerasuolo Co. Inc., agrees there is a lot going on in Boston. “Many new buildings are being constructed and a casino is coming in the next couple of years,” he says. “We anticipate this continued development will stimulate the food business and our market will continue to get a piece of it.”

Within this dynamic marketplace, business at the New England Produce Center remains stable. “We continue doing business as usual,” reports Sharrino. “Our market merchants continue having day-to-day success. This market has been here almost 50 years now, and we’re not going anywhere soon. We continue to look for ways to position ourselves for a sustainable future.”

The market’s varied customer base serves to sustain business. “This market is really a mix of both old and new worlds,” says Jackie Piazza, citrus sales at Community-Suffolk. “The backbone of our market business is everyone all together. The diversity of customers is our stability.”


Boston’s location provides certain advantages in serving a wide geographic customer base and remaining relevant. “Our market has a broad reach,” says Gene Fabio, president of J. Bonafede Co. Inc. “We go to Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and upstate New York. The regional nature of our business is what has sustained us.”

Changes in smaller wholesale markets has helped support Boston’s business. “Up until 10 years ago we had other smaller regional markets competing with us, but they are now gone,” says John Bonafede, chairman of J. Bonafede. “Their disappearance has made us stronger.”

Merchants credit the market’s location with pushing them to be better at what they do. “We have to be good at what we do because Boston is the furthest market from the biggest shipping points,” says Steven Piazza, president and treasurer at Community-Suffolk Inc. “The people and companies who have survived here are good at what they do.”

DRIVING CHANGE

Several key trends drive evolution in the Boston marketplace, including the increasing



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J. Bonafede Co. Inc. – Butch Fabio, Gene Fabio and John Bonafede

knowledge of customers and consumers. “Today’s consumers are so much more food savvy and knowledgeable than in the past,” says Messinger. “They have higher expectations for fresh, heirloom, local. We are pushed to continue to meet these expectations.”

Restaurants are also evolving from a starched environment to a broader philosophy. “Everything now is farm-to-table, sustainable, local,” says Messinger. “Those are words you

didn’t hear five years ago. The classically trained chef idea is also gone. Now we more commonly see chefs with tattoos of pig parts. This is the New Age chef — the old guard chef coming in with his whites and hat is less common.”

Increasingly, Messinger sees food establishments trending toward streamlined, easily implemented concepts. “We’re seeing restaurateurs trying to do more manageable things,” says Messinger. “Fast-casual is popular. With

increased staffing issues, restaurant owners and operators are looking for easy-to-staff concepts, yet still produce good food.”

The marketplace’s staunch competition pushes smaller retailers to develop niches. “Smaller retail stores can have a tough time trying to compete with bigger stores,” says Jim Ruma, president of Ruma Fruit & Produce Co. “The smaller stores have to be more creative to keep the customer.”

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Buying habits on the wholesale market demonstrate change as well. “We see more ordering ahead of time instead of buyers getting up early and walking the market,” says Cavallo. “More buyers are ordering the night before via email or text. However, independent smaller retailers still come in and shop. The ethnic, corner store buyers are hard negotiators, pay cash and come early in the morning — more like the old school.”

OLD WORLD WITH NEW MANAGEMENT

Boston merchants report Old World-type business — the Mom & Pops and the corner ethnic stores — still represent significant clients, but in a new way. “A reasonable percentage of our business caters to Old World-style companies, but the people in these Old World formats are new,” says Fabio. “Now,

our customers include Chinese, Cambodian and Dominicans — those are the people forming the small corner stores. Sometimes these businesses get larger, but their roots come from one store.”

Garden Fresh Salad Co. Inc., catering to a clientele of about 20 percent of the Old World format, has also witnessed this changing of the guard. “Rather than the old Italian stores, now you see Central American or Asian stores,” says Patrick Burke, co-owner. “They’re still serving the local neighborhood; it’s just that the demographics have changed.”

“These customers cater specifically to their neighborhood. They are wonderful; very hard working and honest.”

— Steven Piazza, Community-Suffolk

Approximately 20 to 25 percent of Community-Suffolk’s business caters to the single store, family style business — a format conducive to what the wholesale market offers. “A lot of these stores are owned by newer immigrants, including Mexican, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Eastern Europeans,” says Steven Piazza. “They’ve picked up 5,000- to 15,000-foot stores in the city and they shop the market every day. They don’t have a warehouse, so they’re looking for the benefit we provide in storing product.”

Merchants credit these customers with niche marketing expertise and loyal business sense. “These customers cater specifically to their neighborhood,” says Steven Piazza. “They

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are wonderful customers; very hard working and honest. And, as they grow we've seen them working together to combine buying power and make bigger purchases."

TAILORING PRODUCT MIX

The diversity of Boston's Old World meets new marketplace means balancing the needs of both. "We modify our buying with what we are selling," says Steven Piazza. "A good salesman

knows what the product mix should be, given customer demand. We want a good mix to fit the various needs of our diverse customers, from the chain retailer to the restaurateur to the cash and carry."

One notable shift in the market is the increase in variety in most houses. "It used to be everyone specialized in something," says Maurice Crafts, sales for Coosemans Boston. "Now, everybody sells whatever they can to

get more business with the same customer. For example, just about everybody now sells avocados."

Steven Piazza notes the supply chain has become more challenging and also affects the players in the market. "There are fewer individual houses, but they're bigger," he says. "Between the food safety requirements and the cost of doing business, you need tremendous volume to be successful these days. It has eliminated a lot of the businesses previously just selling one item."

"Now, everybody sells whatever they can to get more business with the same customer."

— Maurice Crafts, Coosemans Boston

With the explosion of Boston's ethnic demographic comes increased demand for more tropical and exotic products. Bonafede now carries more exotics. "Twenty years ago, mangos were not a big thing and Hass avocados came in limited amount in trays from California," says Fabio. "Now we handle truckloads of each."

According to Bonafede of J. Bonafede, bananas are still the company's largest item. "They represent about half our business," he says. "The other main tropicals we sell include mangos, avocados and pineapples."

Sharrino of Eaton & Eustis points out this transition is nothing new. "When immigrants came from Italy early in the 20th century, broccoli rabe and many Italian items were specialty, then they became mainstream," he says. "Many previously specialty items are now mainstream.

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Coosemans Boston – Doug Gordon, John Monahan and Maurice Crafts

Garlic and ginger have exploded, for example.”

On top of the ethnic demand, health and gourmet trends also drive greater variety. “It’s no longer a meat and potatoes business,” says Sharrino. “TV food shows and the internet result in a more educated consumer, thus changing the marketplace.”

Baldor’s Messinger observes the explosion

“Decades ago, customers bought what we had; now they look online and ask for what they want.”

— Maurice Crafts, Coosemans Boston

of variety on restaurant menus. “Staples such as onions, potatoes and carrots are always going to be part of a menu,” he states. “But, we probably sell more romaine and spring mix now than iceberg, as well as great volume in micro-greens and exotic mushrooms.”

Eaton & Eustis sells more year-round volume in dried fruit and nuts. “Years ago, after Christmas you couldn’t give dried fruit away,” says Sharrino. “Now we have steady volume year-round.”

Unique products such as fiddlehead ferns and wild Maine blueberries are highlights of Ruma Fruit & Produce’s business. “We’ve seen new items, especially in organic and specialty products increase tenfold,” says Ruma. “Thirty years ago, no one heard of a fiddlehead fern, now they’re in high demand in when in season.”

Jackie Piazza of Community-Suffolk points to cactus pear as an example of this increased unique demand. “Ten years ago, I wouldn’t have sold it if you gave it to me,” he recounts. “Now, we move about 200 to 300 cases a week.”

Coosemans has seen an increase in customers requesting specific products, for example Australian blood oranges. “With the internet, customers are asking for a lot of different products,” says Crafts. “Decades ago, customers bought what we had; now they look online and ask for what they want.”

ADDING VALUE

Boston merchants seek to add value in

several ways, one of which includes capitalizing on the brand awareness of customers. “Boston in general is brand-oriented,” says Jackie Piazza. “Customers want the consistency and reliability brands represent. Also, customers report that consumer advertising of some brands helps build demand, for example Halos.”

Cavallaro at John Cerasuolo agrees his customers want particular brands. “They may

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Community-Suffolk – Jackie Piazza



Ruma Fruit & Produce Co. Inc. – Jim Ruma



Eaton & Eustis Co. – Anthony Sharrino



Community-Suffolk – Tommy Piazza and Steven Piazza



Garden Fresh Salad Co. – Patrick Burke and John Whitney

shy away from a no-name brand, even if it's really good," he states. "Sometimes price is a factor, but especially supermarket buyers are label-oriented."

Yet, options are important, even among brand-demand when serving a diverse clientele. "Each of our divisions offers a top-line label and a value label," explains Steven Piazza. "The chain stores might want a Dole label, but the cash-and-carry trade might be looking for something less than perfect to sell at a certain price point."

Burke notes the importance of the food safety aspects of branding. "Our brand represents what we do in the food safety area," he says. "We have a lot more requests for the outside audits we do every year and letters of guarantee. Since we're a processor, we've always had this, but now we see more customers asking questions and demanding more information."

Boston companies also provide value added via packaging. Ruma has introduced a beneficial packaging for fiddlehead ferns. "It's a new 8-ounce tray for the fiddlehead with an overwrap," he says. "This allows shoppers to

just pick up the tray instead of sifting through the fiddleheads with their hands. Customers prefer it rather than think other customers

"Sometimes price is a factor, but supermarket buyers are label-oriented."

— Dominic Joseph Cavallaro III, John Cerasuolo

have rummaged through the product. It also helps retail lower shrink."

In another innovative packaging move, Ruma is packaging its Nova Scotia blueberries using the pulp pint with a plastic lid. "On the top of the lid, we put a label with origin and information," says Ruma. "The plastic lid fits on top of the pint. It looks more sustainable and farm-driven than the typical clamshell."

Garden Fresh's Burke perceives the trend, whether wholesale or processed, continues to lean toward packaged. "Less and less volume is

sold loose," he says. "It must be broken down or packaged, or ready-to-go. Romaine hearts are more popular than a whole head of romaine, for example. We're even seeing peeled and diced pumpkin on the rise."

As well, Cavallaro notices the shift toward convenience. "The days of buying whole butternut and peeling it are over," he states. "Customers increasingly want cut and peeled."

ADDED SERVICE

With the changes in Boston's diverse customer base, wholesalers have also changed to address evolving customer needs. Community-Suffolk provides some cross-docking and warehousing for its customers. "We work with customers to meet their specific needs," says Steven Piazza. "We would rather be involved at the infancy and stay involved than play catch-up."

Ruma provides delivery and consolidation services for its clients. "Service is crucial," says Ruma. "If a store is out of product for whatever reason, they need the service we offer. One call and we solve their problem."

“You either deliver or you don’t get the sale.”

— Jackie Piazza, Community-Suffolk

Community-Suffolk also delivers to customers. “You either deliver or you don’t get the sale,” says Jackie Piazza. “We have been operating our own trucks and drivers for about 10 years now, but each year we see increasing demand for this service.”

Though the vast majority of Bonafede’s business is still pick-up, it operates trucks and delivers to about four or five customers. “A lot of customers don’t even walk the market anymore,” says Fabio. “They’re looking for additional service from us.”

Baldor often runs second deliveries to meet its customer needs. “We are extremely service oriented,” states Messinger.

Pre-conditioning of fruit is another developing service. Bonafede pre-conditions avocados and mangos. “We ripen some mangos for customers who have shoppers wanting a mango with a little give,” says Fabio. “Their shoppers are more likely to shop every day



Baldor Boston – Glenn Messinger, Teddy Ceasar and Stephen Kostinden

or more days a week than the typical American consumer. They want produce closer to consumption than the standard supermarket fare.”

One service aspect that has not changed in the past 50 years is the buying and selling between merchants on the market. “There is certainly still buying and selling between market houses here,” says Fabio. “If you’re

making a sale, and you don’t have enough of the item, you must buy from your competitors. You win, the competitor wins, the customer wins and the market wins. It helps everyone when you buy something and sell outside the market. It strengthens everyone’s hand.”

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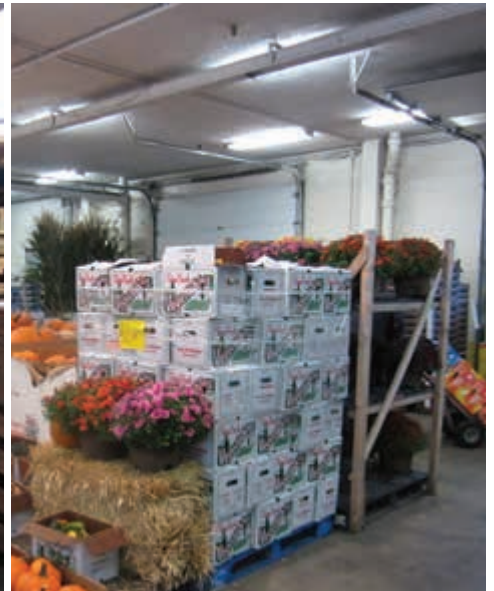
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keep facilities up-to-date and particularly focused on meeting food safety guidelines. “We are doing our best to maintain and upgrade,” says Eaton’s Sharrino. “We have new projects coming up, including new water pipes, paving and lighting. We’re going on 50 years and we continuously work to upgrade our facility.”

Adam Strock, food safety director for S. Strock & Co. Inc. recognizes how all business decisions are filtered through the lens of food safety. “Food safety has been at the forefront of the produce industry, leading companies to adopt the food safety standards benchmarked by the Global Food Safety Initiative,” he says. “We’re proud to have achieved certification for our food safety program under the PrimusGFS

audit scheme.”

Community-Suffolk also takes pride in its GAP certification and other progressive food safety and quality steps. “It can be a challenge to make the changes necessary to move into the future from a facilities standpoint,” says Steven Piazza. “We are paying more attention to detail, such as checking seals and temperature when trucks come in. We’re keeping dry and wet products separate. Everything is computerized and every ticket has a number so there is full traceability.”

Modern technology has transformed the business in a multitude of ways, according to Strock. “These include handling complex orders with ease and lot tracking inventory

for traceability,” he says. “The convenience of taking photos, texting and emailing with a mobile phone from anywhere to anywhere has enabled instant communication throughout the supply chain.”

Bonafede has moved to computerized systems. “We have updated inventory and billing software,” says Fabio. “I can now monitor all my storage and even my warehouse refrigeration on my phone.”

Companies also harness technology for greater customer convenience. “Baldor has always been into tech, from online ordering to our website to our warehouse management system,” says Messinger. “Online has been huge for us.”

pb

The Salty Pig

BLENDING BOTH OLD AND NEW WORLD CUISINES, THE SALTY PIG COURAGEOUSLY INCORPORATES A WEALTH OF UNIQUE PRODUCE ITEMS.

By Jodean Robbins

Who knew a menu designed around pig parts could be so captivating? Apparently, Jim Cochener and Mike Moxley did when they opened The Salty Pig, a charcuterie and regional Italian cuisine-focused restaurant, in 2011. The two owners, both in their mid-40s, met at Boston College and entered the foodservice sector by owning/operating neighborhood craft-beer restaurant Common Ground 20 years ago (it was sold more than four years ago). During their friendship and restaurant ventures, they have worked their way from super-casual to smart-casual to more detail and service-oriented restaurants.

The Salty Pig unites new America with Old World cuisines and is indicative of the new Boston restaurant trend. “How its menu mixes protein and produce is inspiring,” says Glenn Messinger, general manager of Baldor Boston LLC. “This is the new type of chef who is not afraid to get out and use different items.”

Set in a trendy neighborhood at the crossroads of Boston’s Back Bay and the South End, the restaurant has an industrial feel with chalkboard walls; high, exposed ceilings; high tops and booths; and an open kitchen. Butcher-block tabletops reinforce the casual, charcuterie feeling. The restaurant seats 65 inside with an additional 50 outside on its patio during the warm months. “Besides house-made charcuterie, we focus on a stone oven pizza and handmade pasta,” relates Deirdre Auld, director of operations.

The restaurant appeals to a wide demographic, drawing a mixed crowd of young singles, older couples and even families with kids. “We have guests from all over and of all ages,” says Auld. “Our location across from the commuter rail allows us to appeal to both travelers and locals.”



Shishito Peppers



Chorizo Plate

BOSTON FOODSERVICE PROFILE

A BALANCING ACT

Though pig is its namesake, the restaurant considers produce fundamental to its cuisine. “It is super critical to us, especially as a means to balance out all the charcuterie and pig on our menu,” says Auld. “We want our food to be balanced. Produce provides this balance and helps us showcase modern interpretations of classic dishes — something we focus on.”

The Salty Pig’s menu is a complex combination, opening with focus on housemade meats and hand-selected cheeses. The charcuterie options, aptly named “Salty Pig Parts” and “Stinky Cheeses,” incorporate ample touches of produce with each dish. The Foie Gras Torchon is cider poached and utilizes pickled blueberries. The Pork Rillettes integrates grapefruit and urfa chili. An order of mixed cheese with the restaurant’s Chorizo Iberico comes artistically plated and accompanied by pickled cucumbers and fig jam.

Starters offer a local arugula salad with bresaola, citrus vinaigrette, Parmesan crema and pistachio; a Roasted Bone Marrow served with smoked spaghetti squash and local mushrooms. The House Burrata with prosciutto arrives on a refreshing bed of thin-shaved slices of cucumber, honeydew, watermelon and basil.

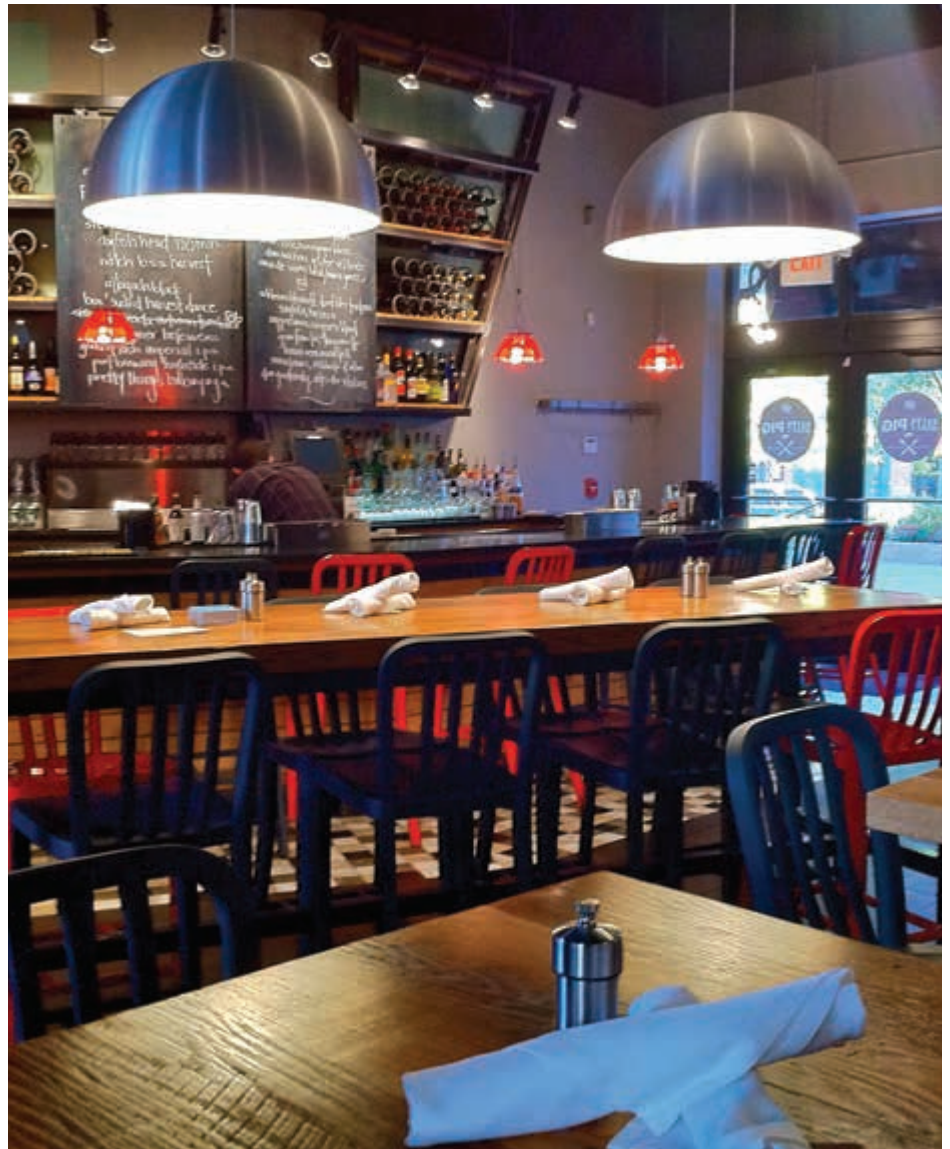
Homemade pastas and mains continue to intersect traditional flavors with unique ingredients. Rigatoni is bathed in a smoked corn crema with chorizo, wax peppers and sorrel. Bucatini features Jonah crab, slow roasted heirloom green zebra tomatoes and piri piri chili. Polenta Spin Rosso adds cranberry beans and chanterelle mushrooms. Pork Shoulder al Latte in a milk braise unites stone fruit, foraged mushrooms and preserved garlic scapes.

Sides are equally as interesting as any of the other courses. Roasted corn delightfully combines walnuts, preserved ramps and feta cheese. Charred shishito peppers mixed with garlic breadcrumbs and bottarga present a savory addition to the meal. Other unique plate additions headlining produce include Eggplant Sott’ Aceto, Fig Jam, Tomato Jam and Smoked Shallot Marmalade.

VARIETY AND QUALITY

The restaurant buys produce from a variety of sources. “We use distributors such as Baldor, as well as smaller farms and farmers markets,” says Auld. “We love to work with Stillman’s Farm (in New Braintree, MA), Siena Farms (in Sudbury, MA) and many more. It is all about quality and seasonality for us.”

Auld says the benefit of working with a distributor like Baldor is access to a wider



Salty Pig Pasta

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variety. “There is more of a guarantee product will be available,” she says. “Sometimes small farms aren’t able to provide the availability we need.”

The restaurant places great emphasis on long-standing relationships with its suppliers. “We like knowing how things are grown and cared for,” says Auld. “Our proximity to the

farms and the farmers markets, and our understanding of them, is important.”

The Salty Pig changes its menu a few items at a time every few weeks to reflect the changing seasons and availability. “Seasonality is king,” says Auld. “We want to use produce when it is fresh and able to be grown naturally throughout the year.”

pb

New Deal Fruit Inc.

AN OLD WORLD ITALIAN GROCER TAKES A PRODUCE LEGACY INTO THE FUTURE BY FOCUSING ON CUSTOMER NEEDS, QUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS.

By Jodean Robbins

The Petruzzelli family began its love affair with fresh food in the 1920s, when Sebastiano Petruzzelli sourced and sold high-quality fruits and vegetables in a horse-drawn wagon through the streets of Boston — beginning at Faneuil Hall and winding through streets as far as Waltham. Throughout the years, the Petruzzelli name became synonymous with high-quality fruits and vegetables.

In 1949, Sebastiano's son, Domenic, and his brothers started a store and wholesale business, which eventually evolved into the New Deal Fruit store. Today, Domenic's sons — Nick, Yano and Domenic Jr. — represent the fourth generation of the Petruzzelli family in carrying forth Sebastiano's legacy selling high-quality fruits and vegetables at the current New Deal location (opened in 1971).

New Deal is a modern-day food emporium with the feel of an authentic Italian market. The owners take pride in providing their diverse clientele with the highest quality produce and a dizzying array of Italian specialty products — from fresh cardone to black pasta made from squid ink to 50 varieties of cheese. The store also offers hand-sliced deli meats and oversized submarine sandwiches.

OLD WORLD FEEL

The store evokes an Old World charm, merchandising everything on open tables and racks. The atmosphere carries a warm, neighborhood feel. Customers chat happily with each other and staff as they browse and select their purchases. "We try to give customers food as good as we'd want for ourselves and our children," says Nicky Petruzzelli, co-owner and produce buyer. "We focus on serving and making a connection with customers. We treat



them like family."

Though the 6,000-square-foot store has a small footprint, its hand in the neighborhood and business is significant. "Everyone sooner or later ends up at New Deal Fruit," says Petruzzelli. "We have just about every ethnic group, every age, every income. It's a great gathering place for everyone. Our area used

to be heavily Italian demographically, but now it has diversified into many different ethnic groups. We have remained relevant to all our new customers."

New Deal aims to personally please every shopper coming through the door. "We supply what people ask for," says Petruzzelli. "We are in touch with our customers and tell them if

BOSTON RETAIL PROFILE

there is anything they don't see, please ask and we'll bring it in. Often, these requests lead us to great business. One perfect example is lychee. We had a customer ask for lychees and so I went hunting. I got them in and it turned out we couldn't keep them in the store."

Petruzzelli believes a crucial aspect of his business is that the store has a face to it. "Our customers know who the owners are and who they can talk to when they come in," he explains. "Our staff can answer any question they might have, whether it's a fresh arrival, about seasonality or just to try something they've never tried before."

PRODUCE PRIDE

The store reflects its produce roots — more than 50 percent of the physical store is produce, accounting for approximately 30 percent of overall sales. "Produce is crucial to our store and to our customers," says Petruzzelli. "Without produce you don't have everything to make a meal. And, without produce it doesn't make your store whole."

Produce is merchandised on a 45-foot display made of wooden tables positioned in the center of the store. At the far end of one side, a 50-foot wet rack with lettuce, greens, radishes and ginger calls to customers with a fresh appeal. Three to four separate island displays highlight particular seasonal or special deal produce items. The visual appeal of the displays is stunning — alternating colors and taking the use of color blocking to a whole other level.

Throughout the store, produce displays are complemented by stands of Italian gourmet specialty products. All displays are impeccably ordered and merchandised. "We merchandise many different items, but in small amounts," says Petruzzelli. "We stack in a way that doesn't hurt the product, but shows abundance."

The produce layout changes every week, according to what's on sale. The store handles hundreds of items. "We have expanded our product mix immensely," says Petruzzelli. "We are handling products we never handled before. For example, we never had avocados or even knew what cilantro was years ago; now they are staple items. Prickly pears are another great example. We maybe sold a few before, but now with our increased customer segment from the Middle East, we have a hard time keeping up with demand."

THE FRESHEST IN TOWN

Petruzzelli has stringent standards for what product makes the shelf at New Deal. "Our motto is 'The Freshest Store in Town' and we



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mean it," he says. "It's more than just a motto for us. Nothing comes in the store unless I taste it and like the way it looks. I don't care if everybody has strawberries; if it doesn't taste good, we don't carry it. Nothing gets by me unless it tastes and looks good."

New Deal sources just about 100 percent of its produce from the Boston Produce Center. "We've been dealing with people there for 50 years; we all grew up and got old together," says Petruzzelli. "We have great relationships there."

The store does have a few direct deals with local farms. "We buy direct from them and they deliver," says Petruzzelli. "On average, we buy 10 percent local during the season, depending on the weather."

The store's confidence in its produce is evidenced by constant sampling. "We sample every day," says Petruzzelli. "Often, while customers are waiting for sandwiches at our deli, we'll sample our produce. We enjoy cutting what customers are looking at and letting them try it. In this building, we don't yell at customers for trying a grape... we want them to."

Showing off the merchandise is also highly touted at New Deal. "We cut open samples and display them on top of related items," says Petruzzelli. "This way customers can see what the fruit looks like inside and smell the aroma from it."

New Deal relies mostly on its location, word of mouth and social media for promotion. "We use Facebook and other social media sites," says Petruzzelli. "We have a gigantic sign in front of the store we use to advertise all the specials. Everyone goes down this street — our location is awesome. Those are the best ways to reach our customers."

Employees at New Deal learn from hands-on experience — most have a long-term relationship with the store. "We have new employees shadow somebody until they get it," says Petruzzelli. "Most of our employees have been here so long, they are all experts in their work. Employees really don't leave our store employ unless it's time to move on in life. When they do, there is always another family member or friend ready to come in and fill that slot."

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Texas Produce Gets More Diverse Every Year

The state fills an essential role in the national food supply.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Texas is well-known as the national leader in cattle and cotton production, and a little less celebrated as No. 1 in the number of sheep and goats, and mohair production.

But the Lone Star state also harvests an abundance of produce — more than \$400 million in vegetables and a combined total of more than \$90 million in fresh fruit and vegetable exports — according to the Texas State Department of Agriculture.

“The sale of Texas produce has become more complex over the years,” says Richard De Los Santos, marketing coordinator for the Go Texan program of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) in Austin. “Meeting the needs of consumers who want a variety of products, including local and organic, makes it a challenge for producers and retailers alike.”

As tastes evolve, producers are growing kale, microgreens and organic Shiitake mushrooms.

“The demand for healthy, fresh, great-tasting and locally grown produce gets bigger and bigger in Texas,” says Dante Galeazzi, sales representative for Frontera Produce in Edinburg. “The top commodities for us over the past few years have been onions, watermelon, cabbage, cilantro and chili peppers.”

KEY PRODUCER IN WINTER MONTHS

Texas is a major supplier of grapefruit and fresh market oranges, with more than 5,000 acres of citrus; and the major producers are poised to expand.

While much of the country is covered in snow during the first few months of the year, Texas is harvesting an array of produce, including broccoli, beets, celery, Chinese Savoy,

red cabbage, spinach, kale, oranges and sweet potatoes, among others. Texas grower-shippers report increased wintertime demand, in particular, for greens.

“The main product is greens; we can’t keep up with the demand,” says Kurt Schuster, chief financial officer at Val Verde Vegetable Company in McAllen. “It really started to increase five or six years ago, around the time kale became big. The great majority of our produce leaves the state; we go all the way to Canada.”

Schuster’s family has been growing in Texas since his father, Frank Schuster Sr., arrived in the area from Austria in 1935 with nothing. During his time he built a prosperous farm — known for being on the cutting-edge of production technology — harvesting cabbage, broccoli, cucumber, onion and cantaloupe.

“November through May is when we harvest the most; February is our biggest month,” says Schuster. “People want fresh vegetables in the winter, and everyone else is frozen over.”

The variety of winter greens grown and shipped out of Texas reflects the evolving diversity of preference and taste in vegetables.

“With the recent explosion of kale, other items have worked their way to the forefront,” says Jeff Brechler, sales and production representative at J&D Produce, Edinburg. “We’re

LONE STAR CORNUCOPIA

Texas farmers have developed a long list of significant fruit and vegetable crops, as the state’s agriculture diversifies to serve both local and North American markets.

“Onions, grapefruit, oranges, cabbage, spinach, watermelon, carrots, winter greens, squash, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, pumpkins and cucumbers are the top produce commodities grown in Texas,” says Richard De Los Santos, marketing coordinator for the Go Texan program of the Texas Department of Agriculture in Austin. “The Texas Department of Agriculture has been contacted by international buyers regarding the purchase of sweet potatoes.”

Texas’ Top 10 produce commodities by acreage in 2015, according to Texas International Produce Association statistics, may include a few surprises.

1. Watermelon	29,000 acres
2. Potatoes	20,000
3. Grapefruit	17,707
4. Oranges	8,892
5. Onions	8,700
6. Cabbage	6,100
7. Sweet Corn	4,400
8. Chile Peppers	3,000
9. Spinach	2,200
10. Squash	2,100

The onion is the state’s top vegetable crop by dollar value, led by the Texas Super Sweet 1015. The Texas Ruby Red was the first grapefruit in the country granted a patent.

Green cabbage, carrots, herbs, mushrooms, turnips and greenhouse tomatoes are shipped year-round, according to the Go Texan produce availability chart posted on its website, gotexan.org. **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

two or three weeks away from our leafy green program, which includes cabbage. Of the greens, only a small percentage stays in Texas. Our primary market is the Northeast and Canada. We’ve seen nutraceuticals grow. Locally grown and organic seem to be the buzzwords today.”

Texas plays a major role in supplying many fruits and vegetables when most of the country is frozen over.

“We’re seeing more demand for diversity in our crops,” says Galeazzi. “We’ve done winter squashes, and the demand for more varieties of chili peppers is growing; we’ll be harvesting cauliflower in a few weeks.”

Frontera Produce is among many Texas growers that also ship produce from Mexico to supply a larger number of items nationwide over a longer period.

“Our Texas-grown produce is sent all over the country,” says Galeazzi. “And when we complement those products with the assortment of items we bring in from Mexico, like mangos and limes, it really makes sense because the buyers are experiencing one-stop shopping and filling all their SKUs without having to wait on multiple trucks from multiple regions.”

But this produce diversity, notwithstanding the Texas Ruby Sweet grapefruit and Texas Super Sweet 1015 onion, continues to lead the list of items grown and harvested in the Lone Star state and shipped throughout the country and beyond.

Delano, CA-based Wonderful Citrus has quickly become a major player in Texas and is ready to lead in expanding the state’s grapefruit and orange production.

“Long term, we’ll see Texas increase acreage in citrus,” says Bret Erickson, president and chief executive of the Texas International Produce Association. “There is a steady increase; that’s what I’m hearing from industry folks. We’ve had consolidation. Wonderful manages around 70 percent of Texas commercial citrus; it owns probably closer to 35 to 40 percent. I know they are looking at expanding their acreage, and I know Lone Star, our second-largest producer, is also looking to expand.”

In the citrus market, Texas competes with Florida, which is enduring a crop disease epidemic, and California, which is facing uncertainties from drought and water regulation politics.

Texas growers are keeping a watchful eye to manage citrus greening, the devastating disease carried by the Asian citrus psyllid that has wreaked havoc with Florida orange production.

“We’re in year six of citrus greening, and it was in year six that Florida started to see decline in yield and quality,” says Erickson. “We haven’t seen any decline yet, and our growers have been proactive in controlling the psyllid and maintaining vigorous trees.”

Texas is worth watching with the other major winter production areas contending with weather and crop disease issues.

“All things considered, I think the outlook for Texas-grown produce is very positive, as long as Mother Nature is agreeable,” says Erickson. “We’ve had a decent amount of moisture over the past year or so. Although by no means are we in the clear, our reservoirs are hovering around the 50 percent mark and we have decent moisture in the ground. For the

short term, Texas is in good position, especially with serious drought challenges faced by California growers. Florida has had the opposite issue and has seen several major flooding events that have impacted supplies.”

GO TEXAN

While national markets for the signature fruit and vegetable items out of Texas are strong and growing, the state’s agriculture continues to grow more diverse as it reflects the evolving tastes of the local residents.

“Most people know about Texas citrus and the other items from down in the valley, but we also have a pretty good-sized berry industry that hardly ever goes outside of Texas,” says Bart Ramage, sales representative for Fresh Point Dallas, a subsidiary of Sysco in Dallas. “I do business with Kroger, Safeway and some regional grocery stores; and the local blueberry and blackberry deals are a hot item.”

Ramage sources a variety of fruit and vegetable crops from various regions of the state and sells them to markets in Texas.

“In the Winter Garden area, they’re growing broccoli, cabbage and green beans on a commercial scale,” says Ramage. We also have small growers who supply us with yellow



zucchini and Mexican gray squash. We have a couple of guys that grow okra, and there is pretty good demand for Texas tomatoes and pickling cukes. We also have a pretty good-sized peach area in the state. There’s a good-sized produce industry in Texas outside of the

Rio Grande Valley.”

State agricultural agencies have gotten involved with growers and retailers to make the most out of the desire to buy local produce.

“The ‘buy local’ movement continues to grow in Texas,” says TDA’s De Los Santos. “The Texas Department of Agriculture has developed a statewide retail marketing initiative to promote Texas produce at retail stores by partnering with retailers in Texas to create sampling events, indoor signage and media outreach. We also are working with our international team to promote Texas fruits, vegetables and pecans all over the world.” In addition to signage and demonstrations, there are other promotional activities under the Go Texan name.

“Our Go Texan retail program works with Texas retailers to promote Texas produce and other Texas products,” says De Los Santos. “This includes the development of promotional signage, TV commercials and radio spots. Additionally, funding has been available for in-store demos and sampling. The Texas Department of Agriculture is also working with other partners to cross-promote Texas fruits and vegetables.”

Both growers involved in Go Texan and

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farmers markets in the state are listed on the Go Texan website.

“Be sure to check out our marketing program’s website, www.gotexan.org, to see a list of members who grow produce in Texas,” says De Los Santos. “We also have a list of Go Texan-certified farmers markets to help people find access to fresh and local produce.”

Many growers are finding markets among the state’s retailers looking to Go Texan with their produce.

“We see an increasing importance on

‘locally grown’ programs at the retail level, creating a premium for Texas-grown products,” says TIPA’s Erickson. “I believe these initiatives are good for Texas producers now and in the future.”

After growing outside Lubbock for more than four decades, Bernie Thiel of Sunburst Farms, Lubbock, TX, discovered just how many of his neighbors wanted to buy local produce.

While most of Thiel’s land is in squash grown under the Sunburst Farms name and

shipped throughout the state, he has had success devoting modest acreage to his own local produce stand.

“The market is going good; the local people come by,” says Thiel. “It’s steady; we get new customers all the time. We’ve been out here several years, and people come out here. We grow six or seven varieties of summer squash, pickling and slicer cucumbers, okra, green beans, pinto beans, cantaloupe, seven or eight varieties of peppers.”

Even his main commodity, squash, is largely sold to retailers within Texas.

“We’re mainly shipping squash in the state of Texas,” says Thiel. “People are pretty territorial about their squash; everybody has their own growers. We have shipped a little to New Mexico and Colorado, but Texas is a huge market. We have Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio. We harvest squash from the first of June to the middle of October. We harvested every day this year from June 1 to Oct. 13.”

Thiel was among the first growers to sign up for the Go Texan program and believes it has played a role in increasing demand for the state’s produce.

“I’ve been in it for 44 years, and Texas produce has gotten more popular,” says Thiel. “We do promote our squash to our retail customers as being from Texas; I think the buyers like it.”

With a population as large and diverse as Texas, some of the growers serving the local market offer produce that seems to have a touch of northern California flavor.

“We have a pretty good-sized company that grows organic herbs,” says Fresh Point’s Ramage. “There are also two or three pretty large mushroom growers. We even have a small organic farmer who grows only Shiitake mushrooms, and he does a good job. We sell pretty much what he grows within Texas. We also have growers of sprouts and microgreens.”

Growers who ship most of their harvest out of state have also signed up to Go Texan.

“We’ve had the Go Texan logo for a couple of years now,” says Val Verde Vegetable’s Schuster. “The point of it is to sell Texas produce in Texas. We do promote our produce as being from Texas. We use signage and logos, and every carton says it is from McAllen, TX. It’s hard to measure how effective it is.”

During the winter, growers find the name helps when they are competing far from home with other warm-weather production areas.

“The Texas name does carry some weight,” says J&D Produce’s Brechler. “We’re in a similar time slot as Florida and Georgia, and, of course, California.”

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Marketing Potatoes And Onions

Effectively

Utilizing multiple displays, recipe ideas and information about health benefits boosts sales. BY LISA WHITE

With produce department merchandising, it's typically the value-added, new and more unique items that are the focus.

Yet, staples such as potatoes and onions deserve attention, too, and can even see a boost in sales with the right displays, location and attention.

Priceville Foodland, a single store operation in Decatur, AL, has found merchandising potatoes and onions together is the most effective method to moving both items.

"If these are on sale, we merchandise in bins, but always have potatoes and onions situated back to back, since consumers typically purchase both," says Tye Newburger, Priceville's produce manager. "We'll market both together during the winter months, as consumers are buying these items for stews and soups."

Most retailers understand commodity potatoes and onions drive fresh vegetable volume in the produce department.

"Potatoes are the No.1 vegetable in volume sales, with a 10 percent share of total produce, so ample shelf space is provided, but often not in prime locations," says Randy Shell, vice president of marketing at Russet Potato Exchange (RPE), based in Bancroft, WI. "Retailers are facing more competition from traditional and non-traditional channels, which are changing the way consumers buy produce."

Due to the potential, potatoes and onions are not taken for granted by product departments, despite the commodity status.

"Fresh potatoes are the second-largest vegetable category in dollar sales and at the top of the list for volume sales, while onions are fifth in dollar sales and second in volume sales," says Kathleen Triou, president and chief executive of Fresh Solutions Network LLC, based in Buxton, ND. "Despite being bought by 87 percent of all households, the most of all produce items, total fresh potato volume is on a slight decline at supermarkets — 2 percent annual volume decline in 2015 versus 2014."

Yet, she adds convenience and organic potato segments are growing.

"To meet the demands of the escalating one- to two-people households that require smaller servings, value-added potato sales,



which still account for just 5 percent of total potato sales, have increased 18 percent in 2015 compared with 2014," says Triou.

POTATO POSITIONING

The potato and onion associations have been credited with much of the marketing push for these items and increasing the sales momentum in Produce Departments.

For example, the Denver-based Potatoes USA (formally the U.S. Potato Board), which represents all U.S. potato growers, recently completed a big segmentation study that looked into what Americans are eating, categorizing consumers in terms of food and shopping opinions.

The study identified a broad group of food enthusiasts who are considered thought leaders and those who utilize recipes, recommend restaurants and are adventurous.

"When we did an attitude and usage study last February, we found the usage, or number of servings, of potatoes by our food enthusiast target market went up by one serving per week compared to the year before, which was surprising," says John Toasperm, chief marketing officer for Potatoes USA.

Potatoes USA also regularly commissions branding ads and initiates media coverage on different potato uses in publications and through social media. In 2015, it worked with Kroger's and Whole Foods' in-store magazines to develop potato articles.

The organization recently revamped its consumer website, potatoesgoodness.com, with its Ninth Wonder branding concept, adding a recipe section inspired by Pinterest. It also rebranded its name as Potatoes USA, along with a new logo.

The Idaho Potato Commission in Boise has embraced programs that incorporate onion merchandising, although the two items haven't been marketed together in Idaho since 1937.

"With onion organizations, we constantly bounce ideas off of each other and mimic programs," says Frank Muir, the Commission's president and chief executive.

The Commission has been holding the largest Idaho potato display contest for the last 25 years, which the onion industry has also incorporated.

"We don't see this as competition, since it reinforces the Idaho ag image," says Muir. "We're building on what we do well and

improving things we think we can do better.”

On the Commission's 75th anniversary, iconic postcards that were a century old were used for inspiration. Slogans like “We Grow Them Big Here” were reincarnated and used in the promotional campaign.

“Our goal was to bring the post cards to life, traveling around the country to big events, like the Kentucky Derby, as well as local events like proms and birthday parties,” says Muir.

In a philanthropic effort, the Commission partnered with Meals on Wheels to donate

more than \$100,000 and raise awareness for the program.

Its Tater Team, including its Potato Ambassadors, travels the country in a branded truck promoting Idaho potatoes while raising awareness and funds for various causes.

One of the Commission's recent events was placing the truck on a barge in New York City's Hudson River.

“We also arranged to donate 12,000 pounds of Idaho potatoes to a city soup kitchen,” says Muir.

Although local potato organizations, such as the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association in Grand Forks, MN, have more limited budgets and resources, trade shows and print ads have proven to be effective promotional tools. These associations also work closely with Potatoes USA to help promote its programs, as well as assist retailers with category management.

NOT SEASONAL

“Potatoes are more often promoted in the fall, since this is when the product tastes and stores best,” says Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for Northern Plains Potato Growers Association. “The biggest shift we're seeing is in organic and natural product, but taste and affordability are big factors.”

The Association is currently creating a new website, redrivalley.com, which will include about 300 recipes.

Depending on the store type, potatoes continue to be advertised and marketed in-store by most retailers.

“Fresh potatoes are promoted about six to nine times per quarter,” says RPE's Shell. “Retailers understand sales success can be driven by promotional dollar, volume lift and frequency.”

The potato data revealed shoppers purchasing potatoes also are buying onions, and these tend to be perimeter shoppers that scratch cook.

Potato promotion best practices show that frequent or nine to 10 times promotions per quarter with discounts less than 25 percent are key to optimized performance.

“All of the retailers I've worked with frequently promote potatoes, as they know the category drives performance for the department and increases traffic to the store,” says Triou at Fresh Solutions. “Keeping the price discounts moderate or less than 25 percent during the holiday periods can be a bit tricky.”

St. Patrick's Day is a prime marketing opportunity for red potatoes, while most other types are promoted more heavily during the holiday season.

Associated Potato Growers Inc. in Grand Forks, ND, provides recipes on its website, along with links to other resources.

“The key is to have good displays, but not too large, and promote the healthy side of potatoes,” says Paul Dolan, Associated's manager. “What's not well promoted is the fact different types of potatoes have varying flavors. It's also good to promote these products with meat in ads and fliers.”

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ID, markets its Green Giant brand using web-based marketing and advertising. The company also offers retailers customized merchandising tools, POS materials and free-standing store displays.

“What works best is dependent on the market or region,” says Ralph J. Schwartz, vice president of marketing, sales and innovation for Potandon. “Overall, we’re seeing a change in terms of consumer demand to more baby potatoes, and Russets are the largest by far, although this is changing with new varieties.”

With potatoes, retailers rely on the profit and tonnage due to the high rate of household penetration and the fact this product is a Top 10 revenue producer for the produce category.

“In our experience, retailers sell potatoes in two primary ways — the traditional potato table that ranges from 8 to 12 feet with the standard assortment items, such as traditional bag Russets, reds, golds, whites and bulk; and secondary displays to attract impulse purchases with items such as 4-count Steakhouse Bakers, 1.5-pound roasters, 3-pound Seafood B Reds and 3-pound Buttery Bites,” says John Pope, vice president of sales and marketing at MountainKing Potatoes, based in Houston.

THE ONION PUSH

Often, potatoes and onions are in close proximity in the produce set because these items have a natural basket affinity. While many buyers manage both potatoes and onions, they are treated as separate categories in most cases, say experts.

“Together both segments contribute as much as 15 percent of total produce volume, consequently a dedicated category manager is frequently assigned to help drive and monitor overall success,” says RPE’s Shell.

Although onion promotions go in phases, depending on the retailer, it’s not common to see this segment mentioned in an advertisement. Many say this is an overlooked opportunity to sell more onions.

“Onions can be on ad more often, whether at a special buy or regular price, since this is a staple and retailers have the opportunity to educate consumers,” says Kimberly Reddin, director of public and industry relations for the Greeley, CO-based National Onion Association.

For the holidays, where consumers are more apt to scratch cook, convenience items like pre-cut onions can expand the category.

“Although onions are typically a planned purchase and rarely bought on impulse, these items are also actively promoted as part of a complete category strategy that includes pricing, promotion, placement and product mix,” says Susan Waters, executive director of the Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee.

The National Onion Association has worked with Potatoes USA on a joint project to institute unique marketing ideas.

“Unfortunately, it was not something the industry gravitated toward,” says Reddin. “Still, consumers purchasing onions and potatoes are often in the store at the same time and are the same buyer.”

With sweet onions, the key is displaying in bulk in more than just a basket, since large displays with selling aids, such as point of sale material and educational signage, are most effective.

“This is not the most glamorous category, so in some cases retailers take it for granted,” says Mark Breimeister, director of sales at OSO Sweet Onion, headquartered in Savannah, GA. “We recommend demos with fresh salad dressing and sweet onions and have seen posi-

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tive results with split bins to cross-promote onions and potatoes.”

CONSUMPTION AND PRICING

Consumption patterns and pricing with these products vary. For example, the average U.S. supermarket sells about 3,000 pounds of fresh potatoes per store per week, says MountainKing’s Pope, with American consumers eating on average between 15 and 20 pounds per person per year.

Onions are a Top Five vegetable category item in both dollar and volume sales, according to the Vidalia Onion Committee. Sweet onions lead total category sales at 35 percent, with the Vidalia variety leading at 62 percent of sales during its season.

The National Onion Association reports consumption of onions is up approximately 70 percent in the last two decades, with the average consumer eating about 20 pounds of onions per year.

“I do know nine out of 10 potato purchases are planned, and research shows the No. 1 way to motivate shoppers to buy more is to provide new ways to prepare these items,” says Triou. “Recipes should suggest new preparation methods, different tastes and textures to be most motivating.”

In terms of popularity, Russets perform best with the largest volume and dollar sales and red potatoes are second. Yet, some are seeing Russets’ share declining due to increases in red, yellow and bite-sized/specialty potato sales. Medleys and blends are also on the rise.

Because this is fresh produce, how long a potato or onion lasts will depend more on how it is stored.

Fresh potatoes generally last about 21 days or more on the shelf, depending on how the potatoes are handled and stored prior to purchase, according to Shell.

A shelf life of two weeks is about average, but this varies based on many factors, such as the potato variety, temperature, storage and handling, lighting at the store, time of year and whether potatoes are fresh dig or from storage.

Vidalia onions are a fresh onion, which results in a shorter shelf life than a white or yellow onion. Most sweet onions are purchased and used within a few weeks, but with proper storage, they can be stored for several months in a cool, dry and dark area, or in the refrigerator.

Because potatoes and onions are staple products, the margins do not fluctuate as with other produce.

“Potato Best Practices indicate retailers should maintain a consistent, segmented

pricing strategy that communicates the value proposition of each package size, creating reasonable price gaps between the different sizes stocked within each potato type and focusing more on internal consistency versus responding to competition,” says Triou of Fresh Solutions Network. “We suggest retailers evaluate promotional pricing every day to ensure this is in line with their own overall pricing strategy and adjust as necessary. Consumers respond to quality produce first before price as long as the price is fair and communicates the value they are buying.”

Both potatoes and onions benefit from year-round marketing, despite the fact September through April are the main shipping months for fall crops.

“Between 80 and 90 percent of potatoes are grown and stored for the winter from Washington State to Maine, Idaho, Minnesota and New York,” says Kreis of the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association. “When that season runs out, there’s a smattering of potatoes through the rest of the country, with the spring crop coming out of Arizona, California and Texas.”

pb

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Southern-Cooking Cuisine

How produce is providing the 'lite' side of the rich fare.

BY HOWARD RIELL



Oyster BLT

PHOTOS ON SPREAD COURTESY OF BRENNAN'S OF HOUSTON

Southern cooking isn't only about fried okra anymore. These days, top-flight, world-class chefs are creating delicious meals that put produce front and center.

Among the vegetables most synonymous with Southern cuisine are tomatoes, squash, okra, sweet potatoes, corn, green beans, pole beans, peas, eggplant, collard greens, Vidalia onions, and cabbage.

"Vegetables in Southern cooking have never been more exciting," says Ralph Brennan, principal of the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group in New Orleans. "Heirloom vegetables are extremely prevalent. Cooking techniques beyond stewing have been embraced, and the produce aisles at grocery stores have a more nuanced and abundant selection of southern greens."

Today, Brennan continues, diners see a lot of fermentation and preservation from chefs. "People are appreciating the natural flavor of vegetables. One theory I have is with the many well-publicized diets that so many folks are

on these days, people actually learned how to cook vegetables properly and appreciate the natural flavors."

Brennan says one of the exciting things happening of late is a new guard of Southern chefs who excel at achieving the flavor profiles they desire with ingredients like okra, collards and black-eyed peas "while still preserving the integrity of the vegetable — the freshness."

Brennan encourages his chefs to use quicker cooking techniques such as pot-blanching and sous-vide.

At Brennan's in New Orleans, Chef Slade Rushing serves a bacon roasted okra alongside a grilled pork porterhouse and creamed corn from Husser, LA-based Covey Rise Farms. Chef Slade roasts the okra, which blisters the outside while the inside develops a nice green bean-like texture.

"The sliminess typically associated with okra just disappears. The poached foie gras sauce then takes this Southern-inspired dish to a whole other level," he says.

Chef Danny Trace at Brennan's of Houston

is achieving great success with Southern produce. Houston has certainly embraced vegetables beyond okra recently, and people are looking for new ways to eat Southern food in a lighter way — without the heavy sauces and deep-fried dishes."

Brennan's of Houston offers a nightly vegetarian prix fixe menu called "Digging Texas Creole," featuring local Texas produce. During dinner, the two-course meal includes an appetizer and entrée. At brunch and lunch, a produce-driven dessert is also available. Past dishes have included:

Beet & Blueberry Soup – crispy sweet potato chips and Chevre Crème fraîche.

Covey Rise Watermelon Salad – cayenne-spiced Marcona almonds, Texas feta, Red Oak greens, ginger-glazed dates and Caribbean daiquiri vinaigrette.

Digging Texas Creole Tart – Farmer's Summer squash, roasted eggplant, charred peppers and Lone Star Chevre in crispy pastry served over smoked Creole tomato sauce.

Honey Butternut Squash Soup – cayenne

“From classic recipes like fried green tomatoes to succotash, all the classics are getting fresh makeovers with upgraded pairings.”

— Jesse Gideon, Fresh To Order

pepitas, allspice crème fraîche.

Southern Vegetable Garden – okra and tomato, Poblano cheddar grits, stewed lima beans, charred onion braised collard greens, fire roasted beets and chow chow.

Louisiana Satsuma Sorbet – pistachio biscotti and ginger Turbinado sugar.

ROOTED IN VEGETABLES

“The South has always been rooted in vegetables,” notes Jesse Gideon, consulting chef with Fresh To Order in Alpharetta, GA, a professed “fast fine” concept. He points to the region’s “fantastic favorable growing seasons and a long, proud history that allows and demands respect for vegetables.”

There is, Gideon says, not a lot of plain, raw produce hitting plates. “Whether pickled, smoked, placed in pies, casseroles, breaded or smashed, vegetables tend to get the same processes and respect as the center of the plate. There are so many iconic ones, but for me it would be green tomatoes, Vidalia onions, collards/mustard greens, okra, corn, squash and beans. From classic recipes like fried green tomatoes to succotash, all the classics are getting fresh makeovers with upgraded pairings.”

Fresh To Order serves a popular corn chowder with local onions, jalapeños and corn. It is a classic soup, Gideon points out, “but instead of just classically sweet, we give it a bit more of a heat kick that I think showcases classic/simple with an updated flavor.”

NO LONGER THE ONLY OPTION

“Traditional Southern cooking embraced seasonal, local produce items,” explains Amy Myrdal Miller, founder and president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting Inc. in Carmichael, CA. “This is somewhat trendy today, but 50 to 100 years ago, this was done because it was the only option. Sure, home cooks preserved produce items to consume later in the year (okra pickles or stewed canned tomatoes), but they used as much fresh, locally grown produce



Creole bread pudding

as they could.”

Miller says there is a definite move among chefs to lighten up Southern cuisine, and to present more produce in the freshest form possible. The traditional method of cooking something like sautéed fresh sweet corn may once have relied on the use of butter for creaminess, she notes.

“Today that same dish would rely solely on the ‘milk’ of the fresh-cut corn, reduced by sautéing with fresh herbs, to provide a creamy consistency,” she explains.

“One can find hundreds of menus for national or regional chain restaurants that feature Southern soups, salads and side dishes with abundant produce, but the trend to lighten up these dishes isn’t common. I see this mostly in independent restaurants located in Southern cities, like Atlanta,” says Myrdal Miller.

One current menu item that exemplifies the lighter, fresher side of Southern cooking in Miller’s mind is Cracker Barrel’s Tomato, Cucumber N’ Onion Salad, which is offered as a side dish. “Cracker Barrel has been working with a culinary nutrition expert for the past four years to develop lighter options on its menus. That influence is definitely seen in this dish, with just 45 calories,” says Myrdal Miller.

When restaurants try to lighten up Southern produce dishes, Myrdal Miller finds they often go too far with the process. “Really good collard greens need some of the smoked pork flavor. Eliminating the ham hock [pork knuckle] is a mistake, but trimming some of the fat is a good idea. You still get the flavor without all the fat. Or making corn fritters and baking them instead of frying them.”

Miller explains the key to “lightening” up this dish is the choice of oil used to fry. “Instead of lard, use vegetable oil. A fritter should be

fried, nice and crispy. And then offer a small portion accompanied by a salad — something like a tomato and onion salad that would offset the sweet richness of the fritter very nicely.”

A mistake a lot of restaurants make is straying too far from Southern ingredients and sensibilities. An example, says Miller, would be to make a Southern produce dish like baked eggplant with peanuts and substituting almonds for the peanuts. “Peanuts are the traditional Southern ingredient, not almonds.”

Miller also finds fault with restaurants that claim to be serving Southern food “but then under a category like ‘Salads,’ they list items like Chicken Caesar Salad, a salad no Southern cook would recognize.”

If a restaurateur wants a great reference for classic Southern cuisine and recipes, she recommends, picking up a copy of *The Gift of Southern Cooking* by Edna Lewis and Chef Scott Peacock.

MENU MAINSTAYS

Southern cooking has always embraced vegetables, according to Michael Ditchfield, faculty chef for the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, PA. “Taking all things into consideration historically, vegetables and grains were the mainstay, with smaller amounts of protein incorporated into the dish.”

Ditchfield calls the South a melting pot of people and cultures and, as a result, cuisine. Among the disparate influences: Native American, African-American, French, Creole, Cajun, Spanish and German.

“As each of these groups came to this region from Europe, Africa and the Caribbean Islands, they brought with them seeds, vegetables and other foods from their homelands hoping they would grow here, too.”

Many of the embraced dishes were one-pot-type meals: jambalaya, gumbo with vegetables, grains stock and whatever proteins may have been available.

Ditchfield points to produce such as black-eyed peas, red beans and Vidalia onions, plus all kinds of peppers. “The vegetables’ ‘holy trinity’ in Southern cooking is celery, onion, peppers. They seem to be in everything.” He also includes collard greens, turnip greens, beets and beet greens. He likes to use Mirliton squash in soup, because it absorbs the flavor

of other ingredients such as a blackened fish or shellfish, and those Cajun spices that are used for a dredge.

Ditchfield offers a fall menu sampler based on what he calls “deep South, low country cuisine”:

Appetizer

Scallop and Braised Pork Belly – Grilled scallops served with braised pork belly, succotash, grape drizzle and pork reduction.

Soup

Black-Eyed Pea and Okra Soup – A rich

“A fritter should be fried, nice and crispy. And then offer a small portion accompanied by a salad — something like a tomato and onion salad that would offset the sweet richness of the fritter very nicely.”

— Amy Myrdal Miller,
Farmer’s Daughter Consulting

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Salad

Garden and Herb Salad – Seasonal garden greens and fresh herbs with tomato and cucumber, served with garlic and herb vinaigrette.

Pecan Ambrosia Salad – Assorted fruits, coconut, pecans, and whipped cream.

Entrées

Chicken Sauté with Kentucky Bourbon – Sautéed chicken breast with a creamy bourbon sauce, garnished with wilted spinach, garlic, and shallots, accompanied by butter whipped potatoes.

Grouper – Baked grouper fillets with a shrimp, tasso, corn cream sauce, served with grits.

Grillades and Grits – Wood-grilled and slowly-braised pork cutlets in a rich bayou stew served with grits.

Duck Au Poivre – Sautéed duck breast with green peppercorn Grand Marnier sauce served with truffle sweet potatoes.

Ditchfield calls it important that the consumers know their farmers and producers. “Look at some of what Chef Günter Seeger was doing in Atlanta in the late 1980s and ‘90s at the Ritz Carlton: foraging daily at a local organic produce farm, never really completing his menus until the forager arrived with the freshly picked crops of the day,” says Ditchfield. “He would take advantage of his vast network and have seafood, game, exotic proteins, not always associated with the South, and then add local ingredients to these.”

Creating exciting Southern dishes using a wide variety of produce — and letting diners share in the history and heritage — has become a powerful combination.

pb

Addressing Concerns About Imported Organic Produce Can Help Increase Sales



If consumers are worried about whether imported produce truly meets organic standards, be ready to answer their questions — then sell them what they need.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

Consumers' interest in organic produce is growing at a rapid pace. According to data from the Organic Trade Association, spending on organic fruit increased 123 percent between 2011 and 2015. Dollars spent on organic vegetables rose 92 percent during that same time period. Shoppers spent an estimated \$5.5 billion on organic produce in 2015, and more than half of U.S. households purchased organic produce at some point during the year.

People dedicated to buying organic products know domestic growers must follow strict guidelines set out by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organics

Program (NOP). They may be less clear about what regulations farmers and distributors in other countries must follow, and that can raise questions. What kind of reassurance do they have that these are truly organic? Can they really trust that they are free of pesticides, non-GMO and have the other qualities they desire?

"The topic of food safety can come to the forefront when discussing imported organic produce," says Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral for Tops Friendly Markets, which has 172 full-service supermarkets in New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts and is headquartered in Williamsville, NY. "But I am getting fewer questions. We have found our core organic consumer is educated and understands that USDA has high standards, which imported organic produce must pass in order to be allowed in this country." That goes

a long way toward putting their minds at ease. Still, when those questions do come up, what do produce managers need to know so they can lay any customer concerns to rest? And should imported organic produce be merchandised differently than fruits and vegetables grown domestically?





REGULATIONS

“All organic produce that is sold to retail grocery stores has to be certified organic by the USDA,” says Alex Jackson, senior account manager at Frieda’s Specialty Produce, a produce marketer and distributor based in Los Alamitos, CA. To prove they’re meeting these guidelines, farms and other food handlers must pay for a third-party certifier to visit them and study practices around things such as pesticide use, food handling, and maintaining soil and water quality. If they meet all NOP requirements, they are granted permission to label their products as organic.

In addition, the USDA has established equivalency arrangements with several countries. These agreements demonstrate the U.S. government has studied the organic regulations prescribed by the country’s government and determined they’re equal to or stricter than the requirements for domestically grown organic produce. As long as growers and other food handlers are certified organic in their own nation, and stick to that country’s regulations, they can sell their products as organic in America without getting an additional certification.

Right now the United States has equivalency agreements with Canada, the European Union, Switzerland and Japan. There’s an equivalency agreement covering processed foods from Korea, but produce items still must be reviewed to ensure they’re truly organic. “For those countries that do have equivalency agreements, consumers can be very confident they meet the spirit of U.S. organic,” says Kathy Means, vice president of industry relations for

the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association (PMA).

There’s another reason consumers can feel confident that grocery store produce is truly organic, whether it’s imported or domestic.

TOP TEN PRODUCE IMPORTERS

Curious which produce items are most likely to come from U.S. international trading partners? The Organic Trade Association shares the top ten produce items brought into America in 2014 by dollar value.

Bananas:	\$121.6 million
Almonds:	\$40.4 million
Mangos:	\$38.5 million
Avocados:	\$37.1 million
Apples:	\$29.8 million
Bell Peppers:	\$19.4 million
Ginger:	\$19 million
Pears:	\$11.5 million
Blueberries:	\$6.2 million
Garlic:	\$2.7 million

Sources:
http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/OrganicProduce_DeepDive.pdf
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/international-trade>
http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/OTAJaenickeMay2015_TradeDataReport.pdf

“Since all retailers are following the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) regulations — and part of FSMA regulations is the organic certification — all retailers in the country will only sell organic product if it has been certified,” says Jackson.

CONCERNED CONSUMERS

Produce executives and industry professionals agree modern consumers seem less concerned about the safety of imported organic produce. “We don’t get a lot of questions,” says Dan McCleerey, director of perishables for ShopRite Supermarkets, the largest retailer-owned cooperative in the United States. The company has locations in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Maryland, and is based in Florida, NY. As McCleery points out, “One of our best-selling items is imported bananas.”

“We definitely get feedback, but the concerns are no longer frequent,” says Earl Herrick, president and founder of Earl’s Organic Produce, a wholesaler and distributor headquartered in San Francisco. “It’s really only people who are just coming into the arena that have any concerns.”

That being said, Herrick also makes this point: “It’s pretty well understood that the organic shopper has some well-defined aspects. They’re willing to pay more money. They’re more educated and more engaged in what they’re eating, which means they have more questions.”

He says the best way to ease worries

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“Customers want a year-round supply... the only way we can do that is to provide imported products”

— Dan McCleerey, ShopRite Supermarkets

about imported organic produce is to educate consumers about where the food is coming from and why it meets the same standards as domestically grown foods.

“It’s also about exposure,” says Herrick. “When people see the same labels on produce year in and year out, the names become familiar. It’s not unlike people going to farmers markets

to make that connection to a grower.” He visits Mexican farmers, then passes along the information to consumers by blogging about the businesses on his website.

BENEFITS OF IMPORTED ORGANICS

Helping consumers recognize the good things about imported organic produce is

an important part of that education process. One of the top reasons to buy imported fruits and veggies is there are some foods shoppers simply can’t access at certain times of the year otherwise.

“Customers want a year-round supply of these items,” says McCleerey. “The only way we can do that is to provide imported products. We’re looking for more items and availability, and fair pricing for our customers. Without imports, we wouldn’t be able to service everyone as much as we’d like to.”

“Having imports does more than just give us more variety,” says Herrick. “It also allows us to have better product.” He uses apples as

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“Organic consumers are more focused on an item being organic than imported organic. Continue to merchandise all organic produce together, making sure the signage on that section of the department is clearly labeled organic, including the imported items”

— Alex Jackson, Frieda's Specialty Produce

an example.

In the winter months, consumers have a choice between eating U.S.-grown apples that have been in storage for months, or buying fresh products from the Southern Hemisphere. The fresher apples are going to have more nutrients than the stored ones, says Herrick.

Jackson points out another benefit to imported organic items. “It’s purely another source of organic produce. Organic produce is expensive to grow, so if there are growers offshore that are investing in organic farming and willing to invest in exporting it, then we should take advantage of that as organic consumers.”

MERCHANDISING

When imported organic produce begins to overwhelm the U.S.-grown goods in the store, there’s no reason to make serious changes to your merchandising strategy. “Organic consumers are more focused on an item being organic than imported organic,” says Jackson. “Continue to merchandise all organic produce together, making sure the signage on that section of the department is clearly labeled organic, including the imported items.”

“I don’t have a sense anyone is calling out organic products as a merchandising technique,” says PMA’s Means. “But it is important to pay attention to merchandising organic products so consumers can find them. They want to know the store cares about what they want and is making it easy for them to find these products.”

“Be upfront and proud of where the product comes from,” says Cady with Tops Friendly

Markets. “The world is much smaller than it used to be. Sign appropriately and be prepared to back up the food safety questions.”

Herrick echoes this point. “You don’t hide it, and you don’t question it,” he says. “You embrace it and continue to advertise it.”

“These are the things that are important at a retail level: having good signage, highlighting farms and commodities, and telling the story,” says Herrick. “It’s important to play into the fact that people want to know where their food

is coming from. It’s also very important to be consistent.” Once you find a good supplier for organic vegetables or fruits, stick with them for as long as possible. Customers will get comfortable with the quality and safety of these items and be more likely to keep buying them.

“Create a good solid section of organic items. Make sure your customers recognize what you have. If you build a good strong base, any concern about imported will go away,” says McCleerey. **pb**

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Vegetable Blends Fill Consumer Needs



These mixes check the boxes for nutritious, easy and interesting meals.

BY BOB JOHNSON

There is a growing group of consumers who want to cook at home, but don't want the hassle or having to spend a significant amount of time doing it. They also want their dishes to be delicious, nutritious and interesting.

This is where the produce department can come to the rescue with vegetable blends that can be added to stir fries, used in salads, or heated and served as side dishes.

The blends that move well are those that include at least a few vegetables that are a step or two off the beaten path, because Millennials are leading the way — and they are not in hot pursuit of broccoli and carrots after watching the Food Network.

“Baby bok choy, Napa cabbage, snap peas, cilantro, parsley and other herbs have become popular home-cooking trends,” says Mike O’Leary, vice president of sales

and marketing of the fresh-cut division of Boskovich Farms, Oxnard, CA. “Foodservice groups and consumers are looking for variety. Home-meal placement and cooking shows are stretching their imaginations.”

In 1915, Stephen Boskovich of Boskovich

Farms began growing produce in the San Fernando Valley for sale at the Los Angeles Wholesale Market. Today, the fourth generation of Boskovich farmers produces 30 different vegetable crops year-round from fields in California, Arizona and Mexico.



COOKING IS COOL AGAIN

Even with time constraints, consumers want to cook and have the convenience of ready-to-eat ingredients.

“The demand for convenient, ready-to-eat vegetables has been on the rise for some time,” says Jacob Shafer, marketing and communications specialist for Mann Packing Co. Inc. in Salinas, CA. “Our Power Blend packs a superfood-punch of veggies, including Brussels sprouts, napa cabbage, kohlrabi, broccoli, carrots and kale. This delicious mix can be enjoyed year-round as a salad, in a smoothie or sautéed for a quick side dish with any meal — versatility and convenience at its best.”

Companies like women-owned Mann Packing, Salinas, CA, a leading producer of pre-washed vegetables and a renowned innovator of vegetable products that appeal to home cooks, help bridge the gap between wanting to cook at home and feeling there is never

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enough time.

“Vegetable blends appeal to everyone who cooks at home,” says Lindsay Barthold, marketing manager at Harvest Sensations in Los Angeles. “The latest trend in vegetable blends is mixed, cut, sliced and diced, like squash blends, baby vegetables, sweet potatoes and roots, that make it quick and easy to use.”

Harvest Sensations sources a wide variety of conventional, organic and specialty produce from fields on both coasts, as well as abroad.

As in so many things pertaining to food, Millennials are forging the way with their unique blend of adventure and laziness.

“Millennials are influencing purchase trends like never before; they are savvy shoppers when it comes to comparison shopping and using mobile phones to their advantage,” says Shafer. “Millennials are looking for quick meal and snack options that are priced right and convenient.”

One place to find blends that will catch on is television food programming, because this generation developed their eating and cooking habits as they grew up watching cable TV.

“Millennials have habits formed by 10 years of the food networks and other programming suggesting cooking is hip. Families are also finding time to create dishes,” says O’Leary.

Another good place to look at trends is the home meal delivery model — Blue Apron, Home Chef, Purple Carrot — because they are constantly on the prowl for interesting mixes they can get from producers.

“Online delivery of home meal replacement is new,” says O’Leary. “There are many companies in competition in the home-meal delivery business. They are looking for unique product mixes and seasonal variety.”

Some products even add a touch of spice and grain to turn their blends into a convenient mini meal.

“We have developed a new product, Nourish Bowls, to appeal to Millennials and create an innovative product that fits the demand for convenience,” says Shafer. “Nourish Bowls were developed with a desire to create a healthy, warm, single-serve meal with fresh veggies, grains and sauces that are ready in 3 or 4 minutes. We partnered with a panel of three San Francisco Bay-area chefs to help us develop the flavor profiles that include Cauli-Rice Curry, Monterey Risotto, Sesame Sriracha, Smokehouse Brussels and Southwest Chipotle.”

One way to merchandise vegetable blends in produce is to build a display of various healthy, highly convenient products that serve as snacks or ingredients.



“Retailers can create healthy destination categories in their stores; a place where consumers can conveniently find fresh vegetables, snacking trays and specialty vegetables,” says Shafer. “Destination categories help consumers find new and innovative products, and the addition of a healthy snacking section in produce makes it easy for consumers to try healthy snack alternatives.”

’TIS THE SEASON

Prime time for cooking is the holiday season, making it a perfect opportunity to use blends.

“Sales tend to spike during the holiday season, as there is much less prep involved when using these vegetable blends,” says Harvest Sensations’ Barthold. “Consumers utilize the blends for lunch and dinner in soups, salads, roasting, sautéing and various seasonal dishes.”

There are blends for both side dishes and salads that fit particularly well for the holidays.

“Roasting Brussels sprouts in the fall and adding fresh beets to salads in the spring and summer are two examples of trending seasonal

favorites,” says O’Leary, who advises to focus on seasonal recipes for consumers.

Vegetable blends also fit nicely with New Year’s resolutions to live and eat healthier.

“Resolutions around the holidays are often repetitive year-to-year,” says Shafer. “Surely, many people will make commitments to lose weight, break bad habits, take up a new hobby and, of course, eat healthier. With this in mind, we are now offering fresh, unique value-added vegetables like our Culinary Cuts, a revolutionary line of fresh vegetables cut into distinctive shapes.”

Products like Culinary Cuts are a great substitute for pasta.

“The convenient vegetables are perfect for a pasta swap, are trending, and are free from preservatives and gluten,” says Mann Packing’s Shafer. “The veggies are washed and ready-to-eat and are versatile enough for multiple uses, such as side dishes, stir-fries, appetizers, desserts and casseroles. Culinary Cuts is the first veggie pasta swap product available nationwide and is backed with promotional and merchandising support to educate consumers and spur sales.” **pb**

IN MEMORIAM

Pat Riordan

November 8th 1949 – November 18th 2016



It is with great sadness California Giant Berry Farms announced that Patrick Riordan passed away November 18 after a brief and unexpected illness.

Riordan was the cousin and a co-founder of the company with Bill Moncovich, and longtime friend Frank Saveria.

Pat Riordan began his career in the produce industry at a young age working in sales for the Watsonville Berry Co-op and Coastal Berry. He ultimately joined Bill Moncovich at what began as New West Fruit, a small strawberry sales company in Watsonville, CA. Pat and Bill have spent over 40 years working side-by-side, with Pat focused on sales and Bill working with farming operations. Together they built the company on personal long term relationships in the industry resulting in tremendous success.

Pat never walked into a room quietly, and made at least one new friend every day. He always succeeded in making people laugh with his stories about his many life adventures, but there was nothing he was more proud of than his two children. Pat loved talking about them and how proud he was of their success and the love they have for each other.

Pat was 67 years old and is survived by his two children Alexa, 21, and Michael, 19, who both attend USC, and his sister Marilee Alaga, who resides in Watsonville, CA.

We and the industry will dearly miss him.

Winter Squash Brightens Produce Shelves



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAY BABY

With an array of varieties, building an exciting display not only adds a splash of color, but drives sales.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Winter squash brings a splash of color to the produce department when it is drab and gray outside, and, even more importantly, this newly popular category offers a highly nutritious warm culinary sanctuary in the coldest time of the year.

Many hard squash dishes are most appealing in cold weather, which makes the late fall and winter a natural season for merchandising.

“Butternut soups do very well from November on,” says Chris Ciruli, chief operating operator at Ciruli Brothers, Rio Rico, AZ. “We expect butternut to do well through the holidays. There’s also good demand on

spaghetti squash. It is helped by the Paleo diet; some club stores are selling two packs.”

For many customers, the best hook for squash is its place at holiday meals, but for another group of younger consumers, the most effective appeal is the nutritional value.

“Depending on a retailer’s marketing goals and customer demographic, we might use a more traditional marketing push that emphasizes squash’s important place in a holiday table setting,” says Megan Schulz, director of communications at Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles. “Younger consumers are really interested in nutritional benefits and would respond to a ‘squash as pasta replacement’ marketing hook. Squash provides nutrients and complex carbohydrates that fit into a variety of dietary choices ranging from vegan to Paleo.”

THE EYES HAVE IT

Just as hot squash dishes fill a need in the winter, the colorful squash fills a display need in produce as the bright summer fruit recedes.

“What a relief the cooler months of autumn

and winter provide for produce display-making,” says Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing at Albert’s Organics, Charlotte, NC. “Although the winter squash season extends from August through March, they are at their best in October and November.”

Hard winter squash are most inviting in large colorful displays that draw the eye to the colors.

“Large bulk variety display is most effective,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles. “The pallet merchandisers are quite popular now. They can be merchandised near potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams and onions.”

The display must be large and bold, but the varieties can be shown next to each other, or they can create a whimsically chaotic image of many squash types and colors together.

“We recommend displaying all squash varieties together in a large, colorful display,” says Schulz.

There are markets, however, that find it is



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAY BABY PRODUCE

most effective to display the varieties separately.

“Some retailers separate the varieties and others jumble them all together,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s Specialty Produce, Los Alamitos, CA. “In the fall, retailers tend to build large, end cap displays. It’s really retailer preference.”

One approach is to build a display with a small number of introductory, exotic squash in the midst of a larger number of the more familiar varieties.

“The other part is carrying the new varieties and displaying them in an eye-catching manner,” says Michele Youngquist, president of Bay Baby Produce, Burlington, WA. “One way we’ve helped buyers do this is with our organic mixed squash bin. It has known varieties, as well as new ones. This approach is less risky for the buyer and us, because we customize the bin so there is only a few squash of the new variety.”

Because some squashes may be unfamiliar to consumers, it is a good idea to include signage that lets them know which varieties

are in the bin, and how to prepare them.

“Especially with a mixed squash display, it’s imperative that a retailer has some sort of chart or signage available that helps shoppers distinguish and understand the varieties that are available to them,” advises Weinstein. “At Albert’s we have a chart that our customers can download from our website, print out and have available for their shoppers.”

The hard winter squash category is an opportunity to build an exciting display that adds a splash of color in the grayest season.

“No doubt, the lusciousness of those summer fruits is certainly missed, but working with product that is durable and has a long shelf life is a pretty nice break for a few months,” says Weinstein. “Apples and citrus will take center stage during the fall and winter season, but particularly during October and November, it’s important not to let the opportunity of promoting winter squash slip away. A large, mixed, bountiful display of hard squash is one of the more beautiful sights in a produce department.”

The splash of colors that comes from mixing the main winter squash varieties together makes for an inviting display.

“In my opinion, the best way to display squash is to have multiple varieties mixed together,” says Youngquist. “The contrasting colors and textures are eye-catching. Great store displays are another must. You want the consumer to see it.”

THE BASIC VARIETIES

It may take extra effort to introduce consumers to the more specialized winter squash varieties.

“We encourage our customers to use demos to introduce the Asian specialties in conjunction with mainstream items in familiar recipes,” says Robert Bennen Jr., president of Ta-De Produce Distributing, Nogales, AZ. “This way the shopper can see how he/she can substitute, say, a yellow squash for a new Opa squash in a stir-fry dish that is easy to prepare. This makes it a less risky venture when introducing unfamiliar items.”

Ta-De Produce supplies a variety of ethnic squash types, many of them unfamiliar, which add color, intrigue and adventure to the category.

“Our focus has been on Asian varieties of squash, such as moqua, sinqua and other related, like bitter melon, which is not technically a squash, but more like a cucumber,” says Bennen. “The ribboning effect of various colors and ethnicities can make the squash category more exciting, especially during this season. Some of our customers help shoppers identify the squash display by signing ‘Great for Baking’ or ‘Ideal for Stir-Fries,’ to prompt purchase.”

These varieties attract specific groups of ethnic or young consumers who typically spend more than most in produce.

“We are focused on introducing these Asian varieties to more adventurous Millennial shoppers, as well as supporting our core demographic, the Asian nationals,” says Bennen. “Asians spend more than \$27 on produce per shopping trip... and they shop several times a week, so this is a growing target market for us. We have retained an Asian consumer expert to help us identify the best customers for our items.”

Most suppliers believe the hard winter squash category, however, is built on a few main varieties.

“Kabocha, acorn, butternut and spaghetti — it’s pretty much the same four,” says Ciruli.

Butternut, acorn, kabocha, and spaghetti are the top sellers year-round, agrees Schueller;



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA'S PRODUCE

and butternut, acorn, delicata, carnival, sweet dumpling and gold nugget are the leaders from September through December.

Merchandise these four varieties well and the category should be a success.

"Melissa's Produce is the largest variety supplier of fall/winter squash in the United States," says Schueller. "The Melissa's Steamed Butternut Squash is the newest item featured and was debuted at the PMA Expo Fresh Summit. I'm not sure if retailers have tried the more than 12 varieties of fall/winter squash, and if they know the difference in taste beyond the visual size and shape of the squash. Education is needed in this category."

But Youngquist offers: "The past couple of years we've seen an increase in delicata, red kuri and kabocha. Delicata is great because it has fabulous flavor and is super easy to cook."

Caplan also says there may be a fifth variety among the staples, as she adds the easy-to-cook delicata to the list of top sellers. Although they are called "winter" squash, some suppliers are set up to deliver these basic varieties year-round.

"Between here and Arizona, California, Texas and Mexico, we're year-round on hard squash," says Ciruli. "We'll do November in California and at the end of the month we'll start bringing it in from Mexico."

L&M, Raleigh, NC, ships winter squash from various locations. Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director, says there is still room for significant growth in sales among the familiar varieties.

"We still see strong interest in acorn, spaghetti and butternut squash," she says. "We have winter squash year-round. We grow squash at all our farms — we grow it in South Florida, North Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan and Colorado. We import some from Mexico and Honduras, as well. It's an up-and-coming crop. It's not one of our top three, but it's growing."

SHOW THEM AND THEY WILL COOK

Very few retailers include point-of-purchase materials, recipes or cooking instructions as part of their hard squash display, but that may soon change because a major selling point is how easy they are to prepare, if only consumers knew how.

"I rarely see recipes on retail displays," says Caplan. "Most consumers search for recipes on the internet. I have not seen sampling of squash."

Some producers are now delivering their winter squash with use and cooking instructions right on the label.

"A recent trend with unfamiliar produce is to put directions on how to use the product right on the label," says Bay Baby Produce's Youngquist. "You want the consumer to feel comfortable buying the product, so easy instructions with no more than three steps are perfect. With winter squash, it doesn't take much to make a delicious dish."

With so many consumers, especially among Millennials, perusing the produce department with smartphone in hand, it may help to put

"A recent trend with unfamiliar produce is to put directions on how to use the product right on the label."

— Michele Youngquist, Bay Baby Produce

directions to the recipes available on the internet.

"We still see opportunity with the mainstream winter squash," says Oxford. "We're working on in-store promotions with signage. We're working on additional labels that show you how easy it is to cook it, and direct you to the website."

Even when they are not using their smartphones to scan labels, many younger consumers are learning about foods through social media.

"Retailers are making good use of social media by posting recipe content, especially in the form of videos," says Giumarra's Schulz. "We offer tailored promotion services to our customers that take advantage of our marketing library."

In the computer age it is also possible to mine the data for tips on how to best tailor squash pitches to different consumer groups.

"With the help of consumer data, retailers can now target their customers with specific promotions designed to appeal to what they value, such as flavor, convenience, price or health," says Schulz. "Squash fits well into all categories."

Because increased familiarity with how to use winter squash is driving sales, these preparation tips are helpful.

"Recipes help," says Oxford. "We're focusing on helping people learn how to cook, and how easy it is to cook acorn, spaghetti and butternut squash. They've got great flavor and are healthy, and people are learning how to cook them. People have learned how to enjoy winter squash."

Squash is easy, a highly nutritious source of vitamins and fiber, and, not to forget, among the most shelf stable of all the items in produce.

"I think a key marketing point for winter squash that retailers are not highlighting is its shelf life," says Youngquist. "There is not a lot of produce that you can buy and prepare a month later. My friends and family love to decorate their porch with winter squash until one by one they are prepared for dinner. It's decoration, it's food, it's healthy and it lasts."

pb



TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXHIBITION

JANUARY 18-20, 2017

BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION, FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

BOOTH REVIEW

YOU'RE INVITED ... TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXHIBITION
JANUARY 18-20, 2017

BROWARD COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

HOST: FLORIDA NURSERY, GROWERS AND LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATION (FNGLA), ORLANDO, FL

TPIE IS THE SOUTH FLORIDA TRADE EVENT SHOWCASING THE LATEST TRENDS IN FOLIAGE, FLORAL AND TROPICALS. MORE THAN AN EXHIBIT AREA, TPIE FEATURES nearly five acres of living plants, creating a virtual indoor garden of show-stopping displays. With more than 800 booths and 400 exhibitors, TPIE offers wholesale buyers the widest array of resources for foliage and tropical plants in the country. (Booth numbers are subject to change.)

BOOTH #421
AMERIGO FARMS INC.
Apopka, FL

Homestead Growers-Amerigo Farms is North America's largest specialist grower of the potted Calla Lily for more than 25 years. Selected by HGTV, our Indoor Plant Program is a HOME DECOR Living Holiday Collection that includes gorgeous Calla Lilies combined with eye-catching WOW inspiring tropicals in current Home Design trends.



BOOTH #129
AVERY IMPORTS/
WILLOW GROUP LTD.
Batavia, NY



Whether you are a garden center, florist, greenhouse, nursery, designer or gift store, Avery Imports offers a variety of more than 1,000 different items to choose from.

Whether you are a garden center, florist, greenhouse, nursery, designer or gift store, Avery Imports offers a variety of more than 1,000 different items to choose from.

BOOTH #1843
ARIS KEEPSAKE PLANTS
Barberton, OH

The Aris Keepsake Plants™ production facility in sunny Florida specializes in high-quality liner and flowered production in a selection of product forms and varieties from its own breeding and other leading brand. Product lines include tropical Tradewinds Hibiscus and Keepsake® Azaleas from our own breeding program, Sun Parasol® Mandevilla, and Dormant Hydrangea from leading European genetics.



BOOTH #841
ARIZONA EAST
Minotola, NJ

Are you a sucker for succulents? Could you just KISS a cute little cactus? Do tillandsias tickle your fancy? Are you ready to hedge your bets on some lucky bamboo? Well then, you've come to the right place. See our terrariums, planters, container gardens and more at Booth #841.



BOOTH #1919
BALL SEED
West Chicago, IL

Ball Seed and Ball Ingenuity are excited to partner with leading tropical plant breeders and suppliers (big and small!) around the world to help bring innovative plants to market, including our industry-leading HibisQs Tropical Hibiscus series and Summer Romance, a world-class collection of Mandevillas and Dipladenias.



BOOTH #315
BAY CITY FLOWER CO.
Half Moon Bay, CA

Family owned Bay City Flower Company — more than 100 years of growing! We are known for producing the most diverse assortments of unique, high-quality flowering plants in the country. Our aim is to keep our customers' floral displays fresh, interesting and colorful.



BOOTH #2431
AINONG PLASTICS
Los Angeles



Ainong Plastics produces high-quality thermoformed and injection-molded carry pots and trays, plug trays, flats and inserts, hanging baskets and decorative planters. Excellent service, competitive pricing and ease of logistics are just a few of the benefits our friendly team offers. Stop by Booth #2431 and say, "Hi!"

BOOTH #2538
AUTOMATED CONVEYOR
COMPANY INC.
Holmes Beach, FL

Our new Porta-Veyor provides innovative solutions to your plant or flats conveying needs. Saving you time and money. More importantly, reducing the back-breaking labor involved with moving, loading and unloading your plants and flats. We also provide the conveyor and parts to the original Add-A-Veyor.



BOOTH #1901
CHRYSLAL USA
Miami



Chrysal Americas is an international company offering a multitude of products for the complete nutrition and care of fresh cut flowers for growers, wholesalers, florist and supermarkets in the United States, Canada and Latin America.

BOOTH #936
COSMIC PLANTS INC.
Beamsville, Ontario, Canada

CosMic Plants, established in 2004, is a wholesale grower, owning and operating two greenhouse locations in Beamsville, with a total surface of 300,000 square feet. It specializes in quality potted Phalaenopsis Orchids for the sophisticated floral retail industry. Offered in three different pot-sizes: 2½", 3½" and 5".



BOOTH #2125
DECOWRAPPS
Doral, FL

Deco Wraps is a leading supplier of distinctive packaging options for fresh flowers and potted plants. We offer prompt service, simplified logistics and competitive pricing. We create products that are always fresh and innovative. Come visit us and see our exciting new items.



BOOTH #2221
EURO QUARRIES LLC
Sarasota, FL

Euro Quarries is an importer of Natural Stone for landscaping. We bring some of the finest natural materials from where they can be found to your location. From pebbles to accent boulders, fine chips to stone furniture, our selection will help you stand out! See us at Booth #2221.



BOOTH #901
EVE'S GARDEN INC.
Groveland, FL

In business for more than 35 years, we design, produce and sell unique Bonsai, Lucky Bamboo, Miniature Christmas Tree, Holly and holiday specialty gifts. We deliver to distribution centers, DSD or any other method. We ship in displays and on a pallet program. Visit our booth or our new 55-acre facility.





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BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #2613

NATIONAL INDOOR PLANT WEEK
Union, IL



Learn to self-market your company through National Indoor Plant Week, celebrated the

third week in September. Supported by a growing group of people throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, the public awareness event was established to promote the importance of live plants in interior spaces. Exhibit sponsored by Interior Tropical Gardens.

BOOTH #719

HEART OF FLORIDA GREENHOUSES INC.
Zolfo Springs, FL



Heart of Florida Greenhouses is celebrating 40 years of producing high-quality foliage for Wholesale and Retail Florist, Interiorscapers, Independent Garden Centers and small Grocers. Quality comes first with superior service. Stop by our booth at TPIE to see the wide variety of interior foliage products.

BOOTH #919

IGI MARKETING
Sorrento, FL



IGI, a leading producer of indoor foliage in the Apopka area since 1983, is your ultimate resource for quality foliage and exceptional service. We have more than 7 acres of environment-controlled growing facilities; specializing in Ivy 'Hedera' in 4 and 6 inch pots, holiday topiaries, and assorted 4 inch plants.

BOOTH #725

JRM CHEMICAL
Cleveland, OH



For more than 25 years, JRM has supplied the horticultural and floral market. Deco Beads is a fantastic way to cross-merchandise the product with your cut flowers. Each packet of Deco Beads makes more than 1 ½ quarts of decorative round beads. Available in 12 colors in attractive shelf and floor displays.

BOOTH #106

KOEN PACK USA INC.
Miami



We specialize in containers and vases, films, sleeves, wraps and pot covers. Especially known for our innovative packaging for potted plants and bouquets, we have a large inventory of sleeves, sheets, picks, bags and other accessories to enhance the look of your final product.

BOOTH #1319

PLANTS IN DESIGN INC.
Miami



Plants In Design Inc. is best known by interiorscapers who demand florist-grade bromeliads at all times. We ship significant quantities of these plants directly to upscale garden centers and supermarkets. We are the premier grower of bromeliads for the most discriminating buyers.

BOOTH #2507

POTS COMPANY G.C.I.
Miami



Pots Company, the southern division of Giftwares Co., is a leading importer and supplier of decorative garden, floral and home décor containers. Servicing the industry for more than 40 years with the latest styles in ceramics, wood, wicker, glass and pottery. Stop by and see our new designs for 2017.

BOOTH #1043

RAINFORST FLORA INC.
Torrance, CA



For more than 42 years, Rainforest Flora Inc. has been growing and marketing unique, high-quality Tillandsia air plants. With more than 800 different "Tillys" to choose from, along with many state-of-the-art finished Tillandsia-mounted products and assorted hard goods, RFI is your one-stop Tillandsia center. We ship worldwide daily.

BOOTH #2035

RAZBUTON FERNS INC.
Winter Garden, FL

Bright, bold and beautiful — our 10" fern baskets speak for themselves. When you SEE our ferns you will know they are for you! Visit our booth for full details on pricing.



BOOTH #1729

PALM TREE PACKAGING
Apopka, FL



Palm Tree Packaging is a manufacturer of plant and floral sleeves. We make sleeves out of a large variety of materials, including paper, various plastics and breathable fiber. Custom printing can be arranged with photo-quality results. Come see our newest product lines.

BOOTH #813

PECKETTS INC.
Apopka, FL



Peketts is a wholesale foliage growing operation specializing in the production of blooming Spathiphyllum and Holiday Cactus (Schlumbergia). We have approximately 750,000 square feet of greenhouse on 50 acres of land in Central Florida. Turn to Peketts for Blooming Spath and Christmas Cactus!

BOOTH #913

PENANG NURSERY INC.
Apopka, FL



For more than 30 years, Penang Nursery Inc. has been a top producer of unique bamboo, bonsai and tabletop gardens. We pride ourselves on offering beautifully designed gardens in the latest, trend-setting containers available at an exceptional value. Visit our booth to see our captivating terrariums, Lucky Bamboo displays and more!

BOOTH #1113

PRIDE GARDEN PRODUCTS
Ridley Park, PA

Pride Garden Products manufactures innovative hanging baskets, patio containers, pot covers, planters and accessories for supermarkets, mass markets, club stores, greenhouse growers and garden centers.



BOOTH #521

PURE BEAUTY FARMS
Miami



Pure Beauty Farms is a wholesale grower catering to mass merchandisers, retail garden centers, landscapers and florists from the Carolinas to Key West. We grow more than 100 varieties of annuals, perennials and holiday plants, such as poinsettias. Our Miami and Georgia facilities combined provide more than 250 acres of growing capacity.

BOOTH #1637

THE PINERY LLC
Escondido, CA



We are growers of living Christmas trees and Rosemary for the holidays. Our beautifully sculpted miniature trees add freshness, fragrance and flair to any setting, whether in the home, courtyard, kitchen or workplace. Stop by and experience our aromatic varieties of Rosemary, Pine and Cypress.



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

Floral Focus Is Year-Round Force



BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

For more than 30 years, PRODUCE BUSINESS has been building meaningful relationships in the floral, produce and foodservice arenas. As we head into 2017, we would like to thank you for your support and offer assurance we will continue to provide information needed to effectively market, merchandise, procure and manage the dynamics of your floral departments.

FLORAL BUSINESS, the digest-size supplement in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS, reached its five-year mark in September. Though new segments are in the works, we will continue with the popular Retail Profiles where we photograph floral departments and offer insight to the challenges and triumphs retailers experience every day.

From feedback we hear, readers also appreciate the quick-read Floral Findings. Whether attending industry trade shows around the country or conducting local store checks, products, announcements and displays capture our attention – and we feature them in Floral Findings.

Beyond the typical circulation of 25,000-plus readers, bonus distribution of FLORAL BUSINESS happens throughout the year at many trade shows and industry events around the country and at international events such as our London Produce Show and our Amsterdam Produce Show. We are on the move!

We know your day starts early, frequently ends late, and often there

seems little time left to stay in-the-know with industry happenings. From what you tell us, this is the reason you appreciate receiving posts and news from the Floral channel of our daily website, www.PerishableNews.com.

You like that you can select the frequency of postings – daily, weekly, etc., and we like to keep you informed with quick reads easily accessible on mobile devices.

Because of our relation to the produce department and all the intricacies that side of the business entails, witnessing and documenting industry changes through the years enables us to view the floral side of the supermarket from a matchless position. Following in the theme of our company motto that was founded in 1985 – Initiating Industry Improvement — we know our role with offering FLORAL BUSINESS is to help you build, improve and make your floral operation profitable.

Thank you for your readership, feedback, participation and continued interest in our floral coverage.

Places, Faces and Accomplishments in 2016...

1. TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXHIBITION



Tropicals galore! The year starts with attending TPIE, the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition in January. Hosted by the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association headquartered in Orlando, TPIE is a favorite show and is always at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale.

4. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA FRESH PRODUCE & FLORAL EXPO

Floral shares the spotlight with produce at this annual event hosted by the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC) based in Anaheim. Held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, CA, this year's show was April 20.



Store checking with Yun Yi, the floral buyer responsible for Lucky's and Save Mart, is a great way to learn!



Visiting growers and greenhouses in the Half Moon Bay area is always on the agenda when traveling anywhere near San Francisco. The hanging planter orbs were attention-grabbers in the wholesale nursery section at Rocket Farms. For floral buyers based in California, purchasing flowers and plants grown in local greenhouses and on nearby flower farms is definitely a buying advantage.

2. WORLD FLORAL EXPO

Discovering products introduced from around the world – many that are not yet available in full production – is the ultimate sneak peek. World Floral Expo, sponsored by HPP Exhibitions of Amsterdam, was held in March at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The event included exhibits, educational sessions, floral design competitions and a tour of the Los Angeles Flower Market.

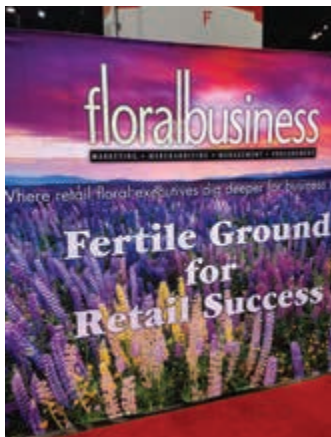


Shaunn Alderman, floral department marketing strategist with Floral Business magazine of Boca Raton, takes a peek at WFE in Los Angeles.



WFE exhibitor Mayesh Wholesale Florists Inc. of Los Angeles, displayed a booth full of exquisite flowers grown domestically and imported from around the world.

5. INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXHIBITION



There was a first-time happening for Floral Business – we had a booth of our own in Chicago at the International Floriculture Expo in June. IFE was co-located with the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, Food Marketing Institute and Global Cold Chain events.

3. FIELD TO VASE DINNER



Dining with 152 people in a working greenhouse surrounded by 1.2 million tulips three weeks before Easter was a magical experience! Sponsored by Certified American Grown, the first Field to Vase event of the year was held March 12 at Sun Valley Floral Farms in Arcata, CA.

6. FRESH CONNECTIONS MIAMI



July in Miami is sizzling and this Fresh Connections floral event hosted by Produce Marketing Association of Newark, DE was a hot time. The one-day event featured speakers, round-table discussions, floral product displays and industry networking.

DecoWraps of Miami displayed its wraps, sleeves and bags designed for potted plants and cut flowers at the Fresh Connections event.



7. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA • FRESH PRODUCE & FLORAL EXPO

The Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim is the convention site for this annual event hosted by FPFC in July. Complete with a keynote speaker, floral design competitions and the naming of Harry Higaki of Bay City Flower Company in Half Moon Bay, as the recipient of the Floral Achievement Award, this one-day exhibition was a memorable event. Featuring a substantial concentration of retail buyers, the well-attended show pours favorable attention on flowers and plants.



Hightop-potted orchids displayed at FPFC by Evergreen Agri-Tech Inc., an importer, grower and wholesaler based in Chino, CA.

10. PMA FRESH SUMMIT



Orlando, Florida was the site for the annual Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit, where buyers were wowed with floral, not just fruits and vegetables. In addition to the full-day of educational seminars, the event featuring more than 70 floral exhibitors was ideal for seeing new products and visiting with industry friends.

8. FLORAL SHOOT AT GELSON'S MARKET



Photographing floral and produce departments is always a treat but the task was especially sweet at Gelson's in Newport Beach, CA. The floral team in this store creates curiosity and builds customer loyalty by masterfully merchandising fabulous floral products.

11. FLORAL MASTERS OF MERCHANDISING



The 31st anniversary issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS published in October included the seventh edition of the Floral Masters of Merchandising. The supplement features advertorials showing retailers how to best merchandise floral department items for greater sales. Retailers often request a digital file of the supplement to use in floral team training manuals.

9. FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF FLORAL BUSINESS



FLORAL BUSINESS, the digest-size supplement in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS, reached its five-year mark in September. The publication presents original articles and observations related to marketing, merchandising, management and procurement.

12. LATIN FLAVOR FULFILLED



Store visits often include photographing floral and produce. It's a fun shoot when the atmosphere is festive the way it is in El Bodegon Supermercados in West Palm Beach, FL. This six-store chain serving South Florida's Latin community satisfies floral customers by following a "keep it simple" strategy.

Health Designation, Right Merchandising Can Increase Almond Sales



Now that nuts can be labeled “healthy,” be prepared for an influx of consumers looking for year-round supplies.

BY SOPHIA MCDONALD

In October, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared almonds — as well as peanuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans and some types of pine nuts — can be labeled “healthy” foods. The change comes as the FDA continues to revisit its dietary guidelines based on the latest food science. Under the new recommendations, the agency is considering not just how much fat is in food, but whether it’s a “healthy” fat (like monounsaturated) as opposed to an unhealthy fat like trans or saturated.

Almonds predominantly contain the so-called “good” fat, as well as plenty of fiber and protein. As a result, they fit safely within the new definition. And people across the country are expected to continue to respond positively.

“Consumer demand for almonds is high,” says Molly Spence, director of North America for the Almond Board of California (CAB), a Modesto, CA-based marketing organization that is also involved in research, quality control and similar activities. “Consumer research shows almonds have been associated with being healthy and nutritious for years. So it’s really important almonds can now be described that way. We believe this change will have a positive impact.”

Produce departments should be prepared to capitalize on the healthy designation as an opportunity to increase sales. There are myriad ways to merchandise almonds, including encouraging consumers to add almonds to produce-centered meals and educating them about how they can be a delicious, convenient snack food.

“Almonds are an item that’s seen pretty substantial growth in sales for us,” says Dennis Baker, director of produce operations for Harp’s Foods, which is headquartered in Springdale, AR, and has 84 stores in that state, Missouri and Oklahoma. “You have to get behind it and stay behind it; if you do you’ll reap the rewards.”

HOW AND WHEN TO SELL ALMONDS

Merchandising nuts as a healthy food is a great way to grab consumers’ attention. “We’ve always tried to highlight the healthy attributes of different things we sell,” says Randy Bohaty, produce director for B&R Stores, which is headquartered in Lincoln, NE, and has 18 stores under the brands Russ’s Market, SuperSaver, Apple Market and Save Best. “Now that almonds can be merchandised as a healthy food, we’ll put that on our signage and promote them as that.”

Consumers are increasingly reaching for nuts when they want something healthy in between meals. “Almonds are the No. 1 nut that consumers associate with snacking; in fact, U.S. consumers surveyed eat almonds an average of more than nine times per month, with nearly half of those occasions specific to snacking,” says Spence. “And, in a recent study, consumers listed apples and almonds as the top two foods they think of as nutritious snacks.”

“Twenty-three almonds is a phenomenal curb to that mid-morning hunger pang,” says Ron Fisher, president and chief executive of Fisher Nut Company, a growing, processing and marketing business located in Modesto, CA. “That will get you through to the next meal. In India, almonds are touted as a mental

food. Seven almonds in the morning is a traditional snack before children leave for school.”

As consumers increasingly look to nuts for munching, flavored varieties have become more popular. Pierre Boucha is the director of sales and field marketing for Don Sebastiani and Sons, which has a new product line called U Gottabee Nutz. The Sonoma, CA-based company currently offers rosemary and Meyer lemon almonds, caramel and sea salt cashews, and balsamic habanero pistachios. These products have been so successful that the company plans to add four more flavors.

“Almonds now sell consistently all year,” says Boucha. “They are no longer seasonal nuts.” That being said, there are times when sales are likely to increase. Nut sales generally rise in November and December, when consumers are baking for the holidays. “The Super Bowl and March Madness are very popular times to drive nut sales,” says Boucha.

MERCHANDISING TIPS

To ensure the produce department can meet the needs of customers seeking almonds and other nuts, consider carrying a wide variety of types. Almonds come roasted and raw; whole, slivered or sliced; salted and unsalted; and with

sweet and savory coatings. “Be able to help educate and sell your audience on what the best choices are,” says Boucha.

Keeping that much product in stock may be challenging in terms of space, but there’s little concern about shrink. “One of the good things about the California almond is it’s very stable on the shelf,” says Fisher. “The oils in almonds are more stable versus walnuts or macadamia nuts. They last at least a year in ambient storage and up to two years in refrigeration.”

Bohaty shares a similar opinion. “One of the benefits of almonds is they’re high ring and low shrink. Don’t be afraid to build some larger displays of them.”

Besides having a variety of nut types to choose from, it’s beneficial to stock bags in several sizes. “Consumers ranked almonds far above other nuts in a variety of attributes, including ‘on-the-go (84 percent)’ and ‘convenient/easy to eat (83 percent),” says CAB’s Spence. As a result, “it can be helpful to ensure that almonds in the produce section have convenient packaging so consumers can continue to use them on the go.”

Baker sells nuts in different sized bags depending on the season. “We like to hit on the vacation and summer seasons, and all the

outdoor activities by carrying smaller packages during the summer,” he says. In the winter, the store stocks larger bags for people interested in baking.

In addition to offering nuts in convenient packaging, Baker attributes his store’s uptick in sales to increased promotions. “We’ve almost doubled the number of ads we’ve run in the past year for the coming year,” he says.

There are many other ways to spread the word about the availability and benefits of almonds — beginning with displays. “They need to be highly visible, in attractive packing and in high traffic areas of the store,” says Boucha.

“We typically have them on the sales floor in either shippers or bin tops,” says Baker. “It’s like everything else: The more exposure you give them, the more likely it is that customers will pick them up.”

In addition, find ways to communicate the many ways to make almonds part of snacks and meals. “Marketing almonds by pairing displays with apples and other healthful foods like bananas, granola or dried fruit can help increase sales,” says the Almond Board’s Spence.

“I personally like them on salads,” says Fisher. “It gives them a good mouthfeel and crunch.”

pb

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Year-End Paradox

BY DON HARRIS

At the end of every year, the conversation during the weekly meetings turns to the need for a continuation of driving sales to finish the year on a high note. Management constantly reminds us we are competing for the dollar as consumers shop for holiday gifts. No mention is made of year-end results in terms of how the produce department accounts for its yearly report. In most cases, management plans to have made its yearly goals by the end of the next-to-last period. Management makes no mention of the need for proper accounting throughout the year as a key part of ending the year on a strong note. In this area, many once again prove they just don't get it.

The one particular area generally ignored is the truthful and accurate accounting of inventory at the end of each period. Far too many times produce department managers will postpone recording certain elements of inventory — especially cost items — throughout the year so they can make their profit goals for each accounting period. This helps them progress toward their overall profit goal for the year, which generates their bonus. By postponing these costs, managers can reach their profit targets for each period. This builds up a surplus and the momentum to allow them to reach their yearly profit goals before year-end. This practice has been going on for a long time. In terms of profits, this type of “Chinese bookkeeping” projects a false picture of profitability that doesn't really exist. It leaves produce management to believe that the profit results of each of the accounting periods are better than they actually are. Postponing recording certain costs results in a false sense of security. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't; and that is where the problem lies.

In the last accounting period, produce managers who postpone recording certain costs end up writing off all costs that had been carried throughout the year. This results in an underperforming period of results and is often overlooked and blamed on unnecessary shrink or other factors caused by the holidays. Instead of actually knowing the true results of each period, we are provided with a “rosy” picture of the actual performance. Since most retailers use a 13 four-week period calendar, the monthly profit picture is not accurate and may show better results than were actually achieved. This does not portray

an actual picture of the strengths or weaknesses of an operation throughout each month of the year.

The danger in using this type of accounting is at the end of the year there are two outcomes. First, this accounting “shell game” works out and the total year's goal of profitability is met, as it was falsely reported and generated through 12 of the 13 accounting periods. Therefore, the less unacceptable results in the 13th period don't affect overall profitability goals and bonuses. The second outcome is postponing these costs creates a loss in the last period which reduces the profit below the goal, thus affecting bonuses. Management, when asked why this happened, is at a loss and generally blames it on high shrink or other causes. In this scenario, a successful year suddenly becomes an unsuccessful one because of this negligent practice.

To avoid this ongoing “sham” of periodic results requires management to perform proper accounting for every cost incurred in a particular period. This provides not only an accurate picture of the progression, but the amount of profitability generated. There is no guesswork and there is no unnecessary “dumping” of excessive costs into the final period of the year. It provides everyone involved — from department level to management — an accurate picture of what is really happening within the operation, from the sales line to the profit line. To gain this advantage requires discipline in terms of training produce department managers to account correctly in all aspects of their operation and conduct follow-up “spot” reviews of each department's books. Though it is a little extra work for the management group, following this protocol provides a much clearer picture of what is actually happening in the field and alleviates any anxiety or stress over what might happen in the 13th period. This makes for a far more pleasant ending to the year. **pb**

Don Harris is a 41-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting and is director of produce for the Chicago-based food charity organization, Feeding America. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.

Far too many times produce department managers will postpone recording certain elements of inventory — especially cost items — throughout the year so they can make their profit goals for each accounting period.

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Now Is The Best Time To Take Stock, Strategize For A Prosperous Future

BY ALAN SIGER

The holiday season is filled with traditions, parties and gifts. It also marks the end of the year, which often presents time to take a moment and reflect on the past 12 months while looking toward the future.

What is working in your business? What is not? Too often, businesses run on auto pilot and continue to operate the same way year after year. If targeting certain customers and markets has allowed for growth, why change? Though I'm sure the folks who had success distributing buggy whips thought they had a good thing going, their perspective likely changed when the invention and mass production of the automobile destroyed the market. Following is an example of how a change in the marketplace can impact your business.

Fruit baskets used to be a staple of traditional produce wholesalers' holiday business. In the 1970s and '80s, my wholesale company had scores of small to medium fruit markets whose holiday business would be 10 times greater than normal due to fruit basket sales. Employers in the mill towns surrounding Pittsburgh often gave their employees and customers fruit baskets for Christmas, and relied on the local fruit markets to supply them. It was not uncommon for a customer to buy more apples, oranges, pears and grapes in a two-week period around the holidays than they would over the next three months combined.

In the late 1990s, my company developed a program to supply fruit baskets to supermarkets through produce distribution centers. We offered four or five different sizes at different price points, thus allowing the produce manager to sell baskets without spending the time to make them during one of the busiest times of year. We — and our customers — were so pleased with the program we expanded into Easter baskets in the spring. A short 10 years later, our fruit basket volume dropped to a point that it no longer made sense to offer it to our customers. The high-end gourmet fruit and gift basket business still exists, but like the buggy whip, the high-volume fruit basket business' time had passed.

What happened to the fruit basket business that looked so promising not that long ago? Along came the Grinch that stole the fruit basket business — the gift card. The gift card is easy to carry, doesn't need refrigeration, won't freeze in the trunk of your car on a Pittsburgh winter day, and it's available in any denomination from just about any retailer you can imagine. To me, a gift card seems like an easy out taking little or no effort. While I can't imagine going to Grandma's house for the holiday dinner and giving her a gift card to Best Buy, that's today's world.

Fruit baskets or not, American consumers still spend millions of dollars on fruits and vegetables during the holiday season; but how we shop for groceries has changed dramatically in recent years. Consider the choices. There are club stores like Costco and Sam's Club, traditionally hard goods merchandisers like Target, upscale and niche retailers like Whole Foods and Trader Joe's, low-cost options like Aldi's and Lidl, and online retailers like Amazon. Let's not forget the explosion of the farmers market and community agriculture. The vast amount of choices has taken a big bite out of the traditional supermarkets and neighborhood fruit markets' bottom line. How

will changes in consumers' shopping habits affect the produce wholesaler? Here are two examples:

Most supermarkets and their distributors rely on wholesalers to cover shorts in retail inventory; for many wholesalers, this is a significant part of their business. Unlike supermarkets that try to never be out of an item, club stores normally don't cover out-of-stock items for their stores; if they are out of blueberries in the warehouse, they wait until the next shipment arrives. The club store customer is used to limited variety — no blueberries, no worries.

Many wholesalers do business directly with individual supermarket franchisees by what is known as "back-dooring" (bypassing the warehouse to sell to the store directly). As the grocery business continues to fragment, this business will dwindle. Many of the non-traditional retailers I mentioned have impenetrable distribution systems. If you're

not an approved vendor, you're not getting into that store.

For a wholesaler who is unwilling to address an unfamiliar marketplace, the future of produce retail does not look rosy. The current seismic changes in the way produce is distributed at retail will certainly impact the makeup of produce wholesalers' customer population. Those who have their heads in the sand and continue operating as they've done in the past may find themselves wondering where their sales went. Are you ready?

pb

While I can't imagine going to Grandma's house for the holiday dinner and giving her a gift card to Best Buy, that's today's world.

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



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HOLIDAYS



Laurence Olins Speaks Out On Brexit And Trump

EXCERPTED FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT
INTERVIEW BY MIRA SLOTT

The United Kingdom's produce industry expert, Laurence Olins, discusses the future of England's produce industry post-Brexit and the future of trade in a President Trump world. Following is an excerpt from the interview, which appeared in *Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit*. You can read the interview in its entirety at perishablepundit.com.

Q: Many executives are anxious regarding the impacts of Brexit, amid uncertainties facing the industry. What is your assessment of the consequences and complexities of the U.K.'s vote to leave the EU?

A: I'm heavily involved in leading the industry on this issue *vis a vie* the government. I've had meetings with secretaries of state in the past few weeks. The one word that comes out is uncertainty, and no one is prepared to give answers going forward. Basically, our concerns are three-fold: labor, funding and trade with the EU.

Seasonal labor availability is critical. The berry industry alone employs 31,000 Eastern and Central Europeans on our farms, similar to the way you employ Mexicans and Central and South Americans in the United States. These are seasonal workers, so they come and stay nine to 10 months a year, they live on the farms, and 70 percent of them return every year.

Q: What percentage of your workforce is made up of these workers?

A: About 95 percent is seasonal European labor. Post-Brexit, that labor force is in jeopardy. We have free movement of labor as a member of the EU. With Brexit, that movement will be curtailed.

Q: What actions can you take to alleviate this problem?

A: We are lobbying for a visa/permit solution to pass border control, which allows us the same number and more, because our industry is growing. We will need 38,000 seasonal workers in five years' time.

Q: That's disconcerting.

A: For us, and a lot of other industries. The U.K. employs 4.5 million foreign-born workers, and we have less than 1.5 million unemployed. So it doesn't take a genius to figure out if you don't have any of those foreign workers, the economy will be absolutely, irrefutably damaged.

Q: The produce industry is dependent on that labor.

A: For the entire produce industry, we employ 75,000 seasonal workers; that's all crops, for which berries are 31,000. Our prediction is by 2020, it will be 91,000 for all produce.

Q: What about other concerns — funding and trade with the EU?

A: We receive about \$60 million US a year from Europe; these

are not food subsidies, but money going to capital projects, and it is matching funds for the fruit/vegetable industry. So \$60 million US has to be propped up equivalently by the growers, but it can only be spent on capital projects, which are innovative. There has been a guarantee that those funds will continue until 2020.

The third issue, which is probably the biggest, is access and membership to the single market, which means we can trade within Europe, and with everyone that Europe has agreements with, and no paper work, no barriers, no customs, no frontiers, no duty, no nothing. We won't be part of the single market. Importing fruit from other European countries will become difficult, and we won't be able to have the speed of logistics and all the logistics sophistication we enjoy at the moment.

Q: Do you think people grasped the extent of the ensuing problems that could occur by voting for Brexit?

A: No one did. Certainly the British voters didn't. The ramifications are great.

Q: Is it possible these scenarios you describe may not happen, depending on how the negotiations unfold?

A: The effect of not having access to the single market entirely infringes on free movement of labor, and free movement of labor is immigration. The Brexiters won because of the immigration card. If the government decided not to control immigration, maybe, but it will. The mere fact of halting visas for European workers will immediately shut out the U.K. from being a member of the single market.

Q: What are your thoughts on Donald Trump winning the U.S. presidential election?

A: Oh My God, indeed. It's exactly what's happened to us with Brexit. No one thought Trump would win, but he did. Implications of a Trump victory for the fresh fruit industry? My fear would be a tariff trade war. We all got used to an environment for the past 20 years of globalization and free trade. Because of Brexit and Trump, there will be a period of great uncertainty.

pb

Laurence Olins is chairman at Pouport, a London-based subsidiary of a major food group representing growers from the U.K. and around the world, and a fourth-generation fruit marketer with 47 years in the produce industry. Olins holds chairman of the board positions at British Summer Fruits, the United Kingdom's crop association for soft fruit, since 2003 and Poupart Group of Companies since 2007. In addition to his chairman positions, he holds non-executive director positions with G's Chilled Foods, The Shropshire Farming Group, Grace Foods UK and Reynolds Catering Services.



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Putting More Produce, Particularly Vegetables, In Desserts

BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

I was interviewed recently for an article on opportunities to use more fruits and vegetables in desserts at restaurants. Using more fruit is easy. Using more vegetables is easier said than done.

First, we have to examine our expectations for desserts. Desserts are typically sweet. Using fragrant, ripe fruit in desserts meets the belief that desserts must be sweet. Using vegetables takes a bit more skill and finesse to develop a dessert that delivers on expectations of sweetness, texture and appearance.

National dietary intake data from the “What We Eat in America” survey shows grain-based desserts account for a larger proportion of daily calories than any other food group for people, age 2 and older. So even though diners may say no to dessert in restaurants, many enjoy cakes, cookies, cobblers, sweet rolls, pastries, donuts and other baked goods on a frequent basis. There are many opportunities to improve the nutrient profile of these foods.

But improving the nutrient content doesn’t always drive demand. (Are you laughing at the irony of that statement?) Are there ways pastry chefs can incorporate vegetables into the grain-based desserts we love that will make us love them even more?

There are already many classic desserts that feature vegetables, including pumpkin pie, sweet potato pie, sweet corn cake, rhubarb pie and carrot cake. What about using beets to color red velvet cake? With demands for clean labels, using a natural ingredient like beets to color cake instead of artificial colors is a good decision. This idea isn’t that new. General Mills uses beet extract to color some of the new Trix cereal with no artificial colors or flavors. If it works in a sweet cereal, it can work in a dessert.

Another trend no one can escape during the fall months is pumpkin-flavored everything. From lattes and doughnuts to cream cheese and crackers, pumpkin flavor appears in hundreds of new products at retail every fall. But many ask where’s the pumpkin? Instead of using pumpkin flavor or the sweet spices associated with pumpkin flavor to trick the brain into thinking “Gee, this tastes like pumpkin,” product developers and pastry chefs can use more pumpkin, squash or sweet potatoes in desserts like ice cream, cake, panna cotta or crème brûlée.

Carrots are another vegetable that can stand in for pumpkin in many recipes, especially if ginger is used as a spice or fresh ingredient. Imagine a ginger-spiced carrot pudding with ginger snaps for dipping.

If we shift our thinking from culinary use to botanical classifications, we can see items like cucumbers can be used in place of their melon cousins. On a hot summer day, a cucumber mint sorbet is a refreshing and approachable lighter finish to a meal.

One issue every pastry chef in America will need to pay attention to in the coming year is added sugar. Sugar is the new fat in terms of consumer sentiment. Right now, dietary surveys show Americans consume 13 to 16 percent of calories from added sugar. The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* for Americans recommend getting no more than 10 percent of calories from added sugar. The nutrition and public health community is looking for ways to reduce added sugars while promoting the enjoyment of our food.

Awareness of added sugar will be fueled by the new Nutrition Facts panels we’ll be seeing on retail products. The new panel includes a line for added sugar. The old panels include total sugars, which includes both naturally occurring and added sugars in products.

Per the Food and Drug Administration, added sugars include brown sugar, cane syrup, coconut sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, malt sugar, molasses, raw sugar, turbinado sugar, trehalose, and sucrose or table sugar.

A pastry chef who is thinking about ways to reduce added sugars in desserts may want to consider the sweetening power of ripe fruit, as well as roasted vegetables like roasted sweet potatoes or carrots.

So, can we put more produce in desserts? Yes. But like every product and menu R&D challenge, it takes some creativity along with strategy to get the flavor, appearance, texture, price point and descriptive language just right. I’m up for the challenge. Are you? **pb**

General Mills uses beet extract to color some of the new Trix cereal with no artificial colors or flavors. If it works in a sweet cereal, it can work in a dessert.

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer’s daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, known kale hater, and founder and president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, Inc. You can learn more about her business at www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com and you can follow her insights on food and flavor issues on Twitter @Amy-MyrdalMiller



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In 1890, Robert "Tommie" Cochran traveled by horse and wagon with his father from Delaware to New York City to sell the family's peaches. The 17-year-old was intrigued by the game of buying and selling, and like any typical teenager, thought he could do it better.

In June 1893, after spending three years in apprenticeship with many of the merchants at the time, Robt. T. Cochran & Co. Inc., was founded in downtown Manhattan.

Cochran died in 1922. His sons, Thomas and Lindsey, took over the reins, with many of Tommie's employees supporting them. In the 1960s, the third generation of Cochran's took the helm with Thomas's son, Robert "Tom" Cochran II, serving as president. In 1967, Tom moved the family business to the Hunts Point Terminal Market in the Bronx, NY, where it still operates today.

Reflecting on the photo above, Richard Cochran, the company's current president and the great-grandson of Tommie, says things haven't really changed that much since the early days. "You have good years and bad years, but you will never starve in this business," he says.



Cochran believes the photo was taken sometime between 1968 and 1970, around the time the company moved to Hunts Point. In the center of the photo is Richard's father, Robert T. Cochran II; to the left, in the black hat and glasses is Murray Lebowitz, Robt. T. Cochran's fruit salesman. In the background are various people from Hudson Valley Apple Growers.

Like the three generations before him, Richard grew up in the family business. "I used to be a loader in the summers; it was fun," he says. "I enjoyed those days working alongside my father and family."

In 1975, Cochran was promoted to the sales department. In 1983, he was named president. Today his son, Michael, works alongside him.

Staying with tradition, Robt. T. Cochran handles a full line of fruits and vegetables, selling to major retailers, independents, wholesalers and foodservice operators. Unlike its earliest days selling peaches, the company now sources its products from all major growing areas worldwide. "In the old days, people used to specialize in things. Today, they sell everything," says Cochran. **pb**

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Fowler Farms	46	800-836-9537	www.fowlerfarms.com	Sunripe Certified	71	209-450-9810	www.sunripeproduce.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	48	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com	Sunshine Bouquet Co.	FL-17	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
Fresh Produce & Floral Council	33	714-739-0177	www.fpsc.org	Sunshine Bouquet Co.	77	305-599-9600	www.sunshinebouquet.com
FreshPro	51	973-575-9526	www.freshprofood.com	Taylor Farms	125	831-772-6664	www.taylorfarms.com
Garber Farms	68	337-824-6328	www.garberfarms.com	Texas Citrus	109	956-383-6619	www.txcitrus.com
Garden Fresh Salad Co., Inc.	95	617-889-1580		Travers Fruit Co.	99	617-887-0170	
The Garlic Company	66	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com	Triple J Produce, Inc.	112	252-205-2936	www.triplejproduce.com
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	52	800-243-6770	www.genproinc.com	Tropical Foods	137	704-602-0631	www.trulygoodfoods.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	53	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofresh.com	A.J. Trucco, Inc.	27	866-AJTRUCO	www.truccodirect.com
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC	69	610-345-1113		Twist Ease	40	888-623-8390	www.twistease.com
GPOD of Idaho	60	208-357-7691	www.gpodpotatoes.com	United Fresh Produce Assoc.	36	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Greenhouse Produce Company, LLC	122	888-492-1492	www.greenhouseproduce.net	United Fresh Produce Assoc.	118	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
Grower Alliance, LLC	78-79	200-761-1921	www.groweralliance.com	The USA Bouquet Co.	FL-3	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Growers Express/Green Giant	55	855-350-0014	www.greenjantfresh.com	Village Farms	50	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
A. Gurda Produce Farms	56	845-258-4422	www.agurdaproduce.com	Vision Import Group	21	201-968-1190	www.visionproduce.com
Harris Consulting Solutions	62	269-903-7481		Wholesum Family Farms	121	520-281-9233	www.wholesumharvest.com
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	69	717-656-2631	www.hessbros.com	Kurt Zuhlke & Association	58	800-644-8729	www.producepackaging.com
Hillside Gardens Ltd	70	905-775-3356					
Idaho Potato Commission	113	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail				
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion							

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The screenshot shows the PerishableNews.com website interface. Callout lines point to the following features:

- Streaming Ticker:** A banner at the top right with the text "UNITED FRESH PRODUCE INNOVATION STARTS HERE! IT ALL STARTS HERE!" and "JUNE 20-22 | CHICAGO".
- Produce Highlights:** A banner below the ticker with the text "Local, Organic Top Consumers' Desired Qualities In \$280M Fruit-Producing Plant Market".
- Top Story:** An article titled "Ocean Mist Farms Introduces Season & Steam Artichokes" by Ocean Mist Farms, dated Tuesday, April 3, 2016 at 9:09AM EDT. The article text includes: "CASTROVILLE, Calif. – Ocean Mist Farms is expanding its award-winning Season & Steam line of fresh convenient vegetables with cleaned and ready to cook fresh artichokes. The Season & Steam line, first launched in 2012 with whole and multiple cuts of Brussels sprouts (SuperSteeds SuperFood®, Quick Cook Sprouts®, whole Brussels sprouts and Baby Sprouts), expanded with Kalesteak® in 2015 and artichokes in 2016." Below the article is a "Share Article" section with options for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email.
- Easy Navigation:** A horizontal menu with buttons for Bakery, Dairy, Deli, Floral, Meat & Poultry, Produce, Seafood, and Retail & Foodservice.
- Stories "Just In":** A section with a featured article titled "Indianapolis Fruit Company Promotes Fresh Labels & Packaging" by Indianapolis Fruit Company, Inc., dated Tuesday, April 3, 2016 at 9:09AM EDT. The article text includes: "Indianapolis Fruit Company, leading distributor of fresh fruits and vegetables, floral and other seasonal produce items, is pleased to announce it has redesigned labels and packaging for its Garden Best and Garden Organic lines of fresh-pack items." To the right of the article is a "Reader Legend" box with options for Original Story, Slicing Story, Third Party Story, and Public Relations.
- Multiple Article Sources:** A row of logos for various brands and services: Global Food Safety Services, Del Monte, MANN'S FAMILY FAVORITES, FRESH, and UNITED FRESH PRODUCE INNOVATION STARTS HERE!

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Plus we cover top-level happenings in Retail and Foodservice that are of special interest to a perishable food executive at a supermarket or other retail chain and at a foodservice chain operation or foodservice distributor.

Zoom



24 hours from order to delivery. With over 100 years of experience and our nationwide distribution-center footprint, Del Monte makes it easy to serve and sell consistent, high-quality whole and fresh cut fruits and vegetables as well as value-added products. All with next-day delivery.



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