

# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



## New Tools For Food Safety Enhancement

### INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE U.K. PRODUCE MARKET  
PROTECTED PRODUCE (PART I) • BLUEBERRY DEMAND ON RISE  
FLORIDA PRODUCE • ROCHE BROS. • SPRING MERCHANDISING  
MEXICAN MANGOS • FRUIT LOGISTICA AWARD RECAP  
MERCHANDISING PACKAGED NUTS • MERCHANDISING CARROTS  
ONIONS ON THE MENU • VALUE-ADDED POTATOES • PALLET INNOVATIONS

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you schedule a Peel the Love event.



p.29

p.66

## COVER STORY

- 21 NEW TOOLS FOR FOOD SAFETY ENHANCEMENT**  
Technological advancements in testing, communication devices, data analysis and sanitation are among the resources to strengthen the segment.

## COMMENTARY

- 10 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT**  
A Value Beyond Price
- 84 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**  
Facing Crossroads In 2014
- 86 EUROPEAN MARKET**  
2014 Fruit Logistica Innovation Award

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 THE QUIZ**
- 6 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE**
- 8 TRADE SHOW CALENDAR**
- 12 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**
- 13 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**
- 14 PRODUCE WATCH**
- 90 INFORMATION SHOWCASE**
- 90 BLAST FROM THE PAST**

p.90



## FEATURES

- 32 SPRING AWAKENING**  
The spring months are ideal to increase sales by capitalizing on merchandising efforts using holiday, produce seasonality, and local-sourcing opportunities.
- 38 PROCURING PROFITS FROM PROTECTED PRODUCE - PART I**  
Challenges and opportunities for retailers to market greenhouse-grown produce.
- 50 MEXICAN MANGOS: CROSSING THE CHASM TO POPULARITY**  
Industry players share their advice and tactics on how to increase mango consumption by a broader consumer base.
- 55 FLORIDA SPRING PRODUCE REPORT**  
Discover the fruit and vegetables that will make the state sing this season.
- 62 A LESSON IN PALLETS**  
Experts from CHEP, Gerawan Farming and Litco discuss how pallets can affect sales, product and employee productivity and safety.

p.32



## DEPARTMENTS

### FOODSERVICE MARKETING

- 66 Onions Dominate Foodservice Menus**  
From fast food to upscale restaurants, onions are winning the hearts of chefs and consumers' taste buds.

### FRESH CUT MARKETING

- 70 Make Your Value-Added Potato Sales Spud-Tacular**  
Learn about what's new in the category and how to capture consumers' attention by discovering what works best for your business.

### MERCHANDISING REVIEW

- 76 Orange Is The New Green**  
Industry advice on the best ways to market carrots.

### DRIED FRUIT & NUTS

- 82 How To Build Stronger Packaged-Nut Sales**  
The category offers retailers numerous sales opportunities through variety, convenience and higher pricing.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

- 18 FROM THE PAGES OF THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT**  
Opportunities To Sell Produce In A U.K. Market In Flux
- 29 INDEPENDENT STORES: ROCHE BROS.**  
The Roche family demonstrates its ambitious and energetic persona through customer service, organic and local selections, as well as promotional sales strategies.
- 88 CELEBRATING PRODUCE THROUGH SONG**  
The band at last year's BeachSide booth at PMA's convention played tunes that got everyone singing and dancing down the aisles. We share our choice favorites.

**THIS MONTH'S WINNER**



**Dodie Gauger**  
Sales  
Classic Yam Inc.  
Livingston, CA

Dodie Gauger was working at a doctor's office when she decided she needed a change.

"I saw an ad in the paper and I applied," says Gauger, "and now I absolutely love it."

Gauger has been working for the past 17 years at Classic Yam Inc, a family-owned company in Livingston, CA. "It's a sweet potato packing shed," she says.

Gauger works in sales but also has a few other responsibilities.

"I'm in charge of sales and food safety," says Gauger. "I also phone customers and get orders and sell yams and potatoes across the United States and Canada."

Winning this prize is especially exciting for Gauger — who has been entering the contest ever since her company first started receiving PRODUCE BUSINESS years ago.

"When I'm done with the magazine at work, I take it home with me," she says. "PRODUCE BUSINESS has all the best information in it. I learn so much through the magazine."

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

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This turntable allows you to transfer your favorite LPs and 45s to a CD or computer. The device simply uses a USB port adapter to archive songs or albums into digital files. If you want to play albums the traditional way, then you will appreciate listening to records through the built-in speakers. Complete with volume and tune controls, as well as a diamond stylus, this quiet belt-driven turntable includes a Software Suite for ripping and editing. It's compatible for a PC or a Mac.



**QUESTIONS FOR THE FEBRUARY ISSUE**

- 1) What is the name of Dole's Summer Tour? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is the city and state for the headquarters of Kingdom Fresh? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What type of grapefruit is shown on the Paramount Citrus ad? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How is Grower Pete's Organic Living Butter Lettuce grown in greenhouses? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is the website for PECO Pallet? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) How many bagged-carrot products are shown on the Bolthouse Farms ad? \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_  
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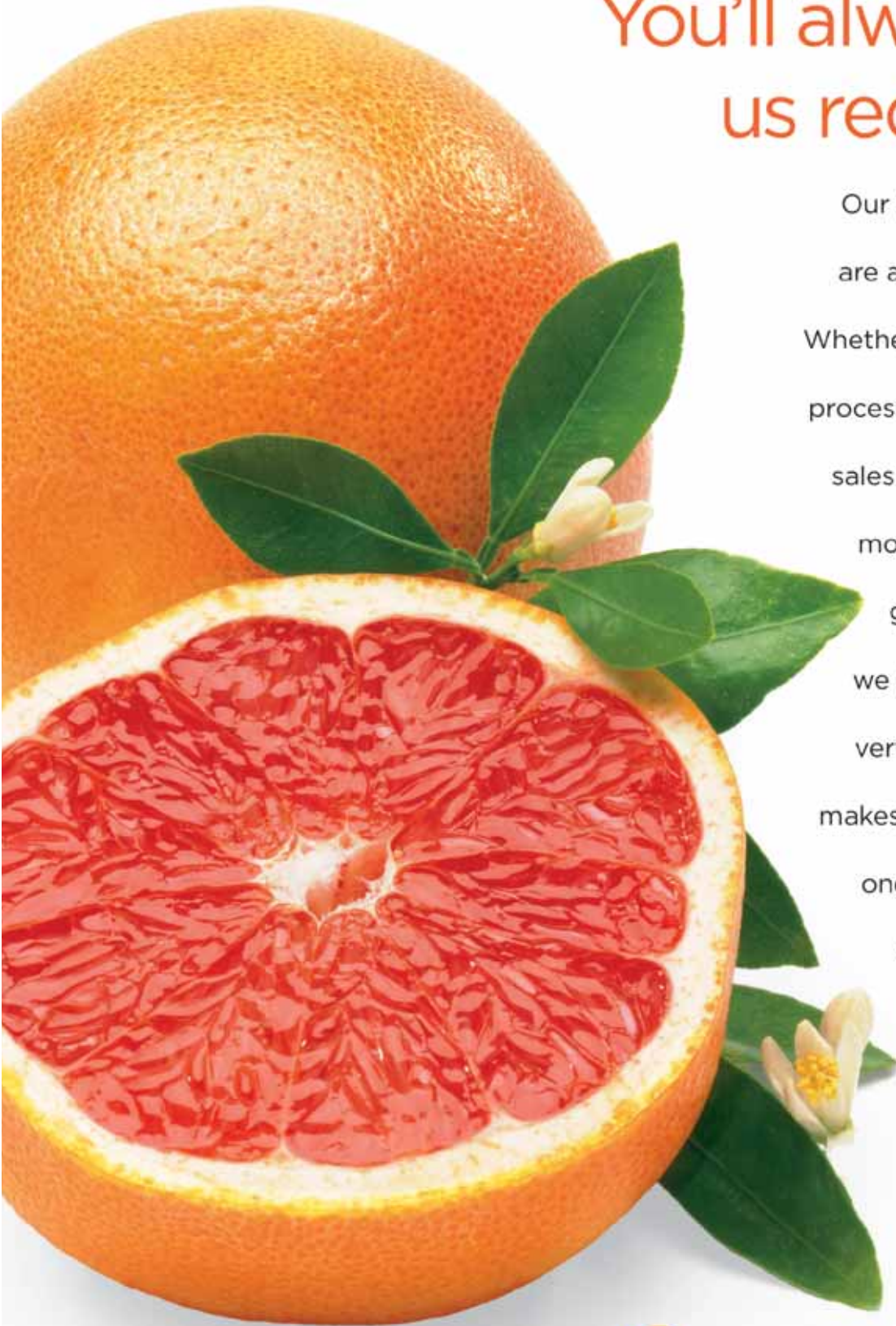
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# WHAT IF IMMIGRATION REFORM PASSES IN 2014?

By Robert Guenther,  
United Fresh Senior Vice President of Public Policy

**W**ith a new bi-partisan budget deal sailing through Congress in December and an emboldened Speaker of the House standing up to those in his party, some are speculating there is a glimmer of hope for immigration reform legislation to move through Congress in 2014. I know, we've heard this before, but let's imagine for a minute if we did see reforms to our nation's immigration laws. How would comprehensive immigration reform impact the fresh produce industry? Let's take a look at a few key issues that produce industry companies would face under new immigration law and regulation.

## Current Workforce

Any law passed by Congress will have a provision that addresses the current undocumented workforce in this country. There could be a host of policy options ranging from a clear path to citizenship after certain requirements are made, such as fines and back taxes, to having to go back to their home country and obtain a visa to return to the United States. In addition, there will certainly be a timeframe established regarding when legal status needs to be granted by the federal government. For the produce industry, employers will need to develop a plan that addresses this situation with their current employees who may fall into this category. For instance, how will employers want to handle the timing of meeting the new federal requirements? What type of information will they need to provide to their employees for a smooth and efficient transition that does not interrupt business operations? Over time, immigration reform will bring higher levels of certainty for farm employers, farm workers and surrounding communities. But the initial transition will require some planning.

**THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT IF CONGRESS CAN FIND TRUE LEADERSHIP AND SEND AN IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL TO THE PRESIDENT FOR HIS SIGNATURE, WE WILL ALL BE BETTER OFF.**

## Agriculture Guestworker Program

The second biggest issue will be for employers to understand the requirements of a new agriculture guestworker program. Most likely, it will take one to two years for the federal government to develop rules and guidelines for a new program. Employers who are planning to utilize this new program will need to be acutely aware of the requirements related to issues such as transportation, timing of applications to coincide with operations, housing requirements, and employment taxes.

## New Requirements on Employee Verification

We expect that any bill sent to the president will require employers to use E-Verify. Most likely, there will be a phase-in period based on the size of the business, with large employers having to implement it before smaller employers are required to do so. However, under most of the current proposals on the table, agriculture is the last industry, regardless of the size of the business, mandated to implement E-Verify (a free, Internet-based application run by the government that can be used by anyone in the U.S. over the age of 16 to confirm his or her employment eligibility). Mandatory use of E-

Verify for agriculture will begin four years after the date of enactment of the legislation. Once the E-Verify program is mandatory for agriculture, it will be that much more important for an agricultural visa program to be in place. Therefore, understanding the requirements and technology needed for an E-Verify system in your business will be critical.

The bottom line is that if Congress can find true leadership and send an immigration reform bill to the president for his signature, we will all be better off. The current system is unworkable and not conducive to industry needs. Reforms to the immigration system can assure that American agriculture has a legal, stable supply of workers, both in the short- and long-term for all types of agriculture. This requires a legislative solution that deals with the current unauthorized and experienced agricultural workforce, and ensures that future needs are met through a program that will admit a sufficient number of willing and able workers in a timely manner.

These are just three of the major issues that will confront our industry if Congress passes immigration legislation in 2014. Let's hope we can get to a point where we are having these types of discussions with our industry in the next year.



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Please visit our booth #1055 at PMA Fresh Summit in New Orleans, Louisiana

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**Conference Venue:** Berlin Exhibition Fairgrounds Hall 1-25, Berlin, Germany

**Conference Management:** Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany

**Phone:** 493-030-382048

**Email:** [central@messe-berlin.de](mailto:central@messe-berlin.de)

**Website:** [fruitlogistica.com](http://fruitlogistica.com)

**FEBRUARY 9 - 12, 2014**  
**NATIONAL GROCERS ASSOCIATION (NGA) SHOW 2014**

**Conference Venue:** The Mirage Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV

**Conference Management:** National Grocers Association, Arlington, VA

**Phone:** (703) 516-0700 • **Fax:** (703) 516-0115

**Email:** [ccunnick@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:ccunnick@nationalgrocers.org)

**Website:** [nationalgrocers.org](http://nationalgrocers.org)

**FEBRUARY 12 - 14, 2014**  
**BIOFACH 2014 INTO ORGANIC**

**Conference Venue:** Exhibition Centre, Nuremberg, Germany

**Conference Management:** NurembergMesse GmbH, Nuremberg, Germany

**Phone:** +49 (0) 9 11.86 06-89 96

**Website:** [biofach.com](http://biofach.com)

**FEBRUARY 19 - 23, 2014**  
**NATIONAL WATERMELON CONVENTION 2014**

**Conference Venue:** Marriott Riverfront Resort & Spa, Savannah, GA

**Conference Management:** National Watermelon Association, Inc., Lakeland, FL

**Phone:** (863) 619-7575 • **Fax:** (863) 619-7577

**Email:** [bmorrissey@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:bmorrissey@tampabay.rr.com)

**Website:** [nationalwatermelonassociation.com](http://nationalwatermelonassociation.com)

**FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 1, 2014**  
**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 2014**

**Conference Venue:** Caribe Royal Resort & Conference Center, Orlando, FL

**Conference Management:** Southeast Produce Council, Inc., East Ellijay, GA

**Phone:** (706) 276-4025 • **Fax:** (866) 653-4479

**Email:** [info@seproduceccouncil.com](mailto:info@seproduceccouncil.com)

**Website:** [seproduceccouncil.com](http://seproduceccouncil.com)

**MARCH 2 - 4, 2014**  
**CANADIAN RESTAURANT AND FOOD-SERVICES ASSOCIATION (CRFA) SHOW**

**Conference Venue:** Direct Energy Centre, Toronto, Ontario

**Conference Management:** Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association, Toronto, Mississauga

**Phone:** (416) 649-4237 • **Fax:** (416) 923-6164

**Email:** [nmestnik@crfa.ca](mailto:nmestnik@crfa.ca)

**Website:** [crfa.ca](http://crfa.ca)

**MARCH 2 - 4, 2014**  
**INTERNATIONAL RESTAURANT & FOODSERVICE SHOW OF NEW YORK**

**Conference Venue:** Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York, NY

**Conference Management:** Reed Exhibitions, Norwalk, CT

**Phone:** (203) 840-5841 • **Fax:** (203) 840-9841

**Email:** [rhomola@reedexpo.com](mailto:rhomola@reedexpo.com)

**Website:** [internationalrestaurantny.com](http://internationalrestaurantny.com)

**MARCH 4 - 7, 2014**  
**FOODEX JAPAN 2014**

39th International Food And Beverage Exhibition

**Conference Venue:** Makuhari Messe (Nippon Convention Center), Tokyo, Japan

**Conference Management:** IMEX Management, Charlotte, NC

**Phone:** (704) 365-0041 • **Fax:** (704) 365-8426

**Email:** [erich@imexmanagement.com](mailto:erich@imexmanagement.com)

**Website:** [imexmg.com](http://imexmg.com)

**MARCH 5 - 8, 2014**  
**REFRIGERATED FOODS ASSOCIATION (RFA) CONFERENCE**

**Conference Venue:** Omni Resort at ChampionsGate, Orlando, FL

**Conference Management:** Refrigerated Foods Association, Marietta, GA

**Phone:** (770) 303-9905 • **Fax:** (770) 303-9906

**Email:** [info@refrigeratedfoods.org](mailto:info@refrigeratedfoods.org)

**Website:** [refrigeratedfoods.org](http://refrigeratedfoods.org)

**MARCH 6 - 9, 2014**  
**NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST**

**Conference Venue:** Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA

**Conference Management:** New Hope Natural Media, Boulder, CO

**Phone:** (303) 998-9208 • **Fax:** (303) 939-9559

**Email:** [tradeshows@newhope.com](mailto:tradeshows@newhope.com)

**Website:** [expowest.com](http://expowest.com)

**MARCH 10 - 12, 2014**  
**WISCONSIN RESTAURANT EXPO**

**Conference Venue:** Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee, WI

**Conference Management:** Wisconsin Restaurant Association, Madison, WI

**Phone:** (608) 270-9950 • **Fax:** (608) 270-9960

**Email:** [dfaris@wirerestaurant.org](mailto:dfaris@wirerestaurant.org)

**Website:** [wirerestaurant.org](http://wirerestaurant.org)

**MARCH 12 - 13, 2014**  
**AMERICA TRADES PRODUCE / BORDER POLICY CONFERENCE**

**Conference Venue:** Tubac Golf Resort and Spa, Tubac, AZ

**Conference Management:** Fresh Produce Association, Nogales, AZ and Texas International Produce Association, Mission, TX

**Phone:** (520) 287-2707 • **Fax:** (520) 287-2948

**Website:** [americatradesproduce.com](http://americatradesproduce.com)

**MARCH 17 - 19, 2014**  
**PRODUCE FOR BETTER HEALTH FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL CONVENTION: THE CONSUMER CONNECTION**

**Conference Venue:** Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas, Scottsdale, AZ

**Conference Management:** Produce for Better Health Foundation, Hockessin, DE

**Phone:** (302) 235-2329 • **Fax:** (302) 235-5555

**Email:** [salston@pbhfoundation.org](mailto:salston@pbhfoundation.org)

**Website:** [pbhfoundation.org](http://pbhfoundation.org)

**APRIL 2 - 4, 2014**  
**CANADIAN PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION (CPMA)**

**Conference Venue:** Vancouver Convention Centre, Vancouver, British Columbia

**Conference Management:** Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Ottawa, Ontario

**Phone:** (613) 226-4187 • **Fax:** (613) 226-2984

**Email:** [cbrault@cpma.ca](mailto:cbrault@cpma.ca)

**Website:** [cpma.ca](http://cpma.ca)



To submit events to our Forward Thinking calendar, please e-mail [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com).





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# A VALUE BEYOND PRICE

By James Prevor  
President & Editor-in-Chief



**W**hen this columnist was in his salad days and green in judgment, he went to work for his father. After a baptism on the loading dock, we were given the job of buying for export, and we quickly learned that buying simply for price was not a wise decision.

Sometimes it was a matter of knowing the vendors and knowing your customer. For example, my father, Mike Prevor, gave me a

list of customers and said that when we were buying apples to ship out of Baltimore or Norfolk, these companies preferred Turkey Knob brand. Why? Through years of experience, my father and these customers found that they always delivered a heavier pack.

Why these particular customers? They were in markets that sold by the pound rather than by the piece. We typically paid a little more to the old Byrd and Fredrickson company — now the orchards and the brand are owned by Bowman Fruit Sales — but our customers made more money on the heavier pack, so there was good value for the money.

Other times, the issue was knowing the internal dynamics of a company. Over the years, we bought millions of cartons of Florida grapefruit from almost every packer, mostly for shipment to France. We had our cartons pre-positioned in many packinghouses. At the time, though, Ocean Spray was making an effort to build its fresh business, and our agent in Vero Beach, Carl Fetzer, tried to buy Ocean Spray grapefruit when he could. Back then, at least, Ocean Spray's focus was really the juice business, and Carl found that if quality was at all marginal, Ocean Spray sent the fruit to be juiced and left the best fruit for the fresh market. We didn't get any bargains, and sometimes we paid a few pennies more, but the fruit made sound arrival at a higher rate than other fruit we bought during those years — so a bargain elsewhere might not have been a bargain at all.

On other occasions, it had to do not with the produce but how the company would behave if there was a problem. Our tomato buyer was named Izzy Seidman. He was an amazing man. As far as I knew, he had no home — since in those pre-cell phone days, I could reach him at a local Holiday Inn on any day of the year wherever tomatoes were being harvested that week.

Once again, we shipped countless loads of tomatoes and bought from everyone at one time or another, but Izzy used to buy from Six L's, now Lipman Produce, when he could. Why? Two reasons: One, when tomatoes were tight, they would always protect us and we would get most of our order filled. Two, because if we had a problem upon arrival down in Puerto Rico, they worked with us. We rarely lost money due to a bad delivery. Once again, there were often cheaper alternatives, but

what good is buying cheaper if you don't have product when things are tight or if you lose when the vendor won't stand behind its product?

What is interesting about these three procurement lessons we learned in produce buying is that none of these examples were “part of the deal.” Turkey Knob didn't guarantee heavier packs — they just delivered. Ocean Spray didn't warrant that its grapefruit would make good delivery overseas, but it diverted the fruit that most likely would not make good delivery. And Six L's didn't sign a contract promising to always get us tomatoes or to make adjustments for problem deliveries overseas — it just did so. It is these often intangible factors that make it wise to not try and drive every penny out of the supply chain.

A few years ago, when Wal-Mart abandoned much of the

procurement system that had been set up by Bruce Peterson in its early produce days, we questioned whether its efforts would actually be profitable. The plan basically replaced dedicated suppliers with a rolling auction system. One can argue about whether the new system — from which Wal-Mart has backtracked a bit — saved a few pennies on procurement. What became clear, though, was that

under the old system every vendor had dedicated teams that bled Wal-Mart blue. Once those disappeared, out-of-stocks went up. It is doubtful there was a win for Wal-Mart.

Today the issue is Safeway. The word on the street is that the company is dressing itself up for a sale to Cerberus. Whether that is accurate or not, it is certainly true that the company has been calling in vendors across the entire grocery industry and demanding price cuts, including retroactive price cuts. Only a few produce companies are affected as of yet, but we are told that the program will expand to cover more produce vendors.

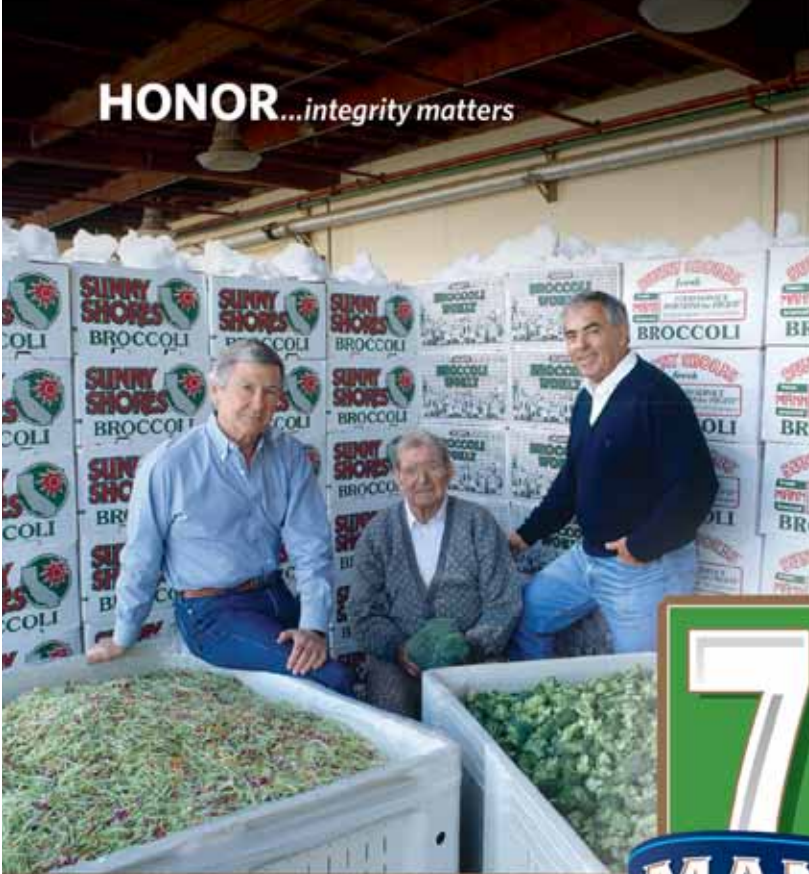
This is another example of being penny-wise and pound-foolish. First, we doubt doing this will help sell the company to Cerberus. These are sophisticated players, and the first thing they will look at is whether such activities are producing the kind of sustainable earnings that will justify borrowing money to buy the company. Second, Safeway is blessed with vendors who have stuck with the company through thick and thin over the years.

Especially in perishables, these vendors “take care of” Safeway in ways no Safeway chief executive could ever imagine. Safeway may force vendors to work for less or it may lose them to competitive vendors desperate enough to take the offers being made. In either case, what some distant executive sees as a “good deal” is not, because produce involves a range of quality, availability and service — and if Safeway pays less, it will get less. Guaranteed. In general, putting one's vendors in a position where they are not even sure if they want your business anymore is not a path to vendor alignment or, ultimately, commercial success.

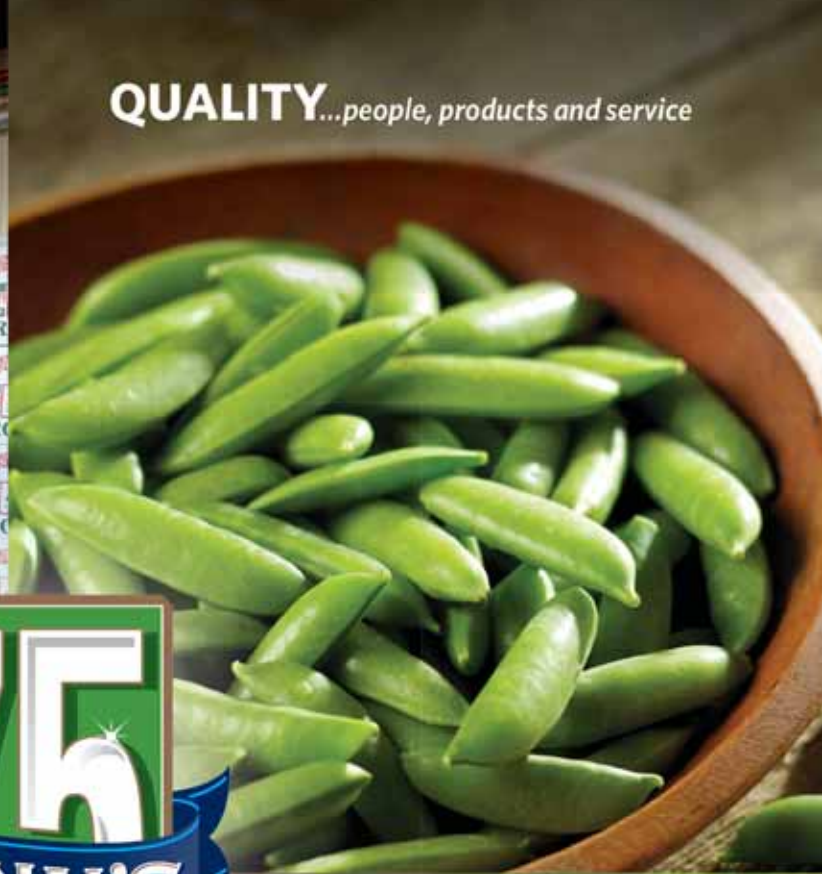
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**In general, putting one's vendors in a position where they are not even sure if they want your business anymore is not a path to vendor alignment or, ultimately, commercial success.**

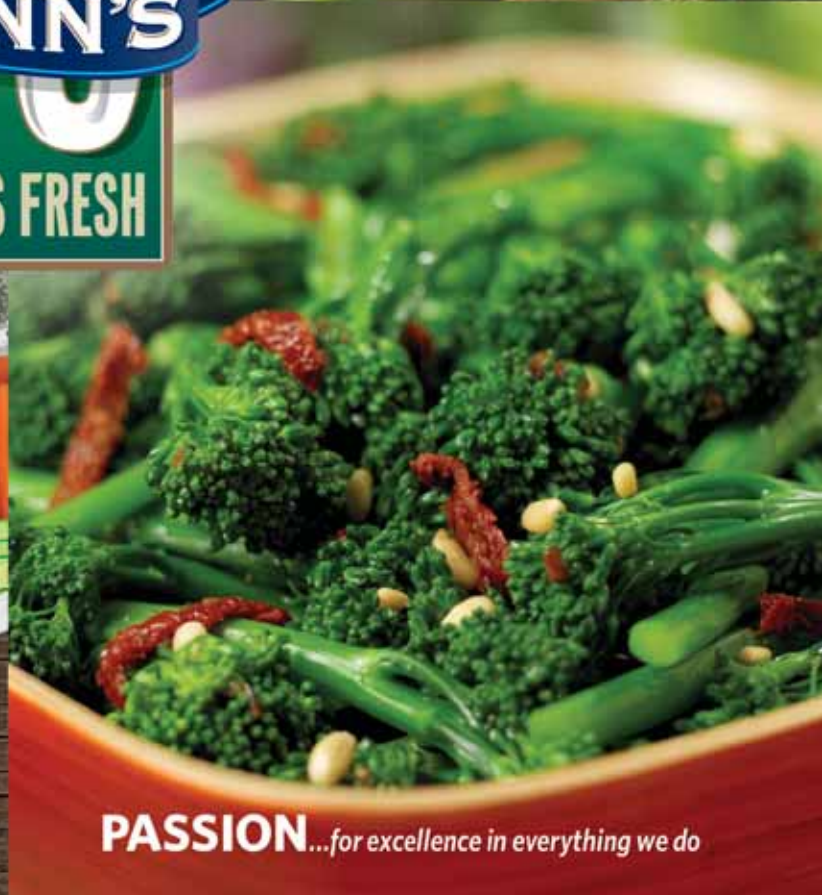
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# Blueberry Consumers Trending Younger As Overall Consumption Rises In U.S.

BY MARK VILLATA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

**D**emand for blueberries is growing by leaps and bounds. Americans are nearly twice as likely as they were nine years ago to buy blueberries this year. The number of households saying they purchased blueberries within the past month (69 percent) has nearly doubled since 2008.

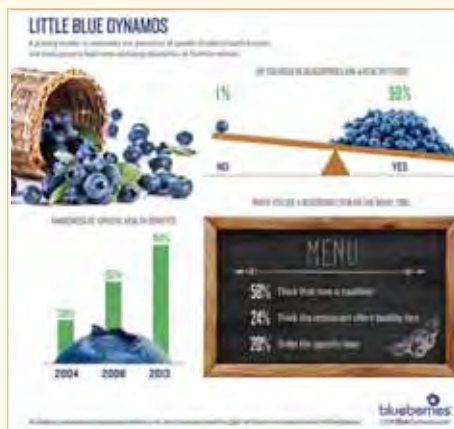
Today's blueberry consumers are also trending younger and more diverse; they are more likely to be 35- to 44-year-olds (often parents with kids at home) and minorities. When one considers this shift in buyer demographics, and the fact that 57 percent of consumers have seen news stories about the healthfulness of blueberries, it's evident that the industry's investment in communicating the role blueberries play in a healthy lifestyle is paying off. With the Mom market representing \$2.7 trillion in annual spending in the U.S. and the Hispanic market expected to hit \$1.5 trillion in buying power by 2015, connecting with this next wave of purchasers will continue to be a key strategy in driving demand.

## A Fit For Modern Lifestyles

As consumers place greater emphasis on finding healthy, flavorful options that are also convenient, blueberries rise to the top of ideal options. Marketers looking to move product quickly off shelves should continue to position blueberries as a good fit for modern lifestyles.

When asked what they like best about blueberries, consumers cite a variety of attributes including health (84 percent), taste (81 percent), convenience (61 percent) and versatility (44 percent) — evidence that they view blueberries as a simple yet beneficial addition to their diet.

The majority of consumers (84 percent) choose fresh blueberries over other forms, preferring to eat them "out-of-hand" as a snack (60 percent), over yogurt (54 percent), in smoothies (49 percent) or over cereal (48 percent) — all ideal options for busy families or individuals.



The favorite way to use frozen blueberries is in smoothies. Forty-nine percent of the general population, and 54 percent of women between the ages of 25 to 44, say they like to use frozen blueberries in smoothies, which have become a popular source of fuel for the health-conscious and time-pressed.

## The Blueberry Effect

With 99 percent of consumers believing blueberries to be a healthy food and 68 percent stating awareness of specific health benefits (a 115 percent increase over 2004), there's no doubt consumers associate blueberries with a healthy lifestyle. This is good news for marketers, because awareness of the fruit's nutritional benefits is closely tied to propensity to purchase.

When consumers see blueberry items on menus, 58 percent perceive the specific dish as being healthier, 24 percent perceive the restaurant as offering healthy fare, and nearly 20 percent say they order that specific dish.

## Blueberry Marketers: Make Use Of The Web

As they seek to enhance their own bottom line, blueberry marketers have much

to gain from web-based communications.

Nearly 60 percent of consumers say they are very likely to purchase blueberries based on information they've seen on social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. To draw more consumers into the store, retailers should consider promoting special blueberry offers through these channels.

## Key Takeaway

As more people are made aware of the many ways blueberries fit in a healthy, dynamic lifestyle, demand for this small package with big benefits will continue to grow. Marketers and merchandisers with an eye on the bottom line should take a closer look at the great potential of this little fruit. To view an executive summary of the research, visit [blueberrycouncil.org/blueberry-marketers](http://blueberrycouncil.org/blueberry-marketers).

**Methodological notes:** The research was conducted by Hebert Research, Bellevue, WA, on behalf of the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council in May 2013 among 3,765 nationally representative Americans ages 18 and over. Data was collected via a combination of online, mobile and telephone surveys. Respondents were categorized into a general population group of 1,797 primary shoppers and an oversample of 1,968 women ages 25 to 44 who also identify themselves as primary shoppers. The general population group was used as the base-line for all comparisons with 2004 and 2008 data. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 2 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.



The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council represents blueberry growers and packers in North and South America who market blueberries in the United States and work to promote the growth and well-being of the entire blueberry industry. The industry is committed to providing blueberries that are grown, harvested, packed and shipped in clean, safe environments.

# Unlike Rest Of Industry, Blueberry's Health Pitch Has Fueled Production And Demand

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

President Reagan's economic program was ridiculed by some as "supply side" economics. The Keynesian view, which was conventional wisdom at the time, was to supercharge demand — expecting businesses to keep up, to employ people and to get the economy going.

Although President Reagan never used the "supply side" term, his program was deemed to be focused on creating investment incentives. The theory was that new products and services created their own demand. So it is with blueberries.

Without question, consumption has boomed. Though some of this growth was facilitated by increases in U.S. production, which grew steadily — from 80 million pounds of fresh harvest in 2000 to 281 million pounds in 2012 (according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services) — the explosion in production came from the Southern Hemisphere — with Chile alone going from 6 million pounds in 2000 to 117 million pounds in 2012 (according to the U.S. Department of Commerce).

Fifteen years ago, there was virtually no Southern Hemisphere blueberry production. Today, about half of the blueberry consumption in the U.S. is supplied by imports, and both Peru and Mexico are expected to boom in the future.

Obviously, few people would plant blueberries or look to establish a Southern Hemisphere blueberry industry if they didn't believe the demand would be there, but it is also true that the year-round volume secured year-round shelf-space at retail and funded enhanced promotion. Indeed the decision to go to a mandatory assessment for research and promotion for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council was driven, in no small part, by projections of

massive increases in blueberry production, which motivated the industry to work hard on increasing consumption.

The blueberry health pitch is also somewhat distinct from that of the produce industry at large. Much of the trade's health focus is built around the idea that eating more produce means eating less of other things and that this change in eating habits will reduce obesity as well as obesity-related health issues. Our industry's overall health focus is not built on any specific health claim related to produce. That is why no specific mix of produce need be promoted; it is just

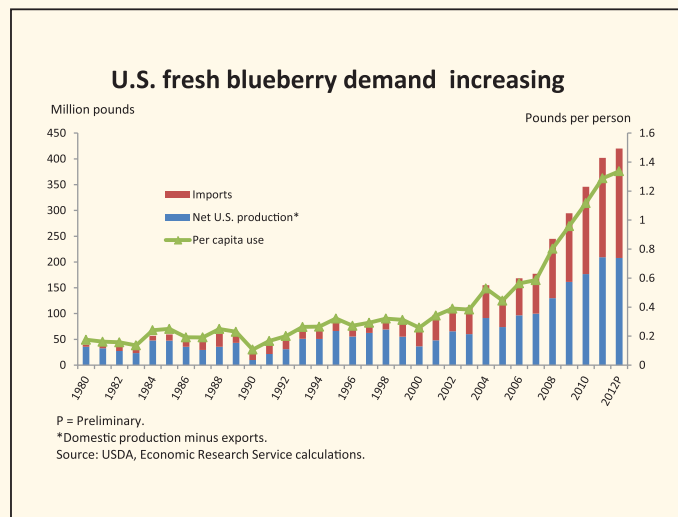
is for the rest of the produce industry. Many items that we need boosted in consumption are bitter greens and don't have the natural appeal of sweet fruits such as blueberries. Many items need to be cooked or are large and bulky. They are not the perfect snack size like the blueberry.

Perhaps some new research would help to find specific health benefits, but it is not clear to what extent these specific benefits drive consumption, as opposed to a general perception that blueberries are good for you, tasty and convenient.

There is a bit of a chicken-and-the-egg quality to the blueberry story. The demographics of usage has broadened — well it is hard to imagine that the demographics of consumption would not change if the market was to absorb such enormous increase in production. More people report they ate blueberries within the past 30 days. Well isn't that part of year-round production keeping blueberries on the shelf 52 weeks a year in every supermarket? In addition, though 57 percent of consumers have seen news stories about the healthfulness of blueberries, causality is not proven.

The key issue is that a well-received product met an opportunity to become a year-round item. The transition led to more year-round shelf space and the adoption of new habits, say putting blueberries on oatmeal rather than bananas. This fortuitously happened in a well-organized industry that was prepared to invest in expanding demand and researching technology to boost usage.

One thing we don't have evidence of is that increased consumption of blueberries has led to greater overall produce consumption. That's a research study that would be well worth doing.



that "More Matters!"

When you have a fruit that is delicious, available year-around, very convenient to eat, and it supposedly has so many benefits, it is not surprising that consumption keeps rising. It is all upside and no downside.

New technology from companies such as Naturipe even brought blueberries into the seasonal oatmeal selection at McDonald's. The plan is to bring blueberries into greater use in foodservice — where sales growth has lagged compared to retail.

The blueberry success is an incredible story, but it is hard to know what the lesson

**TRANSITIONS**

**HBF INTERNATIONAL  
MCMINNVILLE, OR**

HBF International announces that **Doug Perkins** is now CEO of HBF International. Perkins will oversee the day-to-day running of the company. His former role at HBF International included stints as managing director and director of export sales.



HBF International announces that **Mark Hurst** is taking the role of HBF international research and development director. Hurst will oversee projects designed to enhance the HBF product line and planning operations for the future. In addition, Hurst will continue running the day-to-day growing operations of Hurst's Berry Farm and Hurst's Berry Mexico.



**READY PAC  
IRWINDALE, CA**

Ready Pac Foods Inc. announces **Ali Leon** as senior director of marketing within the Food Service division at Ready Pac. In her new position, Leon will be responsible for the development and execution of short- and long-term plans that leverage consumer, culinary and customer insights and future trends.



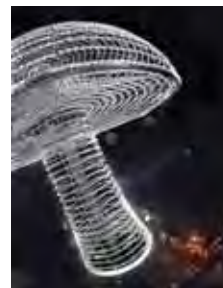
Ready Pac Foods, Inc. announces the hiring of its new chief information officer, **Bob Estes**. He will lead all information systems and technology where his focus will be on transforming information accessibility and system integration. With over 30 years' experience, Estes brings a vast knowledge of the supply chain.



**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**WILCOX FRESH  
REXBURG, ID**

Wilcox Fresh promotes **Jim Richter** to CEO. Richter has worked for seven years with Wilcox Fresh as executive vice president of sales and marketing. Prior to this position, Richter had been senior vice president of category management. While at Wilcox, he also became an owner partner with Lynn Wilcox and Mike Hart at Northeast Distribution Services LLC, (NEDS), in South Portland, ME.



**KENNETT SQUARE MUSHROOM  
DROP IS HUGE SUCCESS**

The Kennett Area Restaurant and Merchant Association (KARMA), Chester County, PA, announced the inaugural "Midnight in the Square" Mushroom Drop on New Year's Eve was a tremendous success. Event organizers were thrilled with the turnout as 4,000 attendees crowded the streets of Kennett as a giant 700-pound lighted mushroom came down to ring in the New Year. Good food and a band rocked the streets late into the night.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**



**SUN COAST SALES AND SUN COAST  
TEXAS TO BECOME SUN COAST FARMS**

Sun Coast Farming, Sun Coast Sales and Sun Coast Texas (all headquartered from Santa Maria, CA) will start the year with a new name, Sun Coast Farms LLC. With Sun Coast Farms' continued growth in the vegetable category on the California coast, the companies are expanding into the Nogales vegetable program and are also looking at various fruit items that would complement its overall programs.



**CALIFORNIA AVOCADO  
COMMISSION PROGRESSES  
ITS GAP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

The California Avocado Commission's (CAC) Good Agricultural Practices program is yielding impressive results over the past two years. More than 600 California avocado groves went through GAP certification. To encourage participation, the Irvine, CA-based CAC established a GAP Incentive Rebate. To date, \$100,000 was paid out to GAP-certified California avocado growers for its actual audit cost.



**TO-JO CAPTURES BEST OVERALL  
MUSHROOM DISPLAY**

To-Jo Mushrooms, Avondale, PA, was awarded "Best Overall Mushroom Display" at the 2014 Pennsylvania Farm Show held in Harrisburg, PA. To-Jo finished first in six of the nine Specialty/Brown Mushroom categories, including best 4-ounce Shiitakes, and best 6-ounce Portabellas to help seal the victory.



**KINGSTON FRESH  
MANGOS VOLUME  
INCREASES**

Kingston Fresh, Idaho Falls, ID, announces its Peruvian mango crop is off to a good start. Volume is expected to climb with arrivals starting in mid-January. Kingston has been steadily building its imports division in recent years and is aggressively adding to its portfolio of branded products.

**KINGSTON FRESH'S NEW ADDITION**



Kingston Fresh, Idaho Fall, ID, announces the addition of Chilean grapes to its growing imports portfolio. The company will receive its first arrivals in early February into the Philadelphia ports — conveniently servicing its key customers within the Eastern seaboard and Midwest markets.

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

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### READY PAC CELEBRATES 45 YEARS

For Ready Pac Foods Inc., Irwindale, CA, 2014 marks the company's 45th anniversary of providing fresh-cut produce solutions to customers across the country. Ready Pac was one of the first suppliers in fresh-cut foods to bring the concept of European salad blends to the U.S. From there, the company created the pillow pack for bagged salads and later introduced a unique, proprietary crisp packaging for bagged salads.



### UNITED FRESH'S LAUNCHES FOODSERVICE REPORT

United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, DC, introduces *Fresh Insights for Foodservice* — a new quarterly report showcasing the latest trends in fresh produce use in foodservice and restaurants. The idea for this new report came from the Retail-Foodservice Board as a tool for United members to identify the latest trends in how fresh produce is being used in foodservice and restaurants. The report was developed by Datassential, a market research firm dedicated to the food industry. It is free to United Fresh members and \$50 to non-members.



### OCEAN MIST FARMS CELEBRATES 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, will celebrate a 90-year legacy of growing artichokes and fresh vegetables with activities planned throughout the year ahead. One of the activities Ocean Mist has planned is a redesign of the company's website and the creation of a new Artichoke Club website.



### E.W. BRANDT & SONS EXPANDS AND REBRANDS

E.W. Brandt & Sons, a Wapato, WA, fruit company, is expanding its operations and re-launching its brand as RemBrandt Masterpiece Fruit. The company is making the investments to capitalize on growing demand for its fresh fruit, both domestically and overseas. The Brandts have added acreage and increased storage capacity with a new facility.

### BC TREE FRUITS CELEBRATES APPLE MONTH

BC Tree Fruits, Kelowna, British Columbia, is celebrating apple month this February. Some of Western Canada's top chefs, nutritionists, authors, and food leaders have teamed up with the fruit cooperative to participate in Apple Month and engage in the ultimate fruit battle. Canadians are invited to visit [apple-month.com](http://apple-month.com) to view the apple inspired recipes.



### GREENER FIELDS' NEWEST PARTNER

Compass Group North America, Monterey, CA, is the newest hospitality partner in Greener Fields Together, the sustainability and local produce initiative created by the Monterey, CA-based PRO\*ACT produce supply-chain management company. Greener Fields Together seeks measurable improvements in sustainability and food safety practices through the supply chain.



### SUNKIST GROWERS' PROMOTION WITH THE BIGGEST LOSER

Sunkist, Sherman Oaks, CA, is kicking off a promotion to help consumers "peel away the pounds!" Teaming up with NBC's hit series, *The Biggest Loser*, Sunkist is launching a national sweepstakes offering consumers a chance to win one of two trips to *The Biggest Loser* Resort.



### MISSION PRODUCE'S NEW FACILITY

Mission Produce, Oxnard, CA, announced the completion of its new, multi-million dollar, Forward Distribution and Ripening Center in Swedesboro, NJ. The new location has over 100,000 square feet of operational space. It includes 360 ripe pallet spaces with room to add extra spaces when necessary, 4,500 cooler pallet spaces, and 23 insulated dock doors.



### AMERICA TRADES PRODUCE CONFERENCE 2014

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas's fourth annual America Trades Produce conference hopes to build upon previous events by examining big-picture U.S./Mexico trade dynamics, as well as the nitty-gritty of daily business. The event is scheduled for March 12 to 13, 2014 at the Tubac Golf Resort and Spa in Tubac, AZ.



### AVOCADO COMMISSION AWARDS RETAIL CONTEST WINNERS

The California Avocado Commission, Irvine, CA, recently honored the winners of its advertising and display contests. The Grand Prize winner, Food Town Store No. 7 in Houston, was chosen at random from the 31 entrants. The winners received an Apple iPad Mini (\$400 value).

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





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# Opportunities To Sell Produce In A U.K. Market In Flux: 'Big Four' Competition And Alternative Channels Provide Untapped Openings For Branded Produce And New Supply Chains

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT



The occupational hazard of punditry is excessive intellectual output with insufficient intellectual input. We took a pause from Punditing to recharge those intellectual batteries, emotionally draining ever since my father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Part of the learning process is the obvious: reading, listening, thinking. But one big advantage we have always had is the fact that, like those who read this column, we are active in running a business. We've built a company from a piece of paper and a dream, and now the company is in the midst of its 29th year.

This past month, we spent most of our time in Europe, as we prepare to launch The London Produce Show and Conference on June 4 - 6, 2014. There was important work to do. Partly it was to visit Fruit Logistica, which we have been to before and frequently recommended. Mostly though, it was to spend a month's time in the United Kingdom, to begin doing a deep dive into the culture and the industry.

It is an exciting time for the produce industry in the U.K., a time of great flux, and whenever you stand at the precipice of a sea change, there is a substantial opportunity for those willing and able to see beyond the present.

The market in the U.K. has been changing. To most foreign shippers, there were only four big retailers to sell — Tesco, ASDA, Sainsbury's and Morrisons — and for the last generation those four retailers were consolidating procurement through their preferred supply partners. Already famous for rigorous audit standards on food safety and sustainability, the U.K. market was a very tough one to crack. The heavy consolidation also gave the so-called "Big Four" substantial leverage on price and made profit opportunities

skinny for suppliers. Many a shipper in production areas that were dependent on the U.K., such as South Africa, made it their priority to diversify their customer base away from the U.K.

That picture, though, only holds for those who do business through a rear view mirror.

**It is an exciting time for the produce industry in the U.K., a time of great flux, and whenever you stand at the precipice of a sea change, there is a substantial opportunity for those willing and able to see beyond the present.**

Part of the issue is that retail is not the whole picture. There has been an explosion of culinary activity. The British have given the world much — the Magna Carta and so on — but the island nation was never known for great cuisine. Yet today, London is one of the top restaurant towns in the world.

British cuisine itself has been recreated with celebrities such as Jamie Oliver leading the way, and, of course, a substantial population from places such as India has made the city a focal point for Indian Food, but today it is often said that the English don't even live in London anymore. Though not precisely true, there is truth in this.

Prime property has become too expensive. If you sit in the 5-star Grosvenor House, where we are holding The London Produce Show and Conference, you see Arab sheikhs in flowing robes, Russian billionaires with platinum blonde girlfriends and an extraordinary array of the world's most affluent — more than you see English folks.

These people have created demand for incredible cuisine and hip venues. Yes, there are plenty of places to get fish and chips, but there are lots of people at Novikov or Hakkasan. Take a look at the produce always on display at Novikov [photo to left], which is said to be London's top grossing restaurant and is owned by Arkady Novikov, Moscow's largest restaurateur.

So, today, the Fresh Produce Consortium, with whom we are

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presenting The London Produce Show and Conference, estimates that fully 40 percent of produce in the U.K. goes through the foodservice or wholesale channels. That's a big chunk of business without factoring in retail at all.

The retail sector is also undergoing extraordinary change. There is basically a trifurcation of the market, with a booming deep discount sector. German retailers ALDI and Lidl are steadily eating into the market share of the Big Four. At the same time, the carriage trade sector, such as Waitrose and Marks & Spencer, are boosting share, Waitrose in particular.

In addition, you have lots of smaller cracks in the Big Four hegemony — American chains such as Costco and Whole Foods Market have footholds but also online services, such as Ocado.

The Big Four thus find themselves in between a growing top and a growing discount sector — and the middle is not typically a sweet spot for retailing.

This is leading the Big Four to change, and for the moment at least, much of the change is focusing on procurement, which is leading to dramatic new opportunities. Basically, over the past few decades, large chains that may have had 15 suppliers in a category, such as grapes, have consolidated that to two. Yet now the large chains no longer want to work with selected importers; instead they are looking to buy direct from producers around the world. This means shippers who never had a shot at a PO from, say, Tesco, suddenly have new opportunities. Give it a few years, and the same chain that had 15 suppliers and shrunk down to two will be back at 15. Opportunity does not only knock in developing markets.

Of course, procurement changes may or may not be effective at helping the Big Four compete with ALDI and Lidl. It's always easy to think one can cut out layers of expense, but it often turns out that those plans underestimate the value contributed, in this case, by importers who tied themselves at the hip to big retailers.

One wonders if in the search to navigate the new retail environment, one of the Big Four won't become really bold and try some totally innovative merchandising. The U.K. has traditionally been a private label market, but we suspect there is a big win out there for some retailer who is willing to focus completely on brands.

**One advantage of private label is that it enables a chain to differentiate itself, but in a market that is all private label, going branded might be a big win as a differentiator.**

Maybe Morrison's, whose sales results have been weak lately, would be willing to steal a page from Bruce Peterson. When Bruce started Wal-Mart's produce program, he wanted to ride on the brand equity of his vendors, so, for a long time, the Wal-Mart produce selection reflected Bruce's understanding of consumer brand acceptance.

One advantage of private label is that it enables a chain to differentiate itself, but in a market that is all private label, going branded might be a big win as a differentiator. Fortunately, Bruce will be presenting at The London

Produce Show and Conference, so both retailers and vendors will get a chance to see how this transition might work.

Of course, the big branded players probably need to reawaken their focus on the U.K. market to nudge this along. Perhaps a firm, such as Morrison's, would be quicker to take such a leap if it could be assured of marketing and promotional support for the brands. This Pundit grew up in an age when television was filled with commercials saying, "A Dole banana is a great banana, and it's great because it's Dole!" And the Pundit Poppa would sing the commercials of his youth: "I'm Chiquita the banana and I've come to say, bananas have to ripen in a certain way."

Generals are always fighting the last war, businesses tend to set up their organizations to serve the trade as it has been, not as it will be. When a market is in flux, as the U.K. market is, though, using last year's organization to meet the challenges of the future guarantees that one will miss opportunities.



OCADO WEBSITE



# NEW TOOLS FOR FOOD SAFETY ENHANCEMENT

Technological advancements in testing, communication devices, data analysis and sanitation are among the resources to strengthen the segment.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**T**he proliferation of technology in food safety has provided significant tools for the produce industry and is considered a major driver for improving food safety in the future. “Technology will help us better understand potential sources of risk of contamination and develop the tools to manage those risks,” says Dr. Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE.

“Given the amount of technology we enjoy in our everyday lives, technological innovation in the food safety arena is probably behind,” adds Cheryn Hargrave, food safety specialist at United Supermarkets, LLC in Lubbock, TX, currently operating

51 stores. “Strides are being made to bring food safety into the 21st century as quickly as possible.”

“When applied to the right point in the supply chain at the right time, technology can play a critical role in ensuring safe products along the supply chain continuum,” says Jorge A. Hernandez, senior vice president for food safety and quality assurance at US Foods in Rosemont, IL. “From identification of a food safety risk, to prevention or elimination, the proper and correct use of technology has a key role at each step from growing to consumption.”

Recent developments in regulation and legislation place even greater emphasis on technology. “The Food Safety Moderniza-

# “Responsible retailers and foodservice distributors are looking to strengthen their food safety programs with tools to help prevent, identify, reduce or eliminate food safety risks from their operations.”

— Jorge A. Hernandez, *US Foods*

tion Act (FSMA) and particularly the Produce Safety and Preventive Controls Rules will force many companies to investigate and invest in emerging technologies,” states Sara Mohsin, business development for SmartWash Solutions, the Salinas, CA-based developer of patented food wash enhancers that boost the effectiveness of standard chlorine-based wash systems.

Tom Daniel, senior vice president / general manager for Malvern, PA-based Sterilox Fresh, a water-based clean technology company focused on developing and commercialising proprietary solutions that protect people from the spread of infectious pathogens without causing harm to human health or the environment, adds, “Depending on the application, technology can be significant in protecting consumers as well as shielding retailers from litigation.”

## EXAMINING THE LIMITATIONS

Any discussion of food safety technology must begin with recognizing constraints. “Because the produce supply chain is more a supply web, sometimes it’s challenging for us to communicate our technology needs and how we want to expend our resources,” relates PMA’s Whitaker. “If we could do a better job of identifying not just today’s problem but what really benefits us going forward, it would help technology providers identify the best solutions and their payout.”

“Because produce is so diverse, some products have more technology-based solutions than others,” states Hernandez. “Some parts of the food chain, like packing or processing, have traditionally used technology more often. However, each new outbreak surfaces the need for additional and innovative food safety solutions where technology can be useful.”

Linking a problem and solution is the crux of success. “People have problems, but they don’t know how to obtain a solution,” explains Dr. David Gombas, senior

vice president food safety and technology for the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, DC. “There is a gap between the people with the problems and the people who can develop the solutions. We need greater communication; people with problems need to be talking with solution-providers, and providers

have to stop trying to make a square peg fit in a round hole.”

Practical input is vital to developing realistic solutions. “Industry must give solution-providers accurate information about the real issues,” suggests Gombas. “Brainstorming is great, but don’t send a solution-provider off to find a resolution you’re never going to buy.”

Current conversations on testing provide a prime example. “We’re hearing a lot of knee-jerk reaction from buyers about testing all produce,” explains Gombas. “Even though it sounds like a good thing to do, it’s really not useful or practical. No one has really thought through the implications and practical reality of what that would require.”

## Better, Faster Testing Keeps Products In Pipeline

**T**hough food safety is much more than tests, detection technologies continue to be important. “Technology plays a huge role in testing methodology,” relates Dr. David Gombas, senior vice president food safety and technology for the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, DC. “New technologies like PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing and other kinds of DNA testing have been developed. Looking for genetic material can provide a more rapid response and make it easier for people who are not microbiologists to run and interpret the test. Sensors and indicators are becoming much easier to use.”

“PCR testing for fresh food is a great advance,” adds Will Daniels, chief food integrity officer at Earthbound Farm in San Juan Bautista, CA. “We get results in 12 to 16 hours. There are some really interesting new methods coming down the pipeline for more rapid reliable testing — for example, bacteriophage detection methods from Sample 6 [a company that offers assistance and products with the world’s first enrichment-free pathogen diagnostic systems].”

“With regard to testing, we’ve seen advancements in the amount of time it takes to receive results,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, Inc. in Lakeland, FL. “Formerly, it could take four

to five days. Today, within most cases, we can receive results within 24 hours identifying the species down to the subtyping.”

More rapid testing would increase application. Daniels suggests, “If you could have *Listeria* results in four hours with a simple, inexpensive and reliable test, you could attack your retail deli with vigor to identify and eliminate contamination. Products processed in the retail environment could be tested before being presented for sale. If one of your suppliers didn’t test their product, you could do so and get results before presenting product for sale.”

However, combining speed with accuracy remains challenging. “A difficult conundrum remains that speed and sensitivity are mutually exclusive,” explains Gombas. “Tests may only take 20 minutes, but you have to be concerned about a false negative or a false positive. We need speed, sensitivity and accuracy, and we’re not quite there yet.”

Sampling presents another proving ground. “We cannot assume every tomato or surface is exactly the same,” says Gombas. “At retail, if you sample just one part of the produce aisle or only at one time of day, it isn’t representative of the entire picture. We need technologies to give us a representative sample of the whole picture.”

**pb**



Technology is advancing so fast that experts say PCR results can be calculated and reported within 12 to 16 hours.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EARTHBOUND FARM

Gombas continues, "Another example is how technology for continuous monitoring of wash water was developed but remains a hard sell. Likewise, an automated mandatory hand-washing system for employees where the room door won't open until the hands are sufficiently washed was devel-

oped. Though created in response to complaints about how to enforce employee hand-washing, this technology has not been adopted in practice."

Meticulous requirements present another limitation. "One of the biggest challenges for technology providers and

suppliers is the degree of customization required to meet each separate buyer's unique processes, data requirements and infrastructure standards," says Kevin Brooks, chief marketing officer for FoodLink Holdings, Inc., a cloud-based software platform that provides solutions across the entire fresh food industry, located in Los Gatos, CA. "Greater standardization helps everyone."

"To an extent, agreeing to a standard makes it cost-effective for suppliers to invest in developing technology solutions," adds Elliott Grant, chief technology officer and founder of HarvestMark in Redwood City, CA. "If each retailer requires a different approach or format, the economic repercussions can make it impossible to justify developing a solution."

"The Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) is one of the most effective advances by the produce industry," suggests Daniel Price, business development for HarvesterGear, a software development firm for food safety and traceability across the supply chain, located in Wilmington, NC. "It brings everyone to a standard procedure no matter the size operation or

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The automated case labeling solution by HarvesterGear will print and apply at speeds of 1 case per second.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVESTERGEAR

the product grown. It also brings retailers to the same standard procedure, so growers and packers don't have multiple solutions specific to each customer."

### BUYER RESPONSE

Concern over food safety has led to greater cooperation and awareness at the buyer level. "Retailers and customers have become more aware of food safety risks, technologies, advancements and best practices," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, Inc. in Lakeland, FL, with 1,069 retail supermarket locations in five states. "Food safety crosses multiple sectors, allows for sharing of best practice information and has become a no-compete topic of conversation among retail industry groups."

"Responsible retailers and foodservice distributors are looking to strengthen their food safety programs with tools to help prevent, identify, reduce or eliminate food safety risks from their operations," says US Foods' Hernandez.

New advances reduce shrink and mitigate risk. "Testing advances means product arrives fresher to retail establishments than ever before," adds Will Daniels, chief food integrity officer at Earthbound Farm in San Juan Bautista, CA.

"We see retailers seeking solutions initially to optimize safety, requesting information so they know exactly what they're buying, and investing in a real-time audit trail," says FoodLink's Brooks.

"Technology providing insight into how product is maintained prior to the retailer taking possession enables them to monitor and manage the supply chain as well as stand behind their product to improve the bottom line."

Buyers can translate new advances to their business. "It behooves the buying side of the industry to have an understanding of the different technical possibilities out there and the latest emerging trends," says PMA's Whitaker. "Some of these technologies could have applications to directly impact operations. For example, a new sanitizer developed for packing sheds could be applicable to retail food prep."

"While ATP (adenosine triphosphate) sanitation monitoring systems have become standard in produce production facilities, adoption at retail and distribution has been slow," states Jim Topper, market development manager for Neogen Corporation, a Lansing, MI-based company that develops and markets products dedicated to food and animal safety. "Yet, the same logic applies in the retail environment; we need to clean well so we don't cross-contaminate the next batch of food. As retailers solve their basic food safety challenges, such as hand washing, temperature controls, etc., these tools will achieve greater adoption."

### DATA ANALYSIS & MANAGEMENT

Perhaps one of the greatest potential areas for advancement in food safety technology is in the area of data. PMA's



**“An impactful technology in temperature monitoring is equipment connectivity via computer, with automated alarms sounding when temperatures fall outside prescribed ranges.”**

— Cheryn Hargrave, United Supermarket

Whitaker explains, “The use of data is going to become much more prevalent in things like determining traffic transfer rates through the store, in an operational sense to determine quality of suppliers, and even with timing of delivery. People will make quality and safety judgments based on the model. We’ll see a number of different uses for data analytics not only to track product in the supply chain but to develop predictive models.”

“Most people don’t have the time or background to analyze what all the test results mean,” says Gombas. “Future technology will convert analytical software into results that can then be integrated or interpreted in other systems.”

Some of this is already in practice. “Recently, companies are developing sophisticated data management systems to allow information to be shared between retailers, wholesalers, and suppliers,” reports Heena Patel, technical director food safety for SCS Global Services in Emeryville, CA. “These software programs allow the process to be streamlined, or automated, eliminating a lot of manual data input and significantly reducing the margin of error.”

“As we increase our collection of data from different products across the supply chain we uncovered the need for better data collection, integration and analyzing systems from multiple sources,” reports US Food’s Hernandez. “This capability not only provides an earlier warning system to potential food safety and quality problems, but this continuous analysis of key data points also provides opportunities for optimizing the supply chain and continuous improvement.”

Expanding the use of collected data

## Bridging The Gap

*How industry associations are helping translate technology into everyday practice.*

Industry organizations are proactively looking to bridge the gap between technological innovation and practical application as indicated by several recently announced initiatives. “It’s important to recognize the technologies out there and translate how they might be used by your business,” says Dr. Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE. “Everyone in the supply chain should be aware of what’s out there and what the possibilities are.”

PMA recently announced an addition to the association’s science and technology value area with two new events and a series of year-round technology content. “These resources go beyond broad education or simply providing a technology marketplace,” says Whitaker. “We’re aiming to connect members to detailed information, translate complex issues, and provide industry context to help them identify and apply forward-thinking technologies to their businesses.”

The first event, Tech Talks in March, features networking opportunities combined with education on existing and emerging technologies. The second event, Tech Knowledge in May, looks at technologies in the two- to five-year horizon with the capability of changing the industry. Whitaker explains, “Our Technology Content Series addresses the areas of detection technologies, production input management and data science. More information on these resources can be found on PMA’s website.”

The California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement (LGMA) has been awarded \$247, 445 as part of the California Specialty Crop Block Grant program to enhance food safety training programs in the California leafy greens industry. “Food safety training for workers is required as part of the rigorous food safety practices and all LGMA members must be in compliance with this requirement,” states communications director, April Ward. “We have been conducting

training for leafy greens personnel and harvest crews for a few years now, but this grant will allow us to expand and build our existing program.”

Specifically, the LGMA plan aims to create an industry-wide program with six individual modules to ensure handler food safety practices are in compliance with LGMA metrics. “These modules include conducting risk assessments, cleaning and sanitizing equipment, employee sanitation and hygiene, testing and sampling procedures, managing personnel and harvesting operations, and a train-the-trainer component,” says Ward. “The new training program will be designed to align with the new training requirements included in FDA’s Produce Rule, a part of the Food Safety Modernization Act.”

United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, D.C. is partnering with The University of Georgia on a GAPS/HACCP/HARPC (Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls) workshop designed to establish an in-plant HACCP program for the fresh produce industry. “This three-day course provides a unique program of lectures and work group discussions from a broad-based faculty of food microbiologists, HACCP experts, authorities from academia, industry and government,” explains Dr. David Gombas, senior vice president food safety and technology for United Fresh.

The goal of the program is to assist participants in developing a food safety plan to implement in their specific operations. “The work group sessions provide interaction with food safety authorities who have developed and implemented successful HACCP programs for the fresh produce industry,” relates Gombas. “The hands-on laboratory participation allows participants to learn to identify and prevent food safety hazards, set preventive/control measures and control limits, develop control and monitoring procedures, document and verify the results of their efforts as established by the International HACCP Alliance.” **pb**

## Hand-Held Hardware Helps

As smartphones and tablets have become more commonplace in general society, devices are also supporting the food safety arena as well. “The proliferation and maturity of mobile devices and cloud-based data networks enables low-cost data capture, sharing and reporting in any location across the supply chain,” says Kevin Brooks, chief marketing officer for FoodLink Holdings, Inc., a cloud-based software platform that provides solutions across the entire fresh food industry in Los Gatos, CA.

“Combining traceability with barcodes and mobile devices enables a shopper, inspector or store associate to instantly find out whether a product has been recalled,” explains Elliott Grant, chief technology officer and founder of HarvestMark in Redwood City, CA. “This instant communication increases shopper confidence, reduces waste, and assists in root cause analysis.”

Heena Patel, technical director food safety for SCS Global Services in Emeryville, CA, further reports, “Some third-party auditors use iPads during audits, letting them answer more technical questions, provide observations, and give results right away. A preliminary audit result can now be provided during the exit meeting, along with the accompanying list of findings. If there is a critical failure, the third-party auditing company and suppliers can be notified right away via this system.”

“Using handheld computers in the fields has revolutionized the industry,” reports Daniel Price, business development for HarvesterGear, a software development firm for food safety and traceability across the supply chain in Wilmington, NC. “They help give extremely accurate information that can be printed and applied at the time of harvest. This eliminates the guesswork once it arrives to the packing shed. This real-time visibility has the side benefit of being able to report on yields, compare cultural practices and calculate payroll at the same time.”

Technology is becoming a more common component of food safety audits. Patel explains, “Third-party audit companies have audit checklists in their data management systems, and retailers are



Handheld computers in the field provide accurate information that can be printed and applied at the time of harvest.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVESTERGEAR

asking suppliers to post reports to central sites such as ICIX for easy access. This lets growers and manufacturers post their scores over time to show trends and improvements in food safety scores.”

Burgerville, a 39-unit restaurant chain in Vancouver, WA, uses a computerized auditing tool. “Two of us from the corporate office audit the restaurants using a tool from Steton Quality Suite,” explains Debe Nagy-Nero, director of quality assurance, nutrition and safety of Steton a mobile data collection and reporting software company. “The restaurants also use this tool to do self-audits and submit other forms. This auditing tool not only makes auditing easier but collects data from all audits that we use to make changes to policy or even food products.”

The future promises effective options. “Other tools on the horizon include digital inspection tools such as quality audit apps for mobile phones that incorporate audit guidelines and picture taking capabilities,” explains Grant. “Apps for store personnel will take advantage of low-cost mobile devices and in-store WiFi to equip personnel with tools for training, inspection, record-keeping, alerts, and shopper engagement.”

will aid decisions. “While a sanitation system’s instant clean/not clean determination is the basic reason for use, the ability to wade through collected data and see big-picture things provides the manager with documented information for decision-making,” explains Neogen’s Topper. “This could be something like the effect of one cleaning chemical or process versus another, or small details such as a particular piece of equipment is becoming too difficult to clean and should be taken out of service.”

“Real-time data linked to cloud storage of the information can dramatically increase productivity,” adds SmartWash’s Mohsin. “This enables instantaneous decisions to be made about line operations at anytime from anywhere. At SmartWash, we further integrate this information to instantaneously recognize and automatically respond to deviations in control — resulting in continuous verification and documentation of compliance to food safety parameters.”

### WATCHFUL EYES ON SUPPLY

Monitoring product through the supply chain is another key area for technology development. “The quality and progress of a product can be monitored with various sensors measuring not only quality and temperature but also different pathogen exposure,” reports PMA’s Whitaker. “That data can be used to make improvements in quality and safety.”

FoodLink’s Brooks reports, “Mobile devices are used in the field to scan and print labels, at the cooler to record and adjust inventory levels, in transit to track temperature and location, at retailer/wholesaler DC receiving, in transit to stores, and in stores. Cloud-based data networks serve as a universal integration hub that can channel the right information to the right people at the right time.”

“Management systems, such as Magic Software, enable suppliers to manage the flow of product through packing lines, provide tracking and traceability, control overhead, and keep track of labor,” adds Patel.

Price states, “I see a trend of grower/packers transitioning to single source platforms that monitor the entire process from spray applications, to storage, to packing and to the retailer. A system like this will increase the visibility of all aspects of the

*Continued on page 28*

# Cooperation Is Vital To Food Safety Advancement

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**A**dvancement in food safety hinges greatly upon increased communication and cooperation. “We will see things move so much faster if we have transparency and collaboration between industry and technology providers,” says Will Daniels, chief food integrity officer at Earthbound Farm in San Juan Bautista, CA. “Trust is the third element and is the outcome of these first two elements over time. We need everyone to work in the same direction.”

“We need the entire food industry to hold hands across segments and businesses. We need to partner with regulatory agencies, academia and consumer groups, and commit to finding efficient and effective food safety solutions,” concurs Jorge A. Hernandez, senior vice president for food safety and quality assurance at US Foods in Rosemont, IL.

## From The Beginning

Cooperation in advancing food safety begins even before the farm. “There are many exciting technologies making their way from the Silicon Valley to the Salinas Valley,” reports Sara Mohsin, business development for SmartWash Solutions in Salinas, CA. “Large processors, such as Taylor Farms [out of Salinas, CA], use technologies such as rapid detection of pathogens at the field level — where corrective actions are less disruptive to the supply chain — and geospatial mapping to track pathogens in growing areas to improve management of the growing environment. We are continuously evaluating new sensor technologies for their inclusion in food safety monitoring and control.”

At the lab level, G-Mapping technologies may offer unique application. Dr. Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE, explains, “We currently can understand the genetic components of plants and bacteria. We can identify which genes are important for flavor, aroma, etc.; therefore, we should also be able to iden-

tify which may make them more resistant to certain pathogens. It’s not putting new genetic material into a plant and not genetic engineering; it’s just knowing what’s there already and focusing on it.”

Whitaker continues, “Studies done at the University of Florida show certain strains of tomatoes may be more resistant to pathogens, indicating a genetic component of the plant that might be pathogen resistant. We could potentially select for that particular gene to create a more resistant variety. Another study funded by CPS at Oklahoma University indicated certain varieties of spinach more susceptible to pathogen transfer. Those are interesting possibilities and could be another tool in the arsenal for combating food safety issues.”

## Understanding The Partnership

Even when technologies aren’t directly applicable to the buy side, the buy side is still encouraged to understand those technologies. “It’s a partnership,” says Whitaker. “You want to work with your partners to leverage technology to help everyone work effectively and efficiently. More retailers are taking an active role in trying to work with suppliers to have effective food safety programs. They’re extending beyond just a ‘You Must Do This!’ attitude to, ‘This is the latest science, how are you using it?’ focus.”

“A mutually beneficial relationship will make the system work and help both parties adjust to keep up with developments,” says Heena Patel, technical director food safety for SCS Global Services in Emeryville, CA. “Greater communication will help us reach a consensus on what the industry’s needs are and it will lead to the development of better, more specialized food safety tools.”

A good relationship means two-way communication. “Information is key,” says Jim Topper, market development manager for Neogen Corporation in Lansing, MI. “The more we understand what the market needs, the better job we can do to provide products and services to meet those needs.”

## Active Communication

Publix takes an active role in partnering on food safety. “We work closely in food safety committees throughout our retail food industry groups, as well as participate in research and advancements with the Department of Agriculture, the USDA, and the Department of Public Health,” reports Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, Inc. in Lakeland, FL. “We have also testified before Congress on issues of concern.”

Patel explains another example of retail cooperation. “In 2009, GSI US, Food Marketing Institute and Grocery Manufacturers Association joined forces to determine what information needed to be shared during a recall,” she says. “Previous methods caused delays in notification, lacked much needed clarity, and frequently spread incorrect information. The Rapid Recall Exchange (RRE) system was developed to combat those issues.”

Collection and sharing of data paves the way for future solutions. “We need more suppliers to improve their collection of key food safety, quality and process data in a technology-based easy to share form,” requests Hernandez. “This is especially important for mid- and small-size produce suppliers. We also need more suppliers to take a partnership approach to sharing this key data. There is much we can learn from sharing data with each other. Together we can impact and benefit our customers.”

When facing the complex issues of food safety, prioritize then discuss. “Start by identifying the Top 5 issues you’re dealing with that you can’t solve today,” advises Dr. David Gombas, senior vice president food safety and technology for the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, DC. “Then sit down with solution providers to discuss.”

“Tell us where the problems or concerns are,” urges Tom Daniel, senior vice president/general manager for SteriLox Fresh in Malvern, PA. “We excel at coming up with solutions with a real value proposition, especially in supermarkets.” **pb**

# Sanitation Solutions

Sanitation, a crucial area for retailers and processors, is seeing its fair share of advancements from new products to new systems. United Supermarkets is currently testing a mobile touchless cleaning system. “This is designed to remove *Listeria* from refrigerated cases, food prep equipment and display cases,” explains Cheryn Hargrave, food safety specialist at United Supermarkets, LLC in Lubbock, TX. “We are also looking at Sterilox to address freshness and quality as well as an oxidizing sanitizer system. The cleaning system for *Listeria* is obviously intended to eliminate *Listeria*, is self-contained and portable, as well as environmentally friendly. The Sterilox system increases shelf life and quality of produce because it kills harmful pathogens. The oxidizing sanitizer also kills harmful pathogens and is chemical-free.”

Sterilox is currently used in over 6,500 stores in the U.S. and Canada. “The Sterilox System is a produce wash system that enhances food safety and has an economic return for the retailer with improved quality and less shrink,” explains Tom Daniel, senior vice president/general manager for Sterilox Fresh, a water-based clean technology company focused on developing and commercializing proprietary solutions that protect people from the spread of infectious pathogens without causing harm to human health or the environment in Malvern, PA. “It’s made a real impact in the fresh produce arena.”

Billions of pounds of produce have been processed using SmartWash Solutions technology. “Significant improvements in food safety come through innovation in process control,” states Sara Mohsin, business development for SmartWash Solutions, the developer of patented food wash enhancers that boosts the effectiveness of standard chlorine-based wash systems in Salinas, CA. “We’ve been able to leverage our technology to provide instant feedback on the performance of the wash system. This increased process element provides retailers and buyers with new and more expansive insight into product quality throughout processing. If tech-



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEOGEN CORPORATION

nologies are implemented wisely, improvements may well come with decreased processing costs.”

Evaluation and monitoring of cleaning efforts is a crucial step. Jim Topper, market development manager for Neogen Corporation in Lansing, Michigan relates, “Surfaces on which food is produced or prepared need to be cleaned effectively to reduce the opportunities for cross contamination of spoilage and pathogenic organisms or allergenic and toxic compounds. ATP sanitation monitoring systems have become the standard method most facilities are using. These systems provide a near instant reading of the amount of organic material left on a surface after cleaning. They can be performed by virtually anyone, with just a few minutes worth of training, and can capture the location, time, date, test result as well as other important information with each test.”

The latest technological breakthrough for this product line has come from implementation of RFID capabilities. “This technology enables facilities to scan RFID tags to read the location information,” explains Topper. “The system takes that concept one step further and actually selects the test sites at random or, if the facility has identified some sites it always wants tested, as mandatory.” **pb**

*Continued from page 26*

product for the grower and the customer.”

Traceability remains an integral aspect of supply chain management. “While traceability on its own doesn’t make food safer, it provides the critical link in any root-cause analysis, problem solving, and communication,” says Grant.

TruTec is an example of agricultural software systems incorporating greater traceability capacity. Patel explains, “It lets growers use compliance labels on all packing materials; these can be used to trace a product to the exact location in the field where it came from and even the crew member who harvested it.”

US Foods uses traceability systems to identify product source and documents. “We document the grower and the processor from the suppliers’ fields, throughout our distribution systems, all the way to our customers,” reports US Food’s Hernandez. “This is critical when there is a problem with the product or a recall.”

Something as basic as temperature monitoring becomes even more effective with technology advancements. “Time and temperature monitoring is critical in food safety and product shrink,” says Sterilox’s Daniel. “Time and temperature monitoring is advancing all the time with investment costs and returns matching up better than in the past.”

“Automated temperature monitoring includes units that travel with fresh produce in transit and provide retailers with real time temperature as well as GPS data throughout the supply chain,” relates Brooks.

United Supermarket’s Hargrave reports, “An impactful technology in temperature monitoring is equipment connectivity via computer with automated alarms sounding when temperatures fall outside prescribed ranges.”

US Foods currently utilizes temperature monitoring and recording devices. “Since the cold chain is critical to both food safety and quality, temperature recording devices managing the cold chain from farm to fork are very important,” says Hernandez. “Over the past few years, we have seen a vast improvement on the technological sophistication of these devices. Some of them now allow us to identify and prevent food safety and quality problems before they impact the produce, improve the logistical planning of distribution and protect the integrity of produce shipments.” **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCHE BROS.



# Roche Bros.

The Roche family demonstrates its ambitious and energetic persona through customer service, organic and local selections, as well as promotional sales strategies. **BY OSCAR KATOV**

**W**hen Buddy Roche and his brother, Pat, opened a meat market in 1953 in an empty Singer Sewing Machine Store in Rosindale, MA, they matched their \$50 in the bank with high degrees of determination and optimism. As the story goes, it was Buddy who laid out this firm pledge, which became fixed in family history: “No matter what we do, it’s always about the customers. Don’t lose sight of the customers!”

In the 60 years since the first store opened — with 18 stores now flourishing in the state — the Roche family never lost sight of the customers.

## The Mission

“Our commitment to offering the highest level of customer service now has only one major change — the convenience of home delivery,” says marketing director Dena Zigun. “The introduction of home delivery — a new efficient service that responds to special customer desires and lifestyles — has become the fastest growing part of our business. For us, efficient home delivery also builds upon customer confidence in our selection of products, particularly of fresh produce and other perishables. In completing a customer’s shopping order, our associates take the same care as if the products were for their own use.”

“The quality of our service really comes alive in the produce department,” says Zigun. She adds that the store receives various questions from customers when taking home-delivery orders. “We guide customers through orders to give them an idea of the products they can’t experience in the store. We also educate customers on special-order items for

unique recipes they see on a TV food show, or we will chop a winter squash for an elderly customer who can’t do it at home. Of course, it all adds up to a lot of personal attention, but it defines who we are at the highest level of quality service, and that translates to the bottom line in sales,” says Zigun.



In addition to local farmers, Roche Bros. stores receive produce from the New England Produce Center as well as Connecticut, New Hampshire and Georgia.

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For Tom Murray, vice president of produce, delivering fresh products six or seven consecutive days to every store without a distribution center can be tricky. He efficiently handles the challenge with a team of veteran buyers at the New England Produce Center who know pricing, quality standards, and are aware of which items appeal to Roche customers. “Those guys are out touring the market at 4 a.m., with our trucks on the road by 6 a.m., and heading for our stores. We push for fresh daily to the farthest stores to attract customer attention to our commitment in offering quality produce, which is our competitive edge.”

#### **From A Local and Organic POV**

“Productive relationships with local farmers considerably add to the volume of products that come through the New England Produce Center,” says Murray. “This includes special items, such as pumpkins for Halloween. We have some really great Massachusetts organic and natural growers who take good care of us. We also get produce from Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Georgia. As a Massachusetts company, promoting Massachusetts products, we focus more on that identity with our signage, as opposed to promoting the same product that comes from another state. We see our customers reacting very favorably when they know that the farmer is truly local.

“Included in this mix are organics, which are growing every year,” says Murray. “We try to place organics in sections with signage, so the customer isn’t forced to walk the entire department. There’s a heavy interest in juicing and blending, and we have a promotion related to offering juicing containers to customers. It’s not another kale craze. We

believe that we will continue seeing interest in health and nutrition issues connected to fresh produce. We try to demonstrate to the customer that the entire produce department is a destination for foods that contribute to maintaining good health.

“Fresh produce is also a critical factor in the success of the home delivery program,” says Zigun. “When we assure customers that the freshness of products we place in their kitchen is exactly the same as in our stores, there can’t be any deviation. Some of that assurance relates to our unique delivery trucks, which operate with three defined sections — ambient, refrigerated, frozen — reflecting the temperature sensitivity of the different products as the truck makes its delivery rounds.”

“Trying to respond to the tastes and product appeal of customers in 18 neighborhoods is a constant challenge,” acknowledges Murray. “Here is my assessment for all the stores: we pride ourselves on offering excellent products at fair market prices. Our weekly circulars feature great savings on popular seasonal produce with regular produce \$1 sales. Our ‘Big Deals’ provide club-store savings without any need of club memberships. We also offer a selection of local produce and profile our local farm partners. We stock a growing selection of organic products, exotic produce, and value-added items (such as our cut-fruit program and our poly-bagged produce packaged with recipes). We are a reliable, locally owned and operated business.”

The Roche family continues to demonstrate its ambitious and energetic persona to this day. The family will open its 19th “neighborhood store” in 2015. Located in downtown Boston, the gourmet supermarket will serve an area that includes City Hall, The Financial



District, college dormitories, and luxury condos. The supermarket was locked in as a tenant of the new Millennium Tower project, which includes 450 luxury residences and

95,000 square feet of retail space in the Downtown Crossing shopping section of Boston. It will be the first major supermarket to service the area. **pb**

*Editor's Note: We thank the Food Marketing Institute for its recommendation of independent members who are recognized for their outstanding produce operations in this series of PB articles.*

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The months of March, April and May reawaken people's interest in produce as new seasonal items become available.

# Spring Awakening

The spring months are ideal to increase sales by capitalizing on merchandising efforts using holiday, produce seasonality, and local-sourcing opportunities. **BY AMY SAWELSON LANDES**

**T**he arrival of spring in March creates a level of anticipation with consumers. The mindset of the masses shifts from cocooning with hearty meals by a roaring fire to warm, sunny days, outdoor activities, picnics and shedding some winter pounds with an emphasis on healthier eating.

The months of March, April and May reawaken people's interest in produce as new seasonal items become available. Each month, with its associated holidays — such as St. Patrick's Day, Passover and Easter along with seasonal events such as baseball and barbecue season — creates opportunities for retailers to increase traffic in produce departments.

In the coming months, retailers have the chance to increase sales by capitalizing on merchandising efforts in their produce departments using holiday, seasonality, health and local-sourcing opportunities.

## March and Early Spring

"Yellow and green squash, cabbage, greens, new crop potatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant and broccoli [will be] big movers," predicts Steve Williams, manager of business development for L&M Companies, a grower/shipper/distributor located in Raleigh, NC. "On the East Coast, new crop potatoes are very exciting at this time. With a display of

bright red and golden potatoes, you can really jump-start your potato sales."

Greg Calistro is executive director of produce and floral at Save Mart Supermarkets, a 62-year-old chain headquartered in Modesto, CA, operating in northern California and northern Nevada. He believes in seasonal cross-merchandising for success. "Around St. Patrick's Day, we feature corned beef with cabbage, red potatoes and carrots. By reminding people of the complete meal, you build additional sales."

Kori Tuggle, director of business development for Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville, CA, says, "March through May is peak season for artichokes. The heirloom variety out of the Castroville growing region generally starts on the jumbo to large sizes of heirloom artichokes in March.

"May is prime for baby artichokes, which is the foodie-favorite size. Traditionally, the larger sizes peak at the front end in March and April with the smaller sizes peaking in April and May," adds Tuggle. "Our existing social media tools and our Artichoke Club for consumers update artichoke lovers about weekly specials, news, and contests for fresh artichokes. These social media tools allow us to support the retailers' promo specials to a targeted audience that wants to know when artichokes are on sale and where."

"In the spring, kids are back on the soccer fields and baseball diamonds, so parents are looking for quick, healthy snacks for their little athletes. Orange wedges, sliced apples and mini-juices are all perfect," says Trish James, vice president of Produce for Kids, which brings the fresh produce industry together with national supermarket retailers to educate families about the benefits of healthy eating. "Items should be merchandised in a convenient location for easy pick-up, ideally in a 4 foot

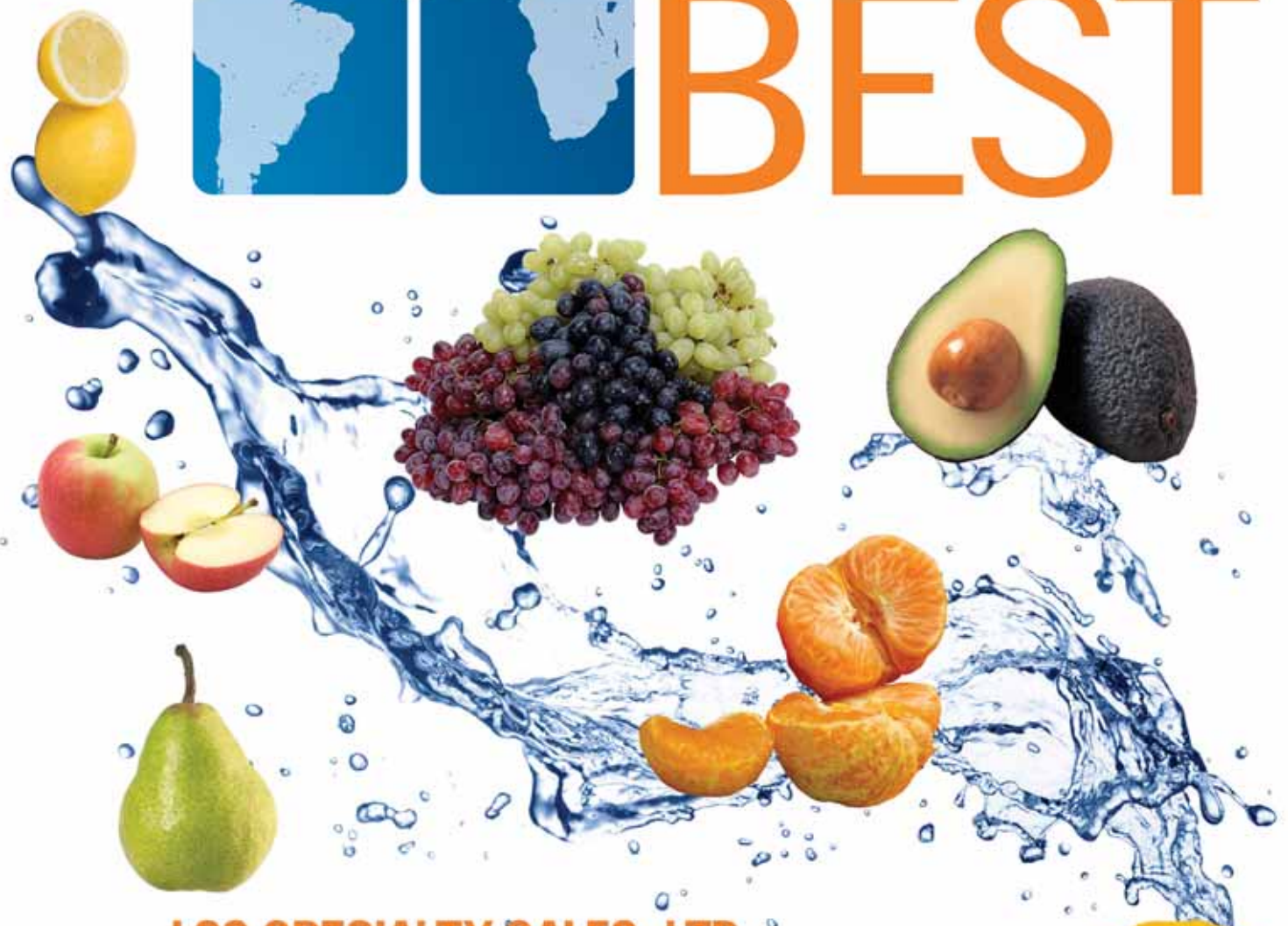


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by 4 foot cooler or refrigerated endcap. You want these items in a location that's convenient for the customer who is in a hurry."

With Lent occurring March 5 through April 17, many people give up meat. "During Lent, we promote dry beans as a meat replacement," says Bob Rapp, director of produce and floral at Vallarta Supermarkets, a fast-growing ethnic chain headquartered in Sylmar, CA. "Vallarta customers are always heavy produce purchasers; but at this time, produce consumption goes up even more."

During March, Florida tomatoes become available, and the Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), based in Maitland, offers support materials to help retailers with their Florida tomato promotions.

"The red color of Florida tomatoes is eye-popping when placed in displays alongside the green of peppers, limes, fresh cilantro and avocados," says Samantha Daves, the FTC's director of education and promotion. "It's better than a promotional poster. For the produce department, we have tear-off recipe

pads (3 inches by 5 inches) with adhesive on back that sticks to the display, which is perfect for a secondary display.

"We offer recipes developed by Florida chef, Justin Timineri, that are road maps for cross-promoting when you look at the recipe ingredients, which include Florida tomatoes, avocado, bell pepper, fresh cilantro, lime and red onion."

Joe Comito of Capital City Fruit, a packer/shipper in Norwalk, IA, agrees. "Part of successfully merchandising spring produce is creating attractive displays for consumers. It's an art form."

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#### April Celebrations and New Beginnings

Passover (begins on April 14) and Easter (April 20) present opportunities for family celebrations and festive meals featuring spring produce. "Retailers should promote early and frequently starting in mid-March for the spring holidays and consistently throughout the season," says Chris Christian, senior vice president of the California Strawberry Commission (CSC) in Watsonville, CA. "Retailers who promote during the weeks before, the week of, and the week after a holiday will see an 11 to 12 percent increase in sales of strawberries."

L&M's Williams agrees, "For some retailers, Easter and Passover can surpass Christmas and Thanksgiving in sales. The reason is that during the weeks of Thanksgiving and Christmas, stores are usually closed for a day."

"Spring is the big season to promote horseradish because of Passover, but also has uses year-round, especially at the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Hanukkah," says Dennis Diekemper, who is general manager of J. R. Kelly Company of Collinsville, IL, shippers of fresh horseradish. "Our website



has recipes with links to our Facebook page and our blog to help create demand for fresh horseradish among consumers. The best way to keep fresh horseradish appealing in displays is to keep it wrapped to prevent dehydration.”

The end of March to early April sees the arrival of peak California strawberries. “Everyone’s been doing citrus, apples and bananas all winter,” says Jim Grabowski, director of marketing for Watsonville, CA — based Well-Pict Berries. “With the change of season, consumers crave a taste of spring. It gives people a reason to come into the store. Make sure to allow enough space for promoted items.

“End caps sell more than linear shelves, and refrigerated tables work well for grabbing attention. Horizontal space is more effective than height. It’s beneficial to promote strawberries any time. Early in the season they may be \$3.99 per pound and by summer \$1.39 per pound,” says Grabowski. “We can work with retailers and support their fliers to offer the price they want. Easter occurring later this year is advantageous for strawberry promotions. By late April there should be good volume. By the end of April, early May, all three districts — Oxnard, Santa Maria and Watsonville — will be producing.”

Frances Dillard, director of marketing for Driscoll’s, a grower of strawberries, blackberries, blueberries and raspberries, also headquartered in Watsonville, CA, describes ways to help retailers merchandise spring produce. “In addition to the Driscoll’s branded Berry Patch strategy of keeping a well-stocked ‘berry destination location,’ we advise our customers to plan accordingly for spring holidays such as Easter and Mother’s Day. We developed several recipes, which focus on promoting healthy eating habits. These will be promoted on Driscolls.com and on our social media sites throughout the spring.”

“Strawberries should be on primary display throughout the spring months and on secondary display with cross-promotions,” says the CSC’s Christian. “Many stores also place strawberries near the checkout to encourage impulse purchases. To keep displays of strawberries looking their best, maintain the cold chain, check the display frequently, and make sure it’s full.”

The CSC also provides some solid facts and research that assist retailers in taking advantage of the opportunities that spring strawberries present. According to Christian, “Strawberries are the most frequently advertised fruit during April and May. They are consumed in 68 percent of households. Those households

make eight more trips per year to market than those that don’t purchase strawberries. They also spend 66 percent more on those trips when strawberries are in the basket.”

April also marks the arrival of Vidalia onions — another produce department staple that shows growth in its category. “With the launch of the Vidalia onion season in the spring, we recommend retailers provide ample space for both bulk product and the high-graphic D-pack bags in a variety of sizes such as 3- and 5- pound bags,” says Susan Waters,

executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee in Vidalia, GA. “We also recommend a secondary bin display to move additional volume while increasing sales.

“The official launch date for Vidalia Onions is April 21. Vidalia onions are one of the top items to promote in the spring, because consumers will be looking for these in store once the season launches. In fact, our national research shows that 91 percent of consumers surveyed recognize the Vidalia Onion brand, and a third of consumers would be willing to

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## MERCHANDISING 'LOCAL' SPRINGTIME PRODUCE

The term, 'local' has become a marketing tool to promote a wide range of fruits and vegetables. But what is the definition of 'local'? A day's drive or simply not imported? Seminole Produce Distributing in Sanford, FL has an interesting approach to merchandising the relationship between farms and chain customers.

"Our merchandising is in the creation of local product we know we can sell. We don't buy from seed companies, but we sit down and tell them what the store buyers want," says owner Rick Stauffer. "For example, 8-inch super sweet corn with longer, darker green flags — if they can develop this, we can sell it.

When chain stores want to create a 'farm stand' look and feel to their produce departments, they still want traceability and everything else that goes with commercial farming. "This requires expensive techniques. For instance, cauliflower is popular right now. The stores want it cooled, but not wrapped. Our local growers will try producing it to the store's speci-

cations, determine the price, and see if it works for the chains."

Many fruits and vegetables are marketed by their locale, because it is famous for that particular item. There is added value to 'Idaho Potatoes,' 'California Strawberries' and 'Florida Oranges' in the minds of consumers. "In a place like Chicago in April, strawberries from California may be a real selling feature," points out Grabowski of Well-Pict Berries.

"We know that locally grown produce has become an important factor for consumers, and we recommend that retailers promote Vidalia Onions as Georgia-grown throughout the state and the country," says the Vidalia Onion Committee's Waters. "Consumers associate Vidalia Onions with superior sweet flavor and taste whether they are available locally or in other regions.

Shuman of Shuman Produce is in agreement with the importance of Vidalia Onions. However, he says, "Vidalias are available in late April through summer, but the variety can only be grown in 20 counties in Georgia. New crop is promoted in late April to early May. It's a Georgia

product, and one that, nationally, consumers identify with as a regionally grown produce item from South Georgia. The definition of local is elastic. The local movement is turning toward locale. Who's growing our produce? Where? Consumers want to be connected with their food source. They want to know the people and the story behind the food. We provide POP materials that drive this message.

Inestroza of Gourmet Trading Company, which imports and grows asparagus and blueberries domestically, speaks to retailers who want to promote the fact that some of their produce is local. "It's challenging for mainstream retailers to connect with small local farmers because expectations on sizing, packing, volumes, etc., are hard for the farmer to meet. Retailers could capture some interest from consumers by offering 'field packs' of mixed sizes."

Inestroza is in agreement with the concept that while today's consumers like the idea that their produce is 'local,' they are also interested in knowing where it comes from. She explains, "The fresh produce community should present consumers with the face of producers.

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Consumers need to know that people in fields and the owners care about what they cultivate. Whether it's a 1-acre farm or 500 acres, the story is the same."

Driscoll's Dillard also weighs in on promoting 'local' produce. "Driscoll's is working with regional growers to help promote fruit raised locally and has a program in place to label fruit on a state level. This helps the grower and consumers who are interested in knowing where their produce comes from. We regularly partner with our best customers to provide first-hand knowledge of the berry business by bringing growers to the stores.

"While the timing can be tricky, because our growers need to be in the fields, whenever we can, we like to bring together the consumer and the farmer," says Dillard. "That connection is critical to our business, as we want berry buyers to know we are bringing them 'Only The Finest Berries.'" **pb**

pay more for Vidalia onions."

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce in Reidsville, GA, agrees. "Research shows that sweet onions are driving the onion category, so it's a good idea to display them front and center. Be sure to include bulk displays and secondary displays of the vertical bags with their attractive labels and mesh. Secondary displays can drive promotions."

### May: The Gateway To Summer

The May holidays of Mother's Day and Memorial Day, along with the end of the school year and graduations present occasions to celebrate with fresh, seasonal produce. While Mother's Day is typically a dine-out holiday, families will frequently indulge Mom with treats of chocolate-dipped strawberries or breakfast in bed with fresh juice and fruit salad. With the approach of Memorial Day, outdoor cooking and barbeques become the focus of seasonal dining.

"Tomatoes and avocados are big items for us. Varietal berries and eggplant are also popular," asserts Vallarta's Rapp. "By featuring these items, we are educating our customers on fruits and vegetables that may not be familiar to them. The more variety you have, the better. We've found that variety doesn't cannibalize the existing items but rather it encourages trial.

"Sales of packaged salads are growing. Kale consumption is up in our market," adds Rapp. "Health experts like Dr. Oz have helped publicize the whole category. In spring, people are more aware of being healthy. They've eaten like crazy during the holidays and are trying to

## "Sales of packaged salads are growing. Kale consumption is up in our market. Health experts like Dr. Oz have helped publicize the category."

— Bob Rapp, Vallarta Supermarkets

stick to their New Year's resolutions."

Save Mart's Calistro explains, "Our top items in the spring going into summer are the value-added salad category, berries, asparagus and artichokes. All vegetable items are back in California at this time. We like to increase the size of our displays and cross-merchandise like-categories. Seasonal timing on cross-promotions is crucial to success. In the spring you can cross-merchandise asparagus and artichokes with lemons, garlic, olive oil and mayonnaise. Promote berries with berry cups,

crepes and whipped cream."

Gourmet Trading Company (GTC) of Los Angeles, CA took a unique way to market its green asparagus and blueberries in the spring. "We have an ongoing promotion with Chateau St. Jean," says GTC's director of marketing, Julia Inestroza. "Their Sauvignon Blanc wine bottles feature neck hangers with ideas for serving white wine with blueberries as well as asparagus, romaine lettuce and salad dressing. The hanger includes a coupon encouraging the purchase of blueberries." **pb**



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PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENHOUSE PRODUCE COMPANY

The protected ag market for produce has grown so rapidly over the past five years that it now represents more than \$3 billion in sales and is projected to increase another billion by 2020.

# Procuring Profits From Protected Produce PART I

Challenges and opportunities for retailers to market greenhouse-grown produce. **BY KEITH LORIA**

**P**rotected produce was once the business of those strictly in cooler climates, but thanks to innovation and a rash of forward thinking, companies today are cultivating greenhouse produce in regions suitable for year-round growing. That means protected produce is a successful component of companies in places such as Mexico, Arizona and Florida. Additionally, many growers view greenhouse produce as a way to differentiate their products and make more money with them.

Gonzalo Avila, chief executive of Malena Produce, Inc. in Rio Rico, AZ, notes that the protected ag market for produce has grown so rapidly over the past five years that it now represents more than \$3 billion in sales and is projected to increase another billion by 2020. This growth is driven by economic factors such as cost of land, crop yields, and weather risks, which are fueled by consumer interest in sustainable agricultural practices and a desire to eat more healthfully.

## Growth Within The Green

“Malena Produce has grown from being predominantly an eggplant supplier in the

1950s to a major winter vegetable distributor, to a multi-region, 52-week, 20+ SKU grower/shipper,” says Avila. “We also expanded our hothouse varieties by 25 percent in the past year. This evolution has allowed us to deliver what retailers tell us they want today: consistent, multi-SKU supplier partnerships.”

Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL, says local greenhouses and product innovation are continuous topics in the greenhouse-grown industry as many of the top growers offer specialty varieties and innovative packaging.

“Our latest product introduction is the Bon Bon snacking tomato, which is available to retailers across North America,” says Christou. “Our sourcing and operations span across diverse regions throughout Central and North America. We offer five varieties of greenhouse tomatoes as well as colored peppers in addition to our field rounds, Romas, and grapes.”

Diana McClean, director of marketing for Tanimura & Antle in Salinas, CA, which grows lettuce in a hydroponic facility in Livingston TN, a region not otherwise suit-

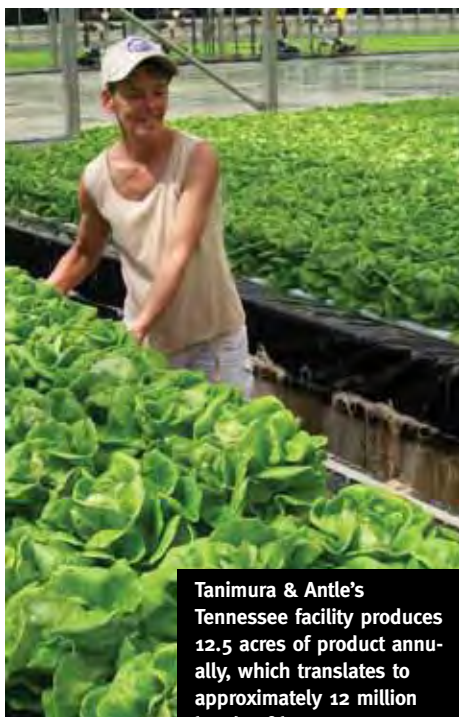
able for conventional farming, says the facility produces 12.5 acres of product annually, which translates to approximately 12 million heads of lettuce per year.

“Greenhouse-grown lettuce is a different eating experience than field grown — the leaves are more tender and the flavor more delicate,” she says. “We recently obtained Pesticide Residue Free Certification for our hydroponic lettuces to emphasize the benefit of the controlled growing environment.”

The company offers a hydroponic butter lettuce that is available with or without roots attached. This product is sold in a one-count and three-count clamshell to retail and club stores across the United States. Its Tennessee location provides a strategic distribution point that is in close proximity to many major markets, which reduces the time and distance the product needs to travel.

Kathryn Ault, vice president sales for NatureSweet Tomatoes in San Antonio, TX, says she is noticing more of a shift by retailers toward greenhouse-grown to ensure great tasting and consistently available produce.

NatureSweet has a range of highly flavored tomatoes, with its focus historically being on small tomatoes with its Cherubs (red grape),



**Tanimura & Antle's Tennessee facility produces 12.5 acres of product annually, which translates to approximately 12 million heads of lettuce per year.**

Glorys (red cherry) and SunBursts (yellow cherry) products.

“We are testing a flavorful larger tomato under the Jubilees brand, and we believe this product will transform the large tomato category in time, similar to how NatureSweet has transformed the small tomato category,” says Ault. “We also have a new, portable tomato in a unique proprietary package that we believe has the opportunity to grow the category by introducing an incremental eating occasion.”

Jim DiMenna, president of JemD International, which is headquartered in Leamington, Ontario, and, growing operations in Canada, Mexico and Virginia, says a big topic in the industry today is the very definition of greenhouse as, some find it hard to distinguish greenhouse from shade cloth or low-tech.

“I think that’s a movement that will help educate the world on what it is,” he says. “We are an all high-tech greenhouse, and we grow in the same greenhouses in Canada that we do in Virginia and Mexico. We are vertically integrated in all three, producing and growing what we want.”

JemD’s greenhouse offerings include tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, mini eggplants and seedless cucumbers. In 2013, the company marketed close to 16 million cases of greenhouse vegetables and it continues to add offerings as the popularity of the produce increases.

Ken VandeVrede, director of business development for Edible Garden, which

switched over to growing herbs and lettuce hydroponically in greenhouses five years ago, says its cooperative of local farmers are all growing exclusively in greenhouses now.

“We have six farms, and we are expanding very quickly throughout the United States, because we see this as where the industry is going,” he says. “People are paying attention to this [movement] and see that the produce growing in greenhouses is a lot cleaner and more nutritional. As for retailers, I don’t think the greenhouse-grown produce is

getting enough attention in stores for being local, clean, or all around better.”

Kerry Herndon is president and CEO of Kerry’s Kitchen Gardens of Apopka, FL — a grower of certified organic micro herbs — and has a long history of working with ornamental horticulture. He recently moved into the food space with sophisticated glass greenhouses, which use flood irrigation and asphalt flooring under sealed one-acre units. In total, the facility houses 1 million square feet.

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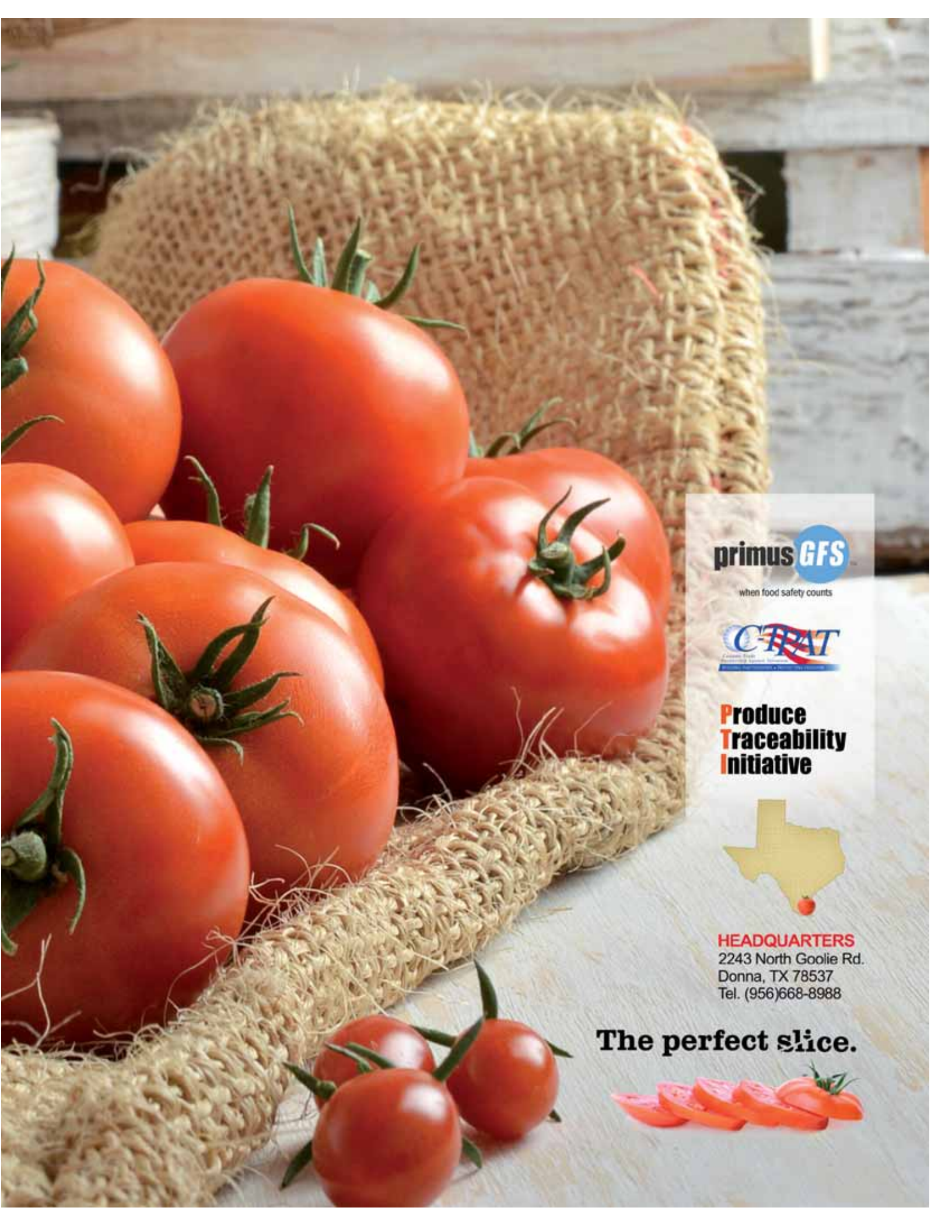
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Herndon bought 8 million seeds and started growing it to learn about the herbs.

“We spent about 6 months just on R&D. Now we’re showing product, and it’s very well received,” says Herndon.

“We don’t water the top of the plants, we just water the soil. In my opinion, and the hydroponic guys will probably disagree, but what I find is that items grown through hydroponics end up being very soft. It grows fast, but soft. It doesn’t have the same flavor. We like organic dirt.”




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## The View From Mexico

Dan Edmeier, vice president sales and marketing for Kingdom Fresh Farms (formerly Kingdom Fresh Produce), in Donna, TX says the industry buzz is about the huge expansions that are taking place in Mexico with shade and low- to mid-tech greenhouses.

“In many cases, companies are doubling their size in a single season. We have purchased an existing greenhouse operation and are slowly transitioning the varieties and practices to coincide with our existing operations,” he says. “In the commodity arena, the sweet mini bell peppers seem to have really captured the interest of both retail and food-service customers.”

The company owns and operates just less than 500 acres, producing about 125 million pounds of tomatoes (vine ripe tomatoes, Romas, grapes and mini sweet bells). In December, Kingdom purchased a new ranch in Puebla, Mexico, adding an additional 150 acres to its 475 acres in Torreon.

“Input costs definitely are higher for greenhouse products, but the beneficial yields usually offset these higher input costs,” says Edmeier. “This factor, combined with higher percentage of exportable [from Mexico to the U.S.] product, makes for a nice business model.”

Fried De Schouwer, president of Greenhouse Produce Company in Vero Beach, FL, a company heavily involved with greenhouse-grown produce in Mexico, says the industry in Mexico continues to grow, but there have been shifts in production from some areas to others. Still, the overall capacity is growing in acreage and yields per square foot.

“Mexico is a big country, and certain areas are not as suitable as people thought, so experience tells them to move along to better production areas,” he says. “By the same token, other operators are finding certain products more feasible to grow, getting away from tomatoes and getting more into



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Kingdom Fresh Farms owns and operates just less than 500 acres, producing about 125 million pounds of tomatoes.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KINGDOM FRESH FARMS

specialty peppers or more into easier crops like cucumbers.”

Mexico has been known for its array of technology applied in the greenhouse business, everything from the basic protected culture all the way down to the high-tech greenhouses. As the technology moves on both sides and establishes a broader spectrum, the applications thrive. As a result, the entire country (as a production unit) shed its image of being unreliable and offering an inconsistent supply.

“We experienced a learning curve over the past 10 years that we are coming out of, and people are becoming very efficient with the tools they were given,” says De Schouwer. “Due to economic downturns in the U.S., we have seen a migration of skilled workers back to Mexico over the past five years, which brings skilled growers from the southern U.S. who know the greenhouse business.”

### Advice to Retailers

According to NatureSweet's Ault, studies show that four out of five consumers want small flavorful tomatoes, and the space currently allocated to small tomatoes in retail environments doesn't reflect that.

“Small tomatoes represent more than 30 percent of the fresh tomato category, and they typically do not get that amount on shelf presence,” she says. “More space allocated to

the products that have the highest consumer demand will increase the sales and profits to the retailer. We believe that small tomatoes will have more than 50 percent share of fresh tomatoes if given the room — some are already seeing this.”

In addition to well-merchandised displays, category sales improve with planned promotions, cross-promotions, demos, and the right SKU mix for a retailer's customer base. Proper category management can be especially effective by ensuring that each retailer reaches the maximum potential of this category.

According to Del Monte's Christou, tomatoes offer many cross-merchandising opportunities because they can be combined with several different items, especially in the produce department.

“We recommend cross-merchandising tomatoes with other Del Monte Fresh products such as avocados, onions, peppers, packaged salads, fresh basil, garlic and dressings,” says Christou. “Another effective approach is to cross-merchandise tomatoes outside the produce department with non-produce items like sandwich items, pastas, deli meats and cheeses such as mozzarella.”

It's not just the greenhouse-grown tomatoes and lettuce that are selling well. Other items like English cucumbers, Persian cucumbers, and imported greenhouse peppers are also strong selling items.



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“People in the industry are enthused and surprised at the rapid growth that continues in North America for high-tech greenhouses that are highly sustainable,” asserts Douglas Kling, senior vice president and CMO of Village Farms in Heathrow, FL.

Village Farms offers a full range of premium products, including Beefsteak, TOV, Roma, grape, cherry, mini San Marzano, and heirloom style tomatoes, along with Long English cucumbers and red, yellow, and orange bell peppers — 80 percent of all these items are grown and marketed via Village Farms wholly-owned greenhouse operations in British Columbia and Texas.

“We believe the price of products should represent a fair value for the consumer and include all the costs of delivering a flavorful, safe product from companies that treat their employees with benefits and fair wages. It generally costs a little more to get a lot more in terms of consistent flavor, safety, and community strong organizations,” says Kling.

“Greenhouse-grown products that help conserve water by using more than two-thirds less than traditional field products, integrated pest management versus high doses of pesticide, and safety standards that are world class



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go beyond the term gourmet. They protect the health and well being as well as meet or exceed expectations of today's consumers.”

Malena's Avila says some leading specialty/natural foods chains are already showing a marked preference for protected ag produce, which could represent 60 to 70 percent of their department volume on some key SKUs.

“For them, their protected ag program is a key part of their overall chain marketing strategy,” he says. “Other grocers are showcasing their protected ag grower partners in special displays or special events. Still others are stocking protected ag, yet merchandising it alongside field-grown so

the consumer may not be aware of it.”

“Our major outlet today is FreshPoint and the restaurant trade,” says Kerry's Kitchen's Herndon. “We haven't offered it to retail yet. We're currently designing packaging for the product line. It's going to be centered around young herbs in quarter-ounce packaging, and all items will be certified organic. We're looking at a pricepoint of \$1.29 for consumers and convenient packaging so they can take advantage of the entire product.”

Greenhouse Produce's De Schouwer feels that greenhouse category sales can be improved through packaging via identity or brand development.

“At the end of the day, I'm not sure a consumer cares where or how a product was grown. I believe it's more a matter of highlighting the good qualities, the nutritional qualities, and the health benefits of the products,” he says. “You need to make the packaging in such a way that people are interested in buying the product. Zip-lock bags or a closable container (a self-attaching clamshell) are key packaging options. They are a little more expensive, but people want convenient food and a way to keep their produce fresh.”

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**S**ilver Creek Software (SCS) focuses on delivering a state-of-the-art, high-quality ERP accounting and management system to fresh produce distributors, growers, packers, shippers and brokers. Established in 1982 by John Carpenter, president, and Tina Reminger, vice president, the company flourished as a

family-owned business throughout the '80s and '90s, eventually receiving IBM's top VAR award of 1988 and Inacom's President's Award of Excellence. The company's increasing orientation toward software development led it to deliver Visual Produce in 1993 to its first produce distribution customer.

"Since then, we have installed Visual Produce in over 100 companies, both in the United States and abroad," says Reminger. "Many of our customers have experienced explosive growth in their respective markets, and Silver Creek Software has met or exceeded the related challenges of accommodating those changing business needs."

SCS' Visual Produce accounting software has several key operational and financial capabilities. Carpenter explains, "Standard Visual Produce modules include sales orders, purchase orders, inventory processing, accounts receivable, accounts payable and general ledger. Optional modules include payroll, packing plant manager, grower settlements, brokerage management, fresh-pack processing, repack management, warehouse management, crop accounting, EDI, Traceability solutions and Warehouse Management (WMS)."

Additionally, there are software enhancements such as customer menus, route analysis and management, contract pricing, soft breaker units, commodity boards, business status reports and lot tracking, which allow our Clients to maximize their business productivity. When you buy Visual Produce, you get over 400+ standard reports! The feature set is comparable to many large accounting systems out there but with more bang for your buck!

Visual Produce allows customized sales and operations tracking boards to be designed to address specific business challenges, such as tracking order status, load status, item status and alerts on problems. "Through the use of ProAlert, Visual Produce can be set up to automatically notify managers or users when pre-defined alert criteria are met," states Reminger. "As an example, an e-mail alert can be sent to a manager whenever an order margin amount falls below a specific value. Or a report can automatically be generated and routed to an individual at the same time every day. This tool is limited only by your imagination."

Visual Produce provides easy access to data from many different tools including Report Writer, Crystal Reports, Excel,

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F9 (an Excel-based financial report tool), Visual Internet Online Ordering, FaxIT!, GPS, Roadnet and many others. "Our software's unique features and benefits ensure our customers are never told the program doesn't work the way they need it to, they have to change their business practices or they have to wait until the next version of the software becomes available before a problem is fixed," Carpenter adds. We have the know-how to modify for your requirements today!

Visual Produce's Internet connectivity allows order entry via the Web, and it gives customers access to reporting and data publishing capabilities. "Some of our current Clients have more than 80 percent of their orders being entered through Visual Internet," according to Reminger.

SCS advises thinking on a long-term, large scale when looking at software needs. "When choosing software think long term," suggests Reminger. "Remember your business needs will change and your software needs will need to change as well. Also, ask to speak with customers and ask them about service and product. When you buy software, you enter into a close-knit relationship with your software provider."

Reminger cautions companies to realize the IT industry is much bigger than just their ERP software provider. "How does the program you are evaluating fit into the big picture?" she asks. "Is it proprietary or open? What operating systems does it run on? Are the programs and data accessible to other entities in the market?"

Produce companies currently using Visual Produce for wholesale distribution and processing include Coastal Sunbelt Produce, Pacific Coast Fruit, Baldor Specialty Foods and Loffredo Fresh Produce. Companies using the software for distribution, packing and grower settlements include Country Fresh Mushrooms, Sweet Clover Produce, Grigg Farms and MCL Distributing.

"We outgrew our IBM system in 1998 and implemented Visual Produce shortly thereafter. Since then our business has grown 300% in volume and now supports 5 regional warehouses in neighboring cities. With Silver Creek Software, we haven't skipped a beat!" Mark Zimmerma, Controller, Loffredo Fresh Produce

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PHOTO TO LEFT COURTESY OF NATIONAL MANGO BOARD



Although mango consumption has steadily increased over the years, industry players agree the largest untapped market is among mainstream consumers who are still learning about mangos.

# Mexican Mangos: Crossing The Chasm To Popularity

Industry players share their advice and tactics on how to increase mango consumption by a broader consumer base. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

**M**angos present excellent opportunities for increased sales through promotions and demonstrations as more and more U.S. consumers come to appreciate the versatility of this flavorful food.

Mangos are a popular and prevalent staple to Asian and Hispanic cultures, and the strong population growth in both of these communities has established greater demand for this fruit. But mangos have not yet reached the same level of mainstream star status to generate sales growth of the same magnitude.

“Consumption has increased 32 percent since 2005, when the board was founded, so mango purchase and usage is on the rise. Although mangos are a favorite in the Hispanic community, we are seeing increase purchases in the Caucasian population,” says Megan McKenna, director of marketing at the National Mango Board, Orlando, FL.

Mangos are almost entirely imported, and production in the Western Hemisphere shifts throughout the year.

Imports from Mexico take center stage

from early March through August, and shippers indicate the harvest may start a few days earlier this year with the first of the yellow Ataulfo mangos from southern Mexico.

The largest groups of consumers may be the Hispanic and Asian communities, but mangos have become a 365-day item in the produce department — even in high-end supermarkets.

“We carry them all year, and we are definitely selling more of them than we were five years ago,” says Vince Mastromauro, produce director at Sunset Foods, Highland Park, IL. Sunset Foods is an independent chain of six supermarkets serving suburban neighborhoods outside Chicago, IL.

Because most Hispanics and Asians already appreciate and know how to use mangos, the single most effective way to reach new consumers is to demonstrate the versatility of this fruit.

“You can eat them fresh out-of-hand, or you can use them in recipes like mango salsa, or mango smoothies. We have had a private label of mango spears in 5-pound bags for about five years, and they just fly out of the

store,” says Mastromauro.

## The Target Audience

“Your two largest markets are still Hispanics and Asians. In the past few years mangos have penetrated the Caucasian market,” says Christopher Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Brothers LLC, Rio Rico, AZ.

“In some instances we’ll carry different sizes. The Hispanic customers buy a lot of mangos, and sometimes they’re looking for a better price, so we’ll carry a smaller size,” says Jeff Cady, produce category manager at TOPS Friendly Markets, Buffalo, NY. TOPS operates 126 supermarkets in Upstate New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont.

“We’ve had some great promotion and education to reach more consumers. We have good sampling and in-store demos. We also work with a company that gives us fresh-cut mangos for salads. It’s one of the world’s most popular fruit, and until a few years ago, only 33 percent of the U.S. population had ever tried them,” says Cady.

There are many potential mango consumers who just need more information



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# “The No. 1 challenge in marketing mangos to the U.S. population is building consumer confidence in using the product. Not knowing how to select, ripen or cut mangos is the biggest barrier with purchasing.”

— Megan McKenna, National Mango Board

about the fruit.

“Because of ignorance, and the lack of promotion, it is still considered an exotic fruit,” says Gabriela Luna, marketing manager at Diazteca Company, Rio Rico, AZ. Diazteca is an integrated family business growing in Mexico and shipping to the U.S. through its Arizona facility.

“It’s important in a campaign to focus on the benefits and endless ways mangos can be consumed. Educate consumers on when to select a ripe mango depending on the variety,” adds Luna.

Others agree that the audience for effective retail demonstration and promotion is among mainstream consumers; because while they may not be familiar with this fruit, they are open to persuasion.

“I think the real target market is the Anglos, because the Hispanics and Asians grew up with them,” says Gary Clevenger, co-founder of Freska Produce International LLC, Oxnard, CA.

A variety of media and travel are making more consumers familiar with mangos.

“We have a lot of customers who travel to exotic places and try mangos. When they get home, they want to see them in the store where they shop. The Internet has made a difference, too. A lot of people have become aware of the health aspect of mangos, and of how to use them,” says Sunset Foods’ Mastromauro.

Retailers have opportunities to build on this momentum by sampling and by demonstrating how mangos can be used.

“We demo and it helps. Our customers are largely Caucasian,” says Mastromauro.

An important part of the success of demos is showing the versatility of this nutritious fruit.

“People used to see mangos as a specialty exotic item, which it is. But they have great value and utility,” explains Ronnie Cohen, vice president for sales at Vision Import Group, River Edge, NJ. “You can take a recipe that calls for peaches and use mangos instead, and you can take a recipe that calls for tomatoes and use mangos instead. The challenge is letting people understand the fruit. The challenge is helping people understand the different varieties,

countries of origin, and stages of ripeness. Everybody has different preferences.”

Demonstrations can piggyback on the introduction to mango dishes consumers first enjoyed in restaurants.

“Consumers are trying dishes served with mangos in restaurants. With any recipe that calls for soft fruit, you can always use mangos. We have seen an increase in demand every year since 2000,” says Larry Nienkerk, owner and general manager of Splendid Products, Burlingame, CA.

Demos work, and the Mango Board is doing its part to help retailers show the many refreshing uses of this tasty fruit.

“The No. 1 challenge in marketing mangos to the U.S. population is building consumer confidence in using the product. Not knowing how to select, ripen or cut mangos is the biggest barrier with purchasing. The National Mango Board offers point of sale materials to retailers across the country to help answer these questions. We also want to tell consumers

about how fun mangos can make any dish — adding them to oatmeal, a salad or a smoothie can really ‘Mangover’ their menu,” says McKenna. Retailers can view available POS materials on the Mango Board’s website.

## Ripe For Sales

Nothing helps a mango program succeed like beautiful, ripe fruit that is ready to eat and looks and feels ready to eat.

“Make sure they have a bright color and are a little soft when they come in. If they are green and hard, they won’t sell,” says Mastromauro.

Although mangos turn color as they ripen, the real key to telling if they are ready to eat is not color but feel.

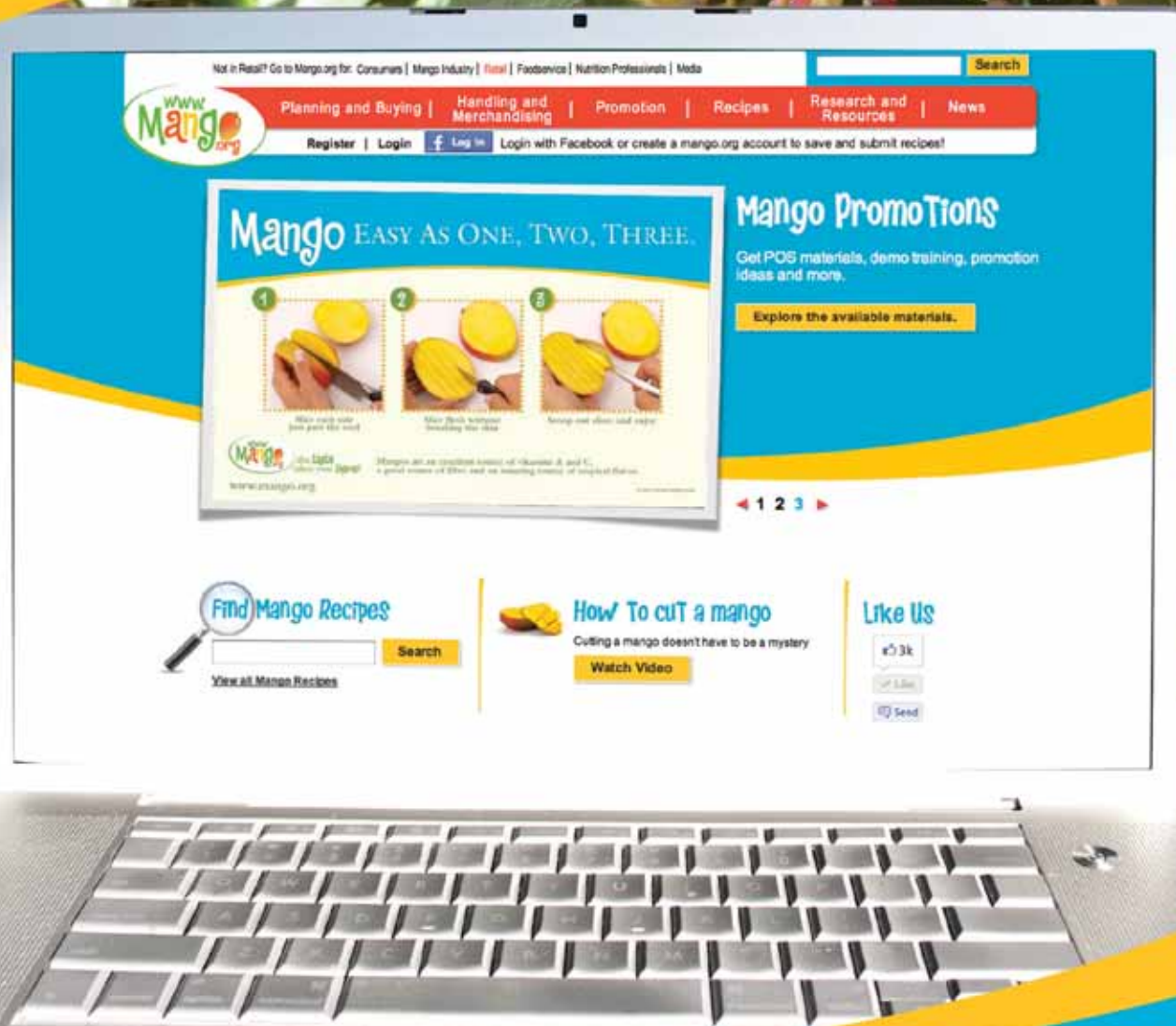
“Consumers can assume that a red mango is a ripe mango. However, this is not so, we definitely need a massive campaign to create the experience of eating a Mexican mango,” says Diazteca’s Luna.

There are POS materials available, which teach consumers that the soft touch, not the color, is the way to tell if a mango is ripe.

“A quarter of total respondents to our 2013 consumer attitudes and usage study said that red skin is how to determine if a mango is ripe. Our ripeness messaging is, ‘Squeeze gently to judge ripeness’ as this works for all varieties. We have also used the slogan, ‘Don’t judge a mango by its color.’ We offer POS material that discusses how delicious yellow and green varieties can be although they never turn



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**“The first thing we tell retailers is to promote early, in March and April when it’s still cold in the East. If you can get consumers to try them early, you can keep selling all season long.**

— Christopher Ciruli, Ciruli Brothers

red,” says McKenna.

Regardless of the size or color, if mangos are to maintain freshness, they must be stored at room temperatures and not under refrigeration.

“In addition to breaking down those barriers, it is important retailers know how to treat mangos so consumers have the best eating experience. It is imperative to merchandise mangos out of refrigeration so they will ripen as they need to. We encourage retailers to treat a mango like a banana,” says McKenna.

“The first thing to keep in mind is the temperature; you have to keep them about 55 degrees,” says Ciruli of Ciruli Brothers.

Another issue in presenting fresh fruit is the transit time from below the border to the supermarket shelf, and the harvest must be timed carefully in order for mangos to reach the store fresh and ripe after a long trip.

“Mangos should be handled more like bananas than peppers. The other challenge is timing. It takes 11 to 14 days of transit to get mangos from Peru or Brazil. You have to cut it at the right time,” says Vision’s Cohen.

The time from harvest to shelf varies a lot from the beginning of the season when fruit is

coming from southern Mexico to the middle of the summer when the fruit is coming from closer to the border.

“In the early deal, they’re coming out of southern Mexico, so you can add an extra three or four days. You can get them from the South to the supermarket in the U.S. in seven or eight days. With the Northern deal, you can get them there in 72 hours,” says Ciruli.

Mexican mangos have the advantage of being much closer to U.S. markets than South American mangos.

“Our growers put 100 percent of their efforts in sending quality great tasting mangos, with traceability. Because of the short distance, it’s possible to harvest the fruit at its best sugar grades — compared to other countries that need at least double the time to reach the U.S. markets,” says Diazteca’s Luna.

Most suppliers encourage carrying both a red and a yellow variety at all times, but practices vary depending on the store’s space and demographics.

“You’d like to see retailers carry at least two colors. The larger the display the better,” says Ciruli.

“The varieties are more or less divided into

red and yellow, and there are a limited number of commercial varieties grown for shipment to the U.S.,” says Splendid’s Nienkerk.

“We generally have the variety that is in season; the Haden or Tommy Atkins red, or the Champagne or Ataulfo yellow,” says Sunset Foods’ Mastromauro.

The first fruit out of Mexico in volume in the early spring is the yellow Ataulfo variety, followed a few weeks later by the red Haden variety.

“The yellow mangos are the first to come from Mexico, and the reds start coming in volume starting in late March,” says Freska’s Clevenger.

Promotion pricing when volumes reach their peak can be effective in introducing new consumers to mangos.

“Consumers like seeing the promotions. When volumes go up, you’ll see four or even five to a dollar, and that seems to drive sales. Multiple pricing drives sales,” says Clevenger.

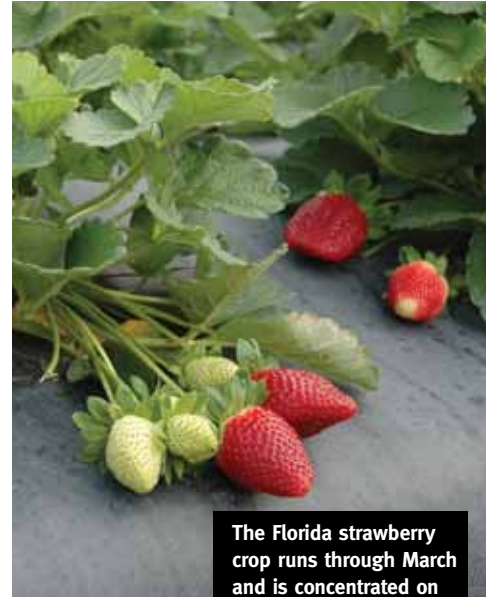
But some suppliers suggest promotions at the beginning of the season, in March or April, in order to capture consumers for the months ahead.

“The first thing we tell retailers is to promote early, in March and April when it’s still cold in the East. If you can get consumers to try them early, you can keep selling all season long. Your toughest months are June, July and August, when you have fruit out of California, and a lot of the local deals,” says Ciruli.

**pb**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WISH FARMS



The Florida strawberry crop runs through March and is concentrated on the southwest coast.

# Florida Spring Produce Report

Discover the fruit and vegetables that will make the state sing this season.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**R**etailers who want to plant the taste of spring in their produce departments need only look as far as Florida. This southeastern-most U.S. state is in peak production during the months of March, April and May — when much of the country’s growing areas are still hard frozen. In fact, Florida is ranked second only to California in the production of strawberries, tomatoes, vegetables and melons, many of which are harvested at their peak in spring. These four commodity groups totaled \$2.14 billion in cash receipts for the state in 2012, according to *Florida Agricultural Facts*, published August 27, 2013 by the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service’s Florida office, based in Maitland.

“Florida is a very important supplier of fruits and vegetables to us at this time of year,” says Eric Hanson, category manager for fresh produce at the Grand Rapids, MI-based SpartanNash Company, which operates 177 supermarkets.

## Why Florida?

The No. 1 selling point for Florida’s spring

produce is freshness, asserts Tom O’Brien, president of the C&D Fruit & Vegetable Company in Bradenton, FL. “We can pick, pack and ship to retail customers east of the Mississippi within a 24- to 36-hour window of time. Mexico can’t do this and neither can California. Plus, we have a cost advantage in freight, especially to the South and North-eastern U.S.”

Quality out of Florida is best in March, April and May, according to Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing for J&J Family of Farms in Loxahatchee, FL. “This is because we plant the spring crop around the first of the year when it’s cool, unlike the fall where crops can suffer heat stress.”

Adam Lytch, grower development specialist for Raleigh, NC-headquartered L&M Companies, agrees. “In the winter, depending on how far the temperatures dip, we can get lower yields. Come mid-March and April, production in Florida really ramps up. At the same time, demand goes up as the weather up North gets warmer and customers are more inclined to buy spring veggies and salad fixings.”

Florida agriculture is not without its chal-

lenges and opportunities at this time of year. “Challenges include the potential for weather issues such as freezing temperatures in January and February that could delay crops in the spring,” says Elena Hernandez, marketing manager for Oviedo, FL-based Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

Protecting against crop-destroying freezes can be a difficult business.

“We’ve invested in a trailer load of cloth cover to protect the strawberry crop from freezing. But, we had mild winters the past two years and haven’t had to use it. It’s just sitting there,” says C&D’s O’Brien.

The traditional method for protecting against freezes is spraying fields with groundwater, a practice that can drain residential wells for weeks depending on the length of a cold snap.

“Water is an ongoing and long-term problem in the state,” explains Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association in Maitland, FL. “It’s a balance between agriculture and our growing population. Construction has been at a stand-

still since about 2005, so that's been a plus, but we're starting to see that rebound."

Despite land demands, some major growers are expanding their operations within the state, and this is providing new opportunities.

"We're continually looking to diversify our farming areas in order to provide a more continuous and seamless supply, especially of mixer items like eggplant and squash," explains L&M's Lytch. "Currently, we grow all over the state in over 12 farms. For example, greens, cabbage and broccoli come out of northeast Florida from December to April, and then new crop potatoes harvest in this region in May and June. We have peppers, cukes and squash out of South Florida from November to mid-May and tomatoes in April. Moving around and having a number of growing locations also mitigates the risk from weather events."

J&J Family Farms enlarged its operation with the addition of 600 acres of prime farmland in the southeast part of the state last year. "The land is equipped with a state-of-the-art drip irrigation system," explains Rayfield. "This will enable us to grow more of our core vegetable commodities such as bell peppers, squash, cucumbers, eggplant and tomatoes. This additional acreage means we will almost double our production from March to May."

### Spring Bounty

"There is a wide array of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in Florida during the months of March to May," says Dan Sleep, supervisor and senior analyst for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) in Tallahassee, FL. "From strawberries, blueberries, watermelon and citrus to sweet corn, snap beans, bell peppers and tomatoes, just to name a few."

**BERRIES.** "The Florida strawberry crop runs through March," says C&D's O'Brien. "Whether it finishes up mid-March, the end of March or runs into April all depends on the weather. However, by April, most retailers switch from Florida to new-crop California strawberries."

The bulk of the state's strawberry industry is concentrated on the southwest coast.

"Labor is 50 percent of the cost of growing strawberries," says Ted Campbell, executive director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association in Dover, FL. "More farms are depending on H-2A (a program allowing U.S. employers or U.S. agents who meet specific regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals to the U.S. to fill temporary agricultural jobs). Last March, we had a shortage of labor because the blueberry crop came in early."

That was hard. Market pricing for strawberries was good at the time, and the fruit was some of the prettiest — firm and flavorful."

Florida blueberries, customarily available from the end of March through the end of May, are the first domestic harvest for this fruit of the year. They are grown primarily in the central part of the state.

"We start with blueberries as Chile wraps up," says Gary Wishnatzki, president and chief executive of Wish Farms, in Plant City, FL. "There's not usually an overlap. Florida berries are sought after because they're fresher. We start packing in 4.4-ounce and 6-ounce clamshells and ramp up to pints, 18- and 24-ounce packs. We've added a new packing line to accommodate the increased production we expect this season."

## WHAT'S NEW?

**G**rower/shippers in the Sunshine State are continually innovating when it comes to varietal development and testing the profitability of crops not traditionally grown in Florida. Here is a sampling of the latest developments:

- **New Strawberry Variety.** Researchers at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, in Gainesville, FL, have bred a new deep-red, high-flavor, high-quality strawberry called the Florida Sensation. "Twenty to 25 growers have each planted an acre of the variety this season. We expect to see some commercially available in 2014-2015, but the real volume won't come until 2015-2016," explains Ted Campbell, executive director of the Florida Strawberry Growers Association in Dover, FL. What marketers are looking at is the ability to sell this strawberry by varietal name and distinguish it as grown in Florida. "We've never done this before," says Campbell. "It's a whole new avenue that needs to be explored."

- **Gold Bar Zucchini.** C&D Fruit & Vegetable Company, in Bradenton, FL now offers Gold Bar Zucchini. "It's comparable to yellow squash in appearance and has a similar flavor to zucchini," says president Tom O'Brien. "The advantage is its vibrant color, especially in a dish with bell peppers. It also has better shelf life than yellow squash. The challenge is getting retailers to try something new."

- **Hot Peppers.** Jalapenos, Anaheims,

Blueberries are a growing crop for Florida. In the past decade, cash receipts have increased from around \$2 million in 2001 to nearly \$70 million in 2011, according to USDA ERS data.

**TOMATOES.** Florida tomatoes are harvested from November to May, however peak availability is in April. Consequently April is designated as Fresh Florida Tomato Month.

WeisBuy Farms, in Fort Myers, FL, has added new acreage for stake tomatoes this spring, according to president Chuck Weisinger. "We market de-greened tomatoes in quantity and are doing more long term deals directly to retailers to stabilize pricing. We are growing more specialty heirloom variety tomatoes and packaging them in consumer ready packaging."

Round field-grown tomatoes are the back-  
*Continued on page 58*

poblanos and habaneros are among the hot pepper varieties available for the first time this spring from J&J Family of Farms, in Loxahatchee, FL. "In the coming year we'll be experimenting with different varieties and varieties within varieties," says vice president of sales and marketing Brian Rayfield. "You need to be more specific than you think especially with buyers who cater to ethnic customers. It's about heat and flavor."

- **Peaches.** There are now about 1,000 to 1,200 acres planted of low-chill peaches in Florida, according to Dan Sleep, supervisor and senior analyst for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) in Tallahassee, FL. "In the future we could have as many as 8,000 to 12,000 acres as some citrus growers switch some acreage over to peaches."

Florida peaches harvest in April and are available for three to four weeks. "They're not big and not in high volume so we need to sell them for \$2.99 rather than the \$0.99 to \$0.29 per pound that we can sell the Georgia peaches for when they're in season, but they're good. They're tree ripe," says Tony Smith, produce merchandising manager for Harveys Supermarket, a 73-store chain based in Nashville, GA. "When we get close to the time, customers will come in and start asking us for the Florida peaches."

pb



## RETAIL INITIATIVES SPARK RECOGNITION AND SALES

Retailers both in and outside of the state have innovative programs in place to promote Florida produce. “Our ‘At Season’s Peak’ program helps customers with storage, preparation and recipe ideas for fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as reminds customers of these products’ true seasonality,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, a 1,000-plus-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL, which operates in six southeastern states. “In February and March, we focus and promote Florida vegetables such as bell peppers, snap beans, yellow and zucchini squash. In March, we focus on Florida strawberries. In May, we highlight Florida tomatoes and watermelon. We have in-store signage as well as television and radio spots and billboards too.”

Harveys Supermarket, a 73-store chain based in Nashville, GA, and one of the Delhaize America companies, features Florida produce as part of its locally grown produce campaign. “In the spring we’ll feature Florida bell peppers, squash

beans, lettuce, celery and eggplant, Florida strawberries and blueberries before moving into the Georgia crop in June,” explains produce merchandising manager Tony Smith.

The chain’s in-house print shop creates in-store signage with the Fresh From Florida (FFF) logo in order to call out Florida produce at point of display. Harveys includes the FFF logo in the circular when Florida fruits and vegetables are advertised. In addition, the chain not only displays local farmer pictures and profiles in the produce department, but also lets shoppers know how much the particular crop contributes to the local economy via information printed at the bottom of the poster.

Strawberries, snap beans, squash, grape tomatoes and sweet corn as well as juice oranges are advertised in the spring with the FFF logo at SpartanNash, the Grand Rapids, MI-based company operates 177 supermarkets. Sometimes, figuring out customer demand for spring items in cold climates can be a challenge,

explains Eric Hanson, category manager for fresh produce. “A few years back we had 70 and 80 degree weather starting in late March. Items like fresh corn took off like a shot. Last year it was cool and the corn sales just didn’t compare. Weather is a huge determinant to sales.”

This spring, SpartanNash will be the first retailer outside the state of Florida to participate in the FDACS’s new advertising campaign designed to promote FFF products via TV commercials. This promotional program started last season in ten media markets in Florida and proved successful.

“The television spots in the Grand Rapids area will focus on an easy recipe using Florida tomatoes and bell peppers and features our retail partners’ logos in the ads as well,” says Dan Sleep, supervisor and senior analyst for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Tallahassee, FL. “The stores will match this effort with circular ads at the same time. We are interested to see if this is something that will spur greater interest and sales.” **pb**



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## TOMATO & RICOTTA SALAD STUFFED MUSHROOMS

This simple dish highlights the flavor of fresh tomatoes and can serve as a vegetarian appetizer or a side dish.

### INGREDIENTS

1 large ripe Florida tomato, chopped  
2 Portobello mushroom caps, cleaned & stems removed  
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided  
Salt & pepper to taste

1 tablespoon minced shallots  
1/2 tablespoon balsamic vinegar  
1/2 cup baby arugula  
Ricotta salata, shaved with a vegetable or cheese peeler, as much as desired



### INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 400F.

Place Portobello caps on baking sheet and drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and salt & pepper.

Roast for about 15 minutes, until the water has evaporated out of the mushrooms. Remove from oven and set aside.

Drizzle with remaining olive oil, vinegar and more salt & pepper to taste.

Fill mushrooms and top with the tomato mixture.

Serve and garnish with additional salt & pepper and/or olive oil if desired.

Recipe developed by Gina Matsoukas, author of the blog, "Running to the Kitchen."

The Florida Tomato Committee offers a variety of POS materials such as recipe tear-off pads that fit easily on top of the display.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FLORIDA TOMATO COMMITTEE

Continued from page 56

bone of the Florida tomato industry. However, J&J's Rayfield says, "Vine-ripes rather than gas greens are becoming a more important part of our program. We also grow Roma, cherry and grape tomatoes in Florida."

SpartanNash's Hanson says, "Florida grows a great grape tomato. Ninety percent of the grape tomatoes we get in the spring are from Florida."

The University of Florida's Institute of Food

and Agricultural Sciences in Balm, FL has an extensive tomato breeding research program that is highly focused on flavor.

**SWEET CORN.** "Sunshine Sweet is the new brand name for Florida-grown sweet corn," explains Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Maitland, FL-headquartered Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida. "Because super sweet varieties of corn are prevalent, we wanted to denote the product grown in the state. Florida

farmers grow a premium-type sugar-enhanced variety that, once picked, has better shelf life and flavor because its sugars don't turn to starch as quickly."

The sweet corn crop in Florida starts harvest in mid- to late-February. Peak production is in April and May when the state can ship up to 1 million crates per week. Bi-color has surpassed yellow in terms of sales, driven by its visual appeal — especially when tray packed or displayed with a portion of the husk pulled back.

**VEGETABLES.** In addition to tomatoes and sweet corn, vegetables in peak volume out of Florida in the spring include bell peppers, cabbage, carrots, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, escarole/endive, lettuce/romaine, radishes, snap beans and squash. This bounty presents seasonal opportunities for promotion.

"By the beginning of December we'll step up planted acreage of cabbage in order to meet demand for St. Patrick's Day in March," says L&M's Lytch. "Easter is a big eating holiday. This year it's late (April 20), which is great because we're rolling in everything then. Tomatoes and hot peppers are big in May for Cinco de Mayo. We work with retailers to set up a calendar of what to promote when, and

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**“Vine-ripes rather than gas greens are becoming a more important part of our program. We also grow Roma, cherry and grape tomatoes in Florida.”**

— Brian Rayfield, J&J Family Farms

then nail it down with them as we get closer to harvest.”

Growers offer a number of services to retail customers. “We can pack consumer packaging specifically tailored to each chain’s needs,” says WeisBuy’s Weisinger. “In addition, many shippers can pack the produce to meet a chain store’s needs. The produce is certified. That’s becoming a requirement.”

J&J’s Rayfield reports, “We’ll be individually PLU stickering our #1 bell peppers this season.”

**TROPICALS.** Spring isn’t a high harvest time of the year for tropicals in Florida. “However, early spring star fruit, a fruit that has had a stellar growth year in sales, is still in-season,” says Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals, in Homestead, FL. “Year-round tropicals such as passion fruit, dragon fruit and boniatos are doing well.”

### Marketing Programs

There’s no shortage of marketing programs to assist retailers in selling Florida produce. For example, at the grower/shipper level, Wish Farms established partnerships in order to offer a trio of on-pack promotions with its 1-pound clamshell of strawberries. The in-store promotions start in February with Dove Chocolates followed by Nabisco’s Strawberry Newtons and General Mills’ Big G cereals in March. Customers who purchase both products receive a discount at check-out. “We started with the cereals last season and saw a good lift on strawberry sales as a result, so we expanded this season,” says Wishnatzki.

“The Florida Tomato Committee offers a variety of point-of-sale (POS) materials,” explains Samantha Daves, director of education and promotion for the Maitland, FL-based federal marketing organization. “We have recipe tear-off pads that fit easily on the top of the display and are heavily requested by



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Gold Bar zucchini, bell peppers and yellow squash are available from Florida in spring and create a hearty meal.

retailers. Recipes include Florida Tomato & Avocado Salsa and Florida Tomato Caprese Salad.”

Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers’ Stemm explains that there are a number of promotional initiatives planned for spring including a Pinterest contest and blog tour as well as traditional public relations efforts such as consumer print media. “One of the biggest programs this season is the TV advertisements in the Buffalo, Indianapolis and Raleigh markets paid for by an increase in grower assessments. The goal is to show uses for corn beyond grilling with recipes that incorporate spring ingredients such as radishes, scallions and peas.”



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**“During 2013 we were closing in on an historic milestone of nearly 500,000 individual store ads. This is an average of 42 ads per store compared to 8 ads when we started.”**

— Dan Sleep, FDACS

The ‘Fresh From Florida’ (FFF) program, administered by the FDACS’s division of marketing and development, has strong recognition compared to other major produce brands. According to results from two regional Consumer Research Projects conducted during the 2012-2013 season, FFF had near parity with Chiquita in Florida (65 percent) and

outscored Fresh Express and Ready Pac both coming in at 17 percent. Consumer research continues this season to measure the FFF brand recognition by consumers in the Midwest, Northeast and Canada.

Trading in on this profitable brand recognition is the FFF incentive program. The program provides dollars for the placement of

the FFF brand logo in vehicles such as retail ad circulars and has helped to grow sales of Florida produce significantly since it started in 2002, says the FDACS’s Sleep. “During 2013 we were closing in on an historic milestone of nearly 500,000 individual store ads. This is an average of 42 ads per store compared to 8 ads when we started. More specifically, in March, April and May of 2013, we averaged 50,000 store ads each month. This is the equivalent of 1,000 to 1,500 stores doing 40 ads.”

The FDACS, from historical experience, estimated that each individual store ad run during the 2012-2013 season averaged approximately \$2,000 in additional retail sales when a produce item was advertised. **pb**



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In order to keep product safe and uncompromised, experts agree that pallets should be loaded properly and in premium condition.

# A Lesson In Pallets

Experts from CHEP, Gerawan Farming and Litco discuss how pallets can affect sales, product and employee productivity and safety. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

**P**allets used to transport fruits and vegetables to retail outlets nationwide increasingly play a vital role. How those pallets are loaded and unloaded has a significant impact on the bottom line.

Knowledge of pallets, pallet programs and the companies that provide them is as essential for produce retailers as knowing the growers who provide fruit and vegetables.

“Not all pallets are created equal,” says Denver Schutz, technical services manager for Gerawan Farming, Sanger, CA. Retailers should learn as much as they can about the pallets their suppliers are using and how these pallets impact their operations in a positive or negative way. The retailer can identify best practices and create a standard that all their suppliers can adhere to.”

The difference between first rate and sub par pallet programs can be measured in wasted product, worker injury and environmental impact.

“Retailers want a pallet that eliminates product damage, is environmentally stable and is sturdy under load,” says Craig Kelly, director of produce sales at CHEP, Orlando, FL. CHEP is a global provider of pallet and container pooling services with 300 million pallets and containers, owned by the Australian firm

Brambles Limited, which also has a pool of more than 170 million reusable plastic containers under its IFCO brand.

“Retailers also want a pallet that can be easily offloaded onto a shelf or placed as part of a merchandised display,” adds Kelly.

## There Is Product Safety In Stability

Payment for pallets is an investment in a stable ride that serves as the foundation for getting packages of produce to market in good condition. This factor matters because if the packages are damaged, it will appear as if the produce inside those packages must also be damaged. That is why it can be a pennywise mistake to choose the least expensive pallets and pallet program.

“At Litco, we believe that the ‘Package is the Product,’” says Gary Sharon, vice president of Litco International, Vienna, OH. “If the package is damaged, then the product inside the box is suspected to be damaged. How many of us push a damaged package aside when we are doing our personal shopping? Unfortunately, we often find that quality initiatives are closely monitored on the finished goods production line, but rarely for the packaging and shipping.

“A big part of the problem is that the packaging is often considered an expense item and

is purchased based on best price without performance evidence. Because purchasing, quality and customer service are three separate departments, there is often little communication about the amount and cost of product damage, returns, and most importantly, customer complaints,” he adds.

A stable ride in the truck is indispensable in protecting the package from damage, and that stable ride begins with selecting the right pallet and loading it properly. “Using an improperly sized pallet, normally one that is too small, is a potential cause of product damage. Many pallets are made small to protect the pallet, not the product stacked on the pallet. So while the pallet may get a few more turns, the product suffers damage. Pallets can only support so much weight. Too much weight can break it, damage product and also create unsafe working conditions,” says Schutz.

If the cargo is to be secured for the haul, the pallets also have to be loaded onto the truck correctly. “Improper trailer loading can cause additional damage. Pallets that are loaded sideways are more susceptible to damage than those that are loaded straight in or chimney-blocked. Air bags are used to secure loads that are loaded straight in or chimney-blocked,” says Schutz.

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Proper loading means investing in a number of products designed to keep the packages, and the pallet, in place during transport, inside the shipping van or overseas container. There is a guaranteed payback — considering it is often a long ride down a winding and bumpy road to the distribution center or store.

In addition to providing all types of pallets, and specializing in the presswood pallets, Litco also supplies a range of products that keep the product in place as trucks rumble down roads. “To prevent damage while in transit, Litco offers load securement products such as friction mats, dunnage air bags and void fill to use in the truck or container to resist movement of the loaded pallets while in transit,” says Sharon.

The right box for the job is an essential step for keeping pallet loads in place during transit. “A perfect pallet load begins with a perfectly formed box. Paper combinations and box design are critical to a perfectly stacked pallet. Stacking tabs on each box are extremely useful when designed properly,” says Schutz. “Just because tabs are present, does not mean that they will interlock the packages together. It is important to ensure that the stacking tabs are actually tall enough



The half pallet is becoming common enough that many retailers are consulting with experts about the optimum size pallet for the job to expand sales opportunities.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEP

to lock into the opening in the box above it, that there is a snug fit between the tab, and that the opening is designed to interlock.”

### Life Of The Pallet

It can be an expensive and dangerous mistake to use pallets after they are no longer up to standard. Many factors go into determining how long a pallet can be used before it is ready for the recycle pile.

“The life of a pallet is based on the materials used, its construction, and pallet handling

practices in the supply chain. CHEP pallets are inspected prior to each use, and if necessary, any damaged components are recycled and are replaced,” says Kelly. “This allows our pallets to remain fully functional for a decade or more. CHEP pallets are engineered to last several years under even rugged conditions. The type of wood used and the design of the CHEP pallet limit the impact of material handling systems and transportation equipment.”

If a pallet is kept in the game too long, or kept in service without proper maintenance, it can be a health and safety hazard. “Wood pallets that are reused can have damage if not repaired often enough. This damage can sometimes be dangerous to the user. Protruding nails and possible contamination are just a couple of things that workers need to be aware of,” says Schutz.

Some shippers address this concern by using pallets once — and once only — as a way to insure against contamination.

“Gerawan Farming does not stack fruit on reused wood pallets. All of our Prima Pallets are brand new, one-way pallets. The Prima Pallet is built to start clean and stay clean. The lumber we use is kiln-dried and heat-treated to eliminate contamination. And every Prima Pallet is built and handled in our HACCP-controlled environment. When our pallets arrive at our customer’s warehouse, they have carried nothing other than our fruit. No cross-contamination. No hazards. No compromise,” asserts Schutz.

Even with a one-time-only policy, Gerawan emphasizes safety in its pallet construction. “Prima Pallets are meticulously fabricated and inspected by our own team of experienced pallet builders — whose skilled hands and attention to detail make every pallet as perfect as it can be. This level of expertise eliminates any possibility of protruding nails — a common sight on

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hastily built pallets, which seriously jeopardizes the safety of those who handle them. Prima Pallets not only protect fruit, but also the people who move it," says Schutz.

It is worth the time to learn the pallet provider's procedures for making sure their pallets do not pose health and safety risks.

"A typical cycle starts at a CHEP Service Center, which issues ready-for-use pallets to manufacturers and growers for use and movement through the supply chain," says Kelly. "Products are loaded onto the CHEP equipment and shipped through the supply chain. At the end of the supply chain, the receiving business unloads the goods and returns the pallets to the nearest CHEP Service Center — where the equipment is inspected and repaired to meet quality standards if necessary."

Technology has taken us to the point where we can reasonably predict how long a pallet should last. "The 'number of trips' that a pallet can make without failure depends primarily on the pallet design, the packaging, the handling, the storage environment and the means of transportation," says Litco's Sharon. "Innovative pallet options and pallet design tools have also made it easier to predict the strength, stiffness and durability of a pallet under load with

various grades of packaging materials."

After all the research and development, all the procedures and training, safety always comes down to using common sense. "Never step onto the pallet; it creates a potential for injury while loading — or at any other time," emphasizes Sharon.

### Using A Pallet As A Display

One of the newest trends in produce shipping is the development of half-sized pallets. In addition to offering greater efficiency in shipping smaller loads, this 40- by 24-inch pallet creates opportunities to display produce in the supermarket on the pallet that brought the food from the farm.

"One of the trends that we're seeing in the produce industry is the concept of retail-ready packaging," says CHEP's Kelly. "With retail-ready packaging, products are easily placed on the store shelf, or on the shop floor, for display without the need for unpacking or repacking. This one-touch packaging increases productivity and lowers the opportunity for damage through the supply chain. For pallets, this means floor-ready displays that can be placed on the store floor with minimal effort."

There are display opportunities, already

widely used in Europe, that incorporate the pallet used to carry the produce from the farm to the supermarket.

"Retailers need to discuss merchandising opportunities for pallets, including floor-ready displays that are shipped from the farm through distribution centers to the store with minimal handling. They also need to discuss the potential for half pallets to promote produce items within the department and elsewhere in the store," says Kelly.

Litco was the first to market a presswood half-pallet option targeted specifically at shipping small lot pallet loads.

The half pallet is becoming common enough that many retailers are consulting with experts about the optimum size pallet for the job to expand sales opportunities. "Litco is more than a pallet provider. We prefer to take a holistic approach to solving damage prevention problems. We offer free consulting to ensure that you are using the most efficient pallet size and design for the optimum load stacking patterns," says Sharon. "To help get the most out of shipping costs, we will also recommend a pallet size that will best cube out a trailer or overseas shipping container with the greatest amount of product possible." **pb**

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# Onions Dominate Foodservice Menus

From fast food to upscale restaurants, onions are winning the hearts of chefs and consumers taste buds. **BY PAUL FRUMKIN**



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL ONION ASSOCIATION

Research shows that 92 percent of restaurants use onions on the menu in some form or another — often white or yellow varieties that are deep-fried or served as onion soup.

**W**hile onions have long been a staple of restaurants across all segments of the industry, a growing number of chefs and foodservice operators are refocusing on the versatile vegetable as a way of differentiating new menu selections from those of the competition.

Menu makers are finding that by moving onions out of their traditional supporting role and into the spotlight, they can better address such trends as the premiumization of ingredients, health and wellness concerns, interest in locally produced products and the need for fresher, more vibrant plate presentation.

James Frye, founder and CEO of the Italian Oven fast-casual concept in Pittsburgh, PA observes, “Onions are moving more toward the center-of-the-plate. They’re healthful and people are eating a little healthier these days. And they’re flavorful, too. If you don’t have to use fatty foods, one way to get flavor into a dish is to use ingredients like onions or garlic — which also blend well with other flavors.”

Food and menu consultant, Nancy Kruse, president of The Kruse Co. in Atlanta, GA,

sounds a similar note, saying, “I have a strong feeling that we will see more emphasis on the onion. I think it’s going to follow the general trend toward menuing ‘real’ food. It will look more natural and be more prominent on the plate.”

Onions, in general, have maintained a high menu penetration over the past four years, according to food industry market research firm Datassential MenuTrends, which finds that 92 percent of restaurants use onions on the menu in some form or another — often white or yellow varieties that are deep-fried or served as onion soup.

Moreover, onions remain one of the most popular vegetables among consumers. According to the National Onion Association, per-capita onion consumption increased more than 70 percent over the past several decades, from 12.2 pounds per person in 1982 to 20 pounds per person in 2009. To address that demand, U.S. farmers plant some 125,000 acres of onions annually, which produces about 6.2 billion pounds per year.

Yet, while white and yellow onions continue to occupy an indispensable place in the profes-

sional kitchen — they also form part of the classic mirepoix, the vegetable medley including celery and carrots — red onions currently are the stars of the family, experts say. In fact, red onions were deemed so popular on burgers and other sandwiches in 2013, *Nation’s Restaurant News* named them one of the next “it” ingredients for restaurant menus.

“We’re seeing a movement from yellow to red onions,” says Bob Hale, president and CEO of River Point Farms LLC in Hermiston, OR, the largest supplier of onions in the United States. “Pizza Hut and Subway changed several years ago, now we’re also seeing others, like Wendy’s, make the change.”

Datassential agrees, “Red onion is the most popular onion variety on menus,” while Dave Munson, chef and director of culinary development for Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc., in Greencastle, PA, observes, “Reds are popping up on menus from quick-service to fine dining. They’re definitely here to stay.”

## Seeing Red

The restaurant industry has caught red onion fever, particularly where burgers and



PHOTO COURTESY OF RIVER POINT FARMS

sandwiches are concerned. When Wendy's upscaled its hamburgers — including the Dave's Hot 'N Juicy line — it replaced white onions with red. More recently, the Dublin, OH-based quick-service chain debuted sliced red onions on its Pretzel Bacon Cheeseburger as a limited time offer last summer.

Also, as part of a growing trend among

quick-service chains to use fresh ingredients, McDonald's and Burger King tapped into the popularity of red onions for new item rollouts. Sliced red onions were featured on BK's limited time only Turkey Burger launched in March. In addition, the Miami-based quick-service chain promoted red onions in its Carolina BBQ Whopper and Carolina BBQ Tendercrisp

Chicken sandwiches limited time offers last summer. McDonald's, which had topped its now-discontinued premium Angus burger with slices of red onions, currently includes them on two of the new Quarter Pounders that the Oak Brook, IL-based chain rolled out last summer.

Family operator Denny's also saw red when it introduced a new BBQ Bacon Cheddar Burger. In addition, the Spartanburg, SC, chain reprised its popular Baconalia Menu, which included the Spicy Pepper Bacon Jack Burger topped with red onion. Casual dining chain Quaker Steak & Lube in Sharon, PA, employed red onion in its summer limited time offer menu item Mac & Cheezburger, while Red Robin worked it into its promotion with "The Wolverine" film last summer. The Greenwood Village, CO-based chain menued a Kuzuri Style Tavern Double burger with two patties and a garnish that included diced red onion, while The Berserker Burger featured Sriracha onion straws.

The chief reason for the rush toward red onions is largely apparent, experts say. "It's the color," says River Point Farms' Hale. "It doesn't get lost." He is echoed by Munson of Keystone Fruit Marketing, who calls the onion "a home

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run” when it comes to presentation. “They really help you put color on the plate.”

Kruse of The Kruse Company, however, suggests there are other factors in play as well. “Firstly, there is the ongoing adaptation of ingredients — fresh red onions tend to promise added flavor,” she says. “Secondly, the notion of value comes into play. There is the perception that they are more upmarket — and that plays into the trend toward premiumization. The sense that red onions deliver a premium image enhances the value overall.”

Kim Reddin, director of public and industry relations for the National Onion Association, concurs, “Consumers perceive value in the red onion. They see it as being higher end.” As a result, experts say, customers generally are willing to accept modest price increases that might result from the added cost of employing a less generic onion variety.

**Sweet Sales**

While red onions seemed to be the go-to onion for many chains in 2013, they do not provide the only opportunity for growth within the onion family for restaurants. Sweet onions, suppliers say, have yet to break through in a major way within the foodservice market-

**“I was pleasantly surprised when I stopped at a Quiznos [restaurant] in Walla Walla that they asked if I wanted onions or Walla Walla sweets on my sandwich. These types of local onion offerings are also seen all over the Southeast for Vidalia Sweets . . .”**

— Matthew Curry, Curry & Company

place — but it’s only a matter of time.

Hale points out consumers are already familiar with sweet onions like Vidalia, Maui or Walla Walla varieties. “Sweet onions make up more than 50 percent of purchases at supermarkets,” he says, “so a lot of people already know about them.”

Matthew Curry, president of Curry & Company, in Brooks, OR, says, “Sweet onions continue to pop up as something on the newer side of menus, especially as the year-round volume of sweet onions has been growing. We have a proprietary sweet red onion grown in the Columbia Basin region of Oregon, and we have had strong demand for it this year.”

And since many consumers recognize that sweet onions are raised in a particular geographical area, they also can be menued as part of the increasingly popular locavore trend (to eat food that is only locally produced) — which Curry expects to fuel interest in such identifiable local or regional onion varieties. For instance, he says, Burgerville, a regional burger chain in the Pacific Northwest, “has continued to advertise its Walla Walla sweet onion rings, which is a popular regional sweet onion. I was pleasantly surprised when I stopped at a Quiznos [restaurant] in Walla Walla that they asked if I wanted onions or Walla Walla sweets on my sandwich. These types of local onion offerings are also seen all over the Southeast for Vidalia Sweets as well as in other sweet growing regions.”

Nevertheless, suppliers say the sale of sweet onions to the foodservice industry have yet to

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reach their potential. “It’s kind of frustrating,” says Munson of Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc. “[Sweet onions] are a leader in the onion category in supermarkets, but we haven’t seen that translate into foodservice as much as we’d like.”

### Healthy Options

While locally sourced ingredients may help to drive sales of sweet onions, consumers’ steadily increasing interest in more healthful eating is also helping to position onions in a more favorable light with menu makers.

“Health and wellness always benefit produce sales,” says Curry. “I think it’s important for retailers to always remind consumers of the health benefits of onions.”

Kruse of The Kruse Company also sees this as an opportunity for onion producers and marketers. Previously, “the category had been taken for granted and commoditized,” she says. “One way to break out of that is to think in terms of health. Onions represent the best of all possible worlds. They’re flavorful, they look beautiful, they’re healthy — they’re hitting all the buttons.”

Reddin cites white onions, in particular, as being able to boast a health halo. She points out that white vegetables such as onions, cauliflower and potatoes are higher in potassium and magnesium, which have been linked to promoting heart health and cancer protection.

### Pickling Possibilities

Another emerging trend that could potentially attract attention to onions is the growing interest in pickling and fermentation — chiefly among higher-end foodservice operators. “Pickling is something that has been growing over the past few years,” says Keystone’s Munson. “And it’s a wonderful application for onions. [Pickling] really allows a restaurant to put its own signature on a dish. When I look at that, I’m most encouraged.”

Jennifer Harvey, food specialist for the fast-casual MOD Pizza chain based in Bellevue, WA also says she has witnessed an increase in the number of vegetables being pickled in restaurants these days. “I’m seeing pickled red onion everywhere,” she says. “Sour is exploding, and people are using it in different ways.”

Chef-restaurateur Tom Douglas is just one of a growing number of culinarians offering house-pickled vegetables at his restaurants like Serious Pie, an upscale pizza place in Seattle, WA. Douglas even offers visitors to his website a recipe for pickled red onions.

Meanwhile, chefs and restaurateurs continue to find new applications for onions. While burger and sandwich chains appear to



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL ONION ASSOCIATION

be the main beneficiary of onion action across the foodservice spectrum, pizza purveyors are finding new applications for them as well. Harvey says MOD Pizza — an acronym for “made on demand” — features onions in two prepared pies. “The Siena” pairs asiago and parmesan cheeses with red onions, mushrooms and rosemary. “It’s a very basic pizza that highlights the individual flavors of the ingredients,” she says.

One of MOD’s best-selling premade pies is the “Caspian,” which combines gorgonzola with mozzarella, barbecued chicken, barbecue sauce and sliced red onions. “The barbecue sauce gives the onions an almost caramelized flavor,” says Harvey. “Pizza is a great and safe platform for experiencing something you wouldn’t normally try,” she says.

However, she says careful operators need to establish certain cooking parameters for onions before randomly adding them as an ingredient to a pizza. For example, if an onion is sliced too thin, it might melt down during the cooking process. If it is too thick, “it can be like eating an uncooked onion curl. You have to find a balance of how thick an onion should be sliced,” she says.

The Italian Oven also uses onions to top its white, sauceless pizzas, explains Frye. However, the onions are first marinated in a balsamic glaze and then grilled. The balsamic-flavored onions also form a base for the Italian Oven’s Tomato Tower, a signature dish that also includes sliced fresh tomatoes, Mozzarella and fresh basil. “It’s very popular when tomatoes are in season,” he says.

Frye, who is about to open a second location in the Pittsburgh area, says grilled cipollini onions also work well as ingredients in some pasta selections — for instance, a chicken pasta dish containing broccoli and onions.

Onions, in fact, can prove to be a popular signature item when menued strategically. The

Greene Turtle, a casual-dining chain based in Hanover, MD, offered onion straws — thinly sliced yellow onions that were coated with seasoned flour and flash fried to order — for several years, but now is placing even more emphasis on them with the rollout of its new menu in March.

“Before we treated the straws as just a garnish,” says food and beverage director Adam Kass. “But we’re now expanding them to get a fuller sized portion to fill out the plate presentation.” Previously, the chain’s cheeseburger sliders had been garnished with a few onion straws. Now Kass estimates that the sliders will contain a more substantial portion size of about 2 ounces. Onions also are a prominent component of The Greene Turtle’s Hog Hammers, grilled pork shanks basted in barbecue sauce. The pork shanks are served on a 4-ounce bed of onion straws.

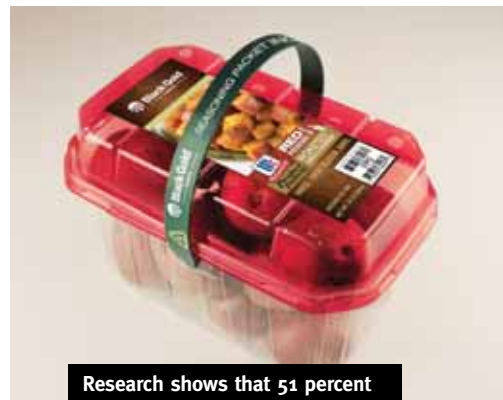
The 37-unit Greene Turtle also features sautéed onions in a variety of other selections, including Philly and chicken cheesesteak sandwiches, chicken pizza and its mushroom and Swiss burger. “Throughout our menu, you can find onions represented in all categories,” says Kass. “You can get a lot of flavor out of onions for the money.”

In general, most industry experts agree that onions are indeed beginning to expand their influence beyond the mirepoix and staple dishes like onion rings, deep-fried onion flowers and onion soups, as well as finding acceptance in a broader range of preparations.

“They’ve never really been there as a showcase ingredient,” says Harvey of MOD Pizza. “But from a kitchen aspect, they’re inexpensive, and you can do interesting things with them. I do think the onion as a leading character is a great, healthy trend. Personally, I have a drive to see people eating healthier, and adding more vegetables like onions to dishes is not the worst thing we can do.” **pb**

# Make Your Value-Added Potato Sales Spud-Tacular

Learn about what's new in the category and how to capture consumers' attention by discovering what works best for your business. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



Research shows that 51 percent of Millennials buy for single meal preparation, while the average customer has six to nine meals in mind when grocery shopping.

(L - R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRESH SOLUTIONS NETWORK, CATEGORY PARTNERS/WADA FARMS, BLACK GOLD FARMS

**V**alue-added items are heating up sales and profits in the potato category. Two trends are driving this spud-tacular phenomenon. First, consumers want items that are convenient, ready-to-cook and that enable them to put an entire family-style meal on the table in a matter of minutes — but they don't want to sacrifice quality or flavor. Second, the rapid growth of convenience items throughout the entire store, about six to seven years ago, spurred spud suppliers to take advantage of these opportunities to introduce fresh potatoes to potential customers. As a result, retailers augmented their potato offerings to include value-added products.

“The traditional 5-, 8- and 10-pound bagged potatoes remain a big chunk of our potato sales,” says Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce merchandising and procurement for Roundy's Supermarkets, Inc., a 165-store chain based in Milwaukee, WI. “However, value-added is a small segment that is growing. Most of our locations carry the microwave bakers and steamable potatoes.”

Value-added potatoes contributed only 3.17 percent of fresh potato category dollars during the 52-weeks ending October 26, 2013,

but this represents a 21.3 percent increase from the year prior, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the Denver, CO-headquartered U.S. Potato Board (USPB). What's more, there's lots of room to grow sales of this sub-category. That's because while traditional packaged potatoes are purchased by 81 percent of U.S. shopper households, high-growth, high-margin value-added potatoes have only entered 10 percent of households, according to Nielsen Perishables Group research that examined purchase data from 31 million households using loyalty card data provided by Monroe, CT-based Spire LLC, at the request of the USPB.

The real opportunity lies in the fact that value-added potatoes don't take dollars away from sales of traditional bread-and-butter bagged potatoes, explains Don Ladhoff, the USPB retail programs consultant. “It's not a trade-off, it's all incremental sales,” says Ladhoff. “Value-added potatoes are a one-meal decision. Buying them doesn't mean that a shopper won't also buy a 5- or 10-pound bag of potatoes for the days they have more time to cook. Research shows that 51 percent of Millennials buy for single meal preparation, while the average customer has six to nine

meals in mind when they grocery shop.

“Sales of commodity plus value-added potatoes equal a higher retail profitability for the entire potato category,” adds Ladhoff. “To accomplish this, it's essential to make sure shoppers know that the value-added potato products are available.”

## What's New In Value-Added Potatoes

There is no standard industry definition of a value-added potato product. However, most produce professionals refer to them as products that add flavor or reduce cooking and/or prep time.

“The goal is to bring consumers into produce aisles through the innovation and convenience of both specialty and high-volume commodity items in order to increase sales across the entire potato category,” explains Randy Shell, vice president of marketing and new business development for RPE Inc., in Bancroft, WI.

Jim Richter, CEO of Wilcox Fresh in Rexburg, ID, agrees, “Value-added takes a product beyond a commodity role and has some kind of enhancement that raises its value proposition and entices the customers to buy. It can be as simple as a pre-washed, shrink-

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**“Consumers are increasingly willing to pay for quality and convenience. If they see that direct cost comparison side by side, it could be a deal breaker.”**

— Mac Johnson, Category Partners

wrapped potato. This was the first generation of value-add products in the potato category.”

Single-wrapped represented 77 percent of the value-added potato sub-category in the 52-weeks ending October 26, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the USPB.

“We started a number of years ago with Biggins Singles,” says Shell. “These are pre-washed, wrapped, uniformly sized and ready-to-microwave russet potatoes. From there, we added Biggins Grillers, individual russets wrapped in our foil FlavorWrap and ready for the grill or oven.”

Wada Farms Potatoes, Inc. in Pingree, ID, takes this concept one step further with its Easy-Grillers, two-, three- or four-count tray packs of pre-washed same-sized russets or three- or four-count tray packs of foil wrapped potatoes.

Tray-packed represented 1 percent of the value-added potato sub-category in the 52-weeks ending October 26, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the USPB.

Farm Fresh Direct, LLC in Monte Vista, CO, continues this product development evolution with its newest item, PotatOH! Steamer Mix, tray-packed potatoes where consumers can leave on the BPA-free SavorSeal overwrap and microwave steam or remove it and oven roast the potatoes. This three-item line features chardonnay and merlot fingerling potatoes. Products such as these are a great way to introduce customers to potato varieties they haven’t previously tried or don’t know how to prepare.

“Package films and technology have played big roles in value-add products across the supermarket, and we’re playing catch-up,” says Mac Johnson, president and CEO of Category Partners, LLC in Aurora, CO. “Wada Farms was the first to market a steamer bag of fresh potatoes. We called it the Easy Steamer.” Johnson explains that the company discovered that

consumers thought the potatoes were easily steamed and that the bag played no role in the process, so they were throwing away the value-added microwave bag. “Now we’ve re-packaged the product, and renamed it ‘Microwave in the Bag.’”

Steamables represented 20 percent of the value-added potato sub-category in the 52-weeks ending October 26, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the USPB.

There have been a number of steamable-type products developed in recent years. For example, RPE introduced its Tasteful Selections Microwavable Packs in both Honey Gold and Ruby Sensation varieties. Wilcox Fresh features baby Idaho, baby reds and fingerlings in microwave kits with seasonings such as savory herb and chipotle. W.P. Griffin Inc. in Prince Edward Island, Canada, offers its Annabelle Potato Steamers, microwave-ready packs of a yellow-flesh variety that is popular in Europe. Nixa, MO-headquartered Market Fresh Produce sells baby red and baby gold potatoes in 12-ounce “steam and eat” microwavable bags. Fresh Solutions Network, LLC in Loveland, OH, expanded its Simple Spuds microwave-ready potato line in 2013 to include purple potatoes. Potandon Produce, based in Idaho Falls, ID, also makes it easy for shoppers to try new potato varieties via its Green Giant-brand Microwave Fresh Baby Klondike Rose and Klondike Golddust potatoes in unflavored as well as flavors such as Mesquite Smoked Bacon and Four Cheese.

There are also refrigerated in addition to shelf-stable value-added potato products.

“We think there are three segments in value-added fresh potatoes,” explains Sherrie Terry, president and CEO of Fresh Solutions Network. “One division is the shelf-stable products such as the microwave bakers and steamables. These are merchandised in the produce department. The second is prepared heat and eat products like mashed potatoes, hashed browns and scalloped potatoes, and the third is the fresh-cut pre-prepared potatoes that require a short cook time to finish them off. These last two segments are not usually displayed in produce.”

“Refrigerated fresh-cut, value-added potato products can present a challenge when retailers try to merchandise them in produce,” says Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail for the Eagle, ID-headquartered Idaho Potato Commission (IPC). “There is limited refrigerated space in the department, and there’s a need to hit higher sales hurdles to make up for what the product displaces from the shelf.”



The USPB's Ladhoff says, "Refrigerated fresh-cut potatoes are an orphan in the produce department because they cannot be displayed on the potato table. Until there are more products that can present a bigger facing, for example at least an 18-inch wide block in the refrigerated case, this challenge will continue."

One example of a product that can help grow this fresh-cut potato section in the produce department are the newly launched Simply Good Simply Fresh Diced Blends Fries by Idaho Falls, ID-based Eagle Eye Produce. This seven-item line of never frozen, ready-to-cook, fresh-cut fries are available in flavors such as four cheese, rosemary garlic and southwestern.

Refrigerated fresh-cut represented 2 percent of the value-added potato sub-category in the 52-weeks ending October 26, 2013, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data as provided by the USPB.

### On The Horizon

"Steady growth and building momentum is forecast for the future of the value-added potato subcategory," says Potandon's Schwartz. "We see this segment to be unlimited in its



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALSUM FARMS AND PRODUCE

potential as the younger generations are always looking for new items. If the industry continues to bring this segment along with new and fresh varieties, ideas, and marketing,

it will certainly be a positive."

Category Partner's Johnson agrees. "Within the next one to three years, I see these products figuring closer to 5 percent or more of potato category sales. Consumers want convenience, and they want fresh."

As for what the future has in store, "We'll see more red potatoes sold as microwave bakers, especially in the Midwest where red consumption is higher than in the rest of the U.S.," says the USPB's Ladhoff. "In tray-pack, we may see the addition of a recipe card on pack or the addition of spice packets. As for steamables, we'll see flavor innovation. There is so much going on with flavors today."

Another unique partnership involves Black Gold Farms, in Grand Forks, ND, with spice, herb and flavoring giant, Sparks, MD-based McCormick Produce Partners. In June, the companies are launching a shelf-stable fresh red-skinned potato product that includes a seasoning packet in one of three flavors: Roasted Italian Herbs, Toasted Onion & Garlic and Roasted Garlic & Rosemary. The potatoes and seasonings are packaged in a clamshell with convenient carry handle.

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## Three Ways To Entice Shoppers To Buy

**F**ocus group research reveals that value-added potatoes score high on taste and convenience, and shoppers who have purchased these products show a high rate of repurchase,” explains Mac Johnson, president and CEO of Category Partners, LLC in Aurora, CO. “The challenge is how to get exposure and gain trial. Retailers should work with their suppliers to develop a plan for where and how to merchandise these products, and how to get the word out to the customers. This could include point-of-purchase signage, recipe ideas, secondary displays and promotions.”

**1. FRONT & CENTER.** The destination potato display is in an upfront location in the produce department at Roundy’s Supermarkets, rather than in the back of the department. “We place the value-added potatoes on a front-facing display and the big bags on the backside of a display case,” says Steve Jarzombek, vice president of produce merchandising and procurement for Roundy’s Supermarkets, Inc., a 165-store chain based in Milwaukee, WI.

Similarly, Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral at Martin’s Super Markets, a 21-store chain based in South Bend, IN, says, “We display our value-added potatoes, microwave bakers and the bagged steamers as part of the destination potato display. That way, customers will easily see them when they come to buy their potatoes.”

“Merchandising all potato items in one set seems to be most productive,” says Randy Shell, vice president of marketing and new business development for RPE Inc., in Bancroft, WI.

But this does not mean that this is the only option. For example, some retailers will merchandise microwaveable potatoes with other microwaveable items. Every retailer could use a different approach and have success with many different options.”

Johnson agrees, “The category is really new enough that we’re still trying to figure out the optimal display tactics. That said, the single-serve microwave bakers near the bulk potato display work well. Some have had success in the wet rack. The key is to figure out that best location, then ensure the customers know where to find them. Others have had success when the steamer bags are merchandised in the specialty potato area — since this generally helps reduce sticker shock.”

When it comes to price, Johnson says, “It’s important not to merchandise the value-add next to or close to the mainstream or end cap bargain bags. The average retail price per pound on bagged product for the most recent 52 weeks was 54 cents per pound, versus value-add products at \$1.65 per pound. Consumers are increasingly willing to pay for quality and convenience. If they see

that direct cost comparison side by side, it could be a deal breaker.”

**2. MEAL DEALS.** “Consumers who buy value-added potatoes are looking for a quick healthy dinner idea,” says Hannah Hughes, marketing manager for Nixa, MO-headquartered Market Fresh Produce.

“Value-added potatoes are cross-merchandised in the meat department at Martin’s Super Markets,” says Osowski. “It makes buying fixings for dinner very convenient. It’s an easy impulse purchase.”

“Some retailers cross-merchandise these products as meal solutions in designated areas of their store sets,” adds Ralph Schwartz, director of category management and director of value added marketing at Idaho Falls, ID-based Potandon Produce, “or add to locations like their service deli.”

“One of my favorite ways to promote value-added potatoes is a meal deal in the deli,” says Jim Richter, CEO of Wilcox Fresh in Rexburg, ID. “For example, buy a rotisserie chicken and get the potatoes free or discounted, whatever balances out to be profitable to all departments.”

To make cross-merchandising easier, Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., in Friesland, WI offers eye-catching pallet display bins that hold the company’s Fast & Fresh red and gold steamers, single-wrapped potatoes and griller potatoes. “These bins can be placed in the meat or dairy departments. The display brings added attention to these products and makes it easier to run cross promotions,” says marketing manager, Heidi Alsum-Randall.

**3. STIMULATE SALES.** “There’s a natural reluctance by shoppers to buy a product for the first time, especially one with a premium price,” says Don Ladhoff, the United States Potato Board’s retail programs consultant. “Promotion gives consumers permission to buy.”

“Promote value-added as frequently as commodity items or approximately every eight weeks,” advises RPE’s Shell. “This will encourage trial buys and turns to keep the product fresh.”

Sherrie Terry, president and CEO of Loveland, OH-based Fresh Solutions Network suggests promoting once per month in-store as a reminder to buy, and once a quarter with a big ad to catch customer’s attention.

“Value-added potatoes are not as price sensitive as commodities,” asserts Shell. “Therefore, there should be less emphasis on price and more emphasis about flavor and use. Small discounts can be very effective.”

However, when first introducing a value-added potato product, Potandon’s Schwartz says, “Retailers should promote aggressively.” **pb**



fingerlings and complimentary seasonings,” says Leah Brakke, marketing specialist for Black Gold Farms.

The IPC’s Pemsler predicts that varietal development could lead to new value-added potato products.

“There will continue to be new items and new packaging in the potato category over the next few years,” forecasts RPE’s Shell. “Most retailers will see additions to SKU counts in the category and will need to be very flexible with merchandising and promotions. Every

aspect of the category will be impacted with new varieties of red, yellow and russet potatoes hitting the market, as well as brand new items in the specialty segment. It could be a fun few years for retailers and consumers in the potato category.” **pb**



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# Orange Is The New Green

Industry advice on the best ways to market carrots. **BY KEITH LORIA**



Retailers and marketers agree that a colorful carrot display intrigues consumers and increases sales.

In this age of the “Foodie Revolution,” at-home chefs want to prepare meals they’ve had at restaurants, seen on cooking shows, or read about in blogs and magazines, and carrots have increasingly been a big part of what’s on those dishes.

Carrots add a bright dash of color to any entrée; it’s like adding paint to the plate, so it’s no surprise that the carrot industry is seeing an increase in sales each year. This is why retailers are emulating farmers markets and bringing in more specialty items when it comes to their carrot selection.

“As one might expect, there are several varieties of carrot offerings within Produce from sticks, to chips, to baby, to organic and to whole. Educating customers as to the offerings is important as well as offering them a need and/or solution for the different varieties,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets. “Signage is important as well as value-added and/or advantage-buys [special pricing].”

Doug McFarland, marketing director for Colorful Harvest, Salinas, CA, says a big trend in the industry is that colored carrots are really catching on. “Consumers want more for their money, so the extra visual appeal and broad-spectrum nutrition of multi-colored Rainbow

Crunch carrots make them a good value,” he says. “We are consistently adding acreage and still can’t keep up with demand.”

Amin Panjwani is in charge of carrots at S. Katzman Produce, a wholesaler that works out of the Hunts Point Market in the Bronx. He says that for the past two years, the company has had a phenomenal success in growing this segment of its business. “In our opinion, the category is under-represented in the produce section. A combination of marketing, merchandising and appropriate shelf space can bring profitable results,” says Panjwani. “Additionally, we would like to see the industry as a whole be more aggressive in marketing and highlighting its nutritional values across the spectrum of media channels available.”

Pierre Dolbec, vice president, sales and procurement, Veg Pro International, Sherrington, Quebec, hears from retailers that people are looking for a better-tasting carrot, and its growers are working on the right balance of taste, shelf life and yield. “There is an important value in carrots. A lot of times, they are taken for granted at the store level, but they are very versatile, easy to prepare and complement a meal, and are also a great snacking item,” he says. “I think we can do a better job of merchandising, and our packaging needs to be revamped to get the consumer a little more on

board, but we are very satisfied with the sales we are seeing right now.”

## Nutrition News

Kate Werner, retail merchandising specialist for East Coast Fresh, Savage, MD, says the latest research for the benefits of eating carrots as part of a balanced diet shows a lower risk of cancer, improved vision, aiding the prevention of heart disease, a reduced risk of stroke, healthier skin, and improved dental health. “Baby carrots continue to be the most popular carrot product for families and young adults in an attempt to maintain a healthier diet,” she says. “Carrots offer an on-the-go option for snacks, delicious juicing options, and still maintain a solid spot on the dinner table. Rainbow carrots are rapidly growing in popularity due to studies that suggest a diet rich in brightly colored fruits and vegetables have important health benefits.”

Bob Borda, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, stresses the nutritional make-up of carrots as being the driving force for sales. “We need to continue to educate the consumer on the benefits of carrots,” he says. “People today are concerned about living that healthy lifestyle, and we’re positioning carrots to be a healthy part of one’s diet. We’ve made them convenient, competi-



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tively priced and they can be used on many different occasions.”

Ande Manos, in charge of new business development for Babé Farms, Santa Maria, CA-based growers of specialty “baby-size” carrots, says gourmet baby carrots have been popular of late, especially those bunched with tops; maroon, pink, purple, white, yellow, Thumbelina and French. “The gourmet carrot category has been steadily increasing for a number of reasons, especially nutrition,” says Manos. “The color of a carrot yields different health benefits.”

**On Display**

Alternating bands of different colored veggies on the produce rack can make the produce aisle pop visually, like a rainbow, and encourages shopper browsing. Therefore, alternating carrots with purple cabbage, green celery and yellow squash have gained solid results in sales.

“When produce managers merchandise all their carrot offerings together, it shows the category a lot better and provides the consumer with a choice,” says Veg Pro’s Dolbec. “Make it easy for the consumer to discover them, and it will help with impulse sales.”



HEB/Central Market, with nine stores in Texas, has done some very creative displays. Lee Crenshaw, business development manager, produce for HEB/Central Market, says when it comes to displays, it’s important to showcase the variety. “For us, it’s about getting them in front of the customer, so they’re not hidden among the other vegetables,” he says. “We put them in the center aisle, displayed on ice and build them up to something that is eye-catching for when someone comes in the

produce section.”

Taking a different approach, Vic Savanello, director of produce and floral at Allegiance Retail Services, Iselin, NJ, finds it much more effective to merchandise regular carrots separately from baby carrots. “I find it much more successful to cross merchandise regular bagged carrots with cooking greens and hardware soup ingredient type items that will drive sales,” he says. “Cross-merchandising baby carrots with dipping items and value-added vegetable items will help drive those sales as well.”

Some retailers are chopping the tops of their whole fresh carrots to show the bright colors of the vegetable, while others are leaving the leaves on to show freshness and pop with the contrasting colors. Both options, while being completely opposite, are good ways to make a statement in the produce department.

**Marketing Matters**

Krista Ward, chief executive at Hooray Puree, Chicago, IL, has seen business rise thanks to a wave of people learning that carrot purees are so easy to incorporate into any snack, meal or baked good to increase nutrition and develop kids’ palates. Still, there are plenty of things she believes could be done at

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### Yellow Carrots:

Contains lutein, important for cardiovascular health, healthy eyes and skin.

the retail level to promote the item better.

“Videos can be on loop in-store showing how to use carrot purees in consumers’ favorite dishes (tacos, chili, muffins, smoothies, etc.), and recipe cards should be displayed nearby,” she says. “Sampling and/or grocery store kitchens are a great way to illustrate the uses live. With any or all of these, consumers might choose to try the new carrot variety, as well as their traditional purchase, thereby increasing produce sales.”

According to Babé Farms’ Manos, retailers should make the carrot display a destination, utilizing lots of colorful varieties, and get creative by cross merchandising with salad components, dressings and dips. “Bright POS advertising the health benefits go far, as does adding recipes or applications to the display,” she says. “Our role is to help provide retailers with attractive POS, educate produce managers and staff on how to build an attractive display with a rainbow of baby carrots, and encourage chef demos or tasting stations.”

Shoppers respond positively to opportunities to save when buying complementary products, so cross-merchandising and offering discounts at the register for each purchase of salad fixings with carrots is a great way to stimulate sales.

Allegiance’s Savanello says retailers have become much more savvy driving sales of items like baby carrots in recent years. “I think the economy has driven us to stay home and entertain more often, so we have to figure out how to become the caterer for those parties and gatherings,” he says. “We have tried cross-

# GARLIC SHOWCASE

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merchandising baby carrots with vegetable platters, for the consumer who thinks they may need to replenish their platter during their entertaining period. We've even offered tie-in promotions where you buy a larger-sized baby carrot and you get a dip for free."

East Coast Fresh's Werner recommends retailers broaden their horizons when thinking about carrots. "Try an aqua-pack carrot in with the cut vegetables, ready-to-go options for dinner such as our over-wrap vegetable program, or even single-serve packs of baby carrots for on-the-go snack options. Add rainbow carrot options with traditional loose carrots, baby carrots, and in the organic section," she says. "Point of sale signage showing benefits of eating carrots will help



retailers improve sales. Also, cross-merchandising within the produce department, as well as throughout the store, will help drive incremental sales."

**Recipe Rules**

There are plenty of ways to spice up a recipe with the inclusion of carrots. Marketers suggest trying everything from offering rainbow carrot crudités (raw) served with assorted dips to maple glazed baby carrots, caramelized spiced carrots, curried baby carrots or even pickled baby carrots.

"When sautéing onions and garlic for spaghetti sauce, add in some shredded carrots for an added health kick without the kids ever knowing," says Werner. "For lunch, fill a whole-





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wheat pita pocket with hummus and stuff it with shredded carrots. Carrots, apples and ginger in a juice machine make a quick healthy drink. Smoothies are also a great option; in a blender mix carrots, apples, spinach, cucumbers, and water.”

Carrots are so very versatile that they can fit into just about every meal of the day. For example, Colorful Harvest’s McFarland recommends: juicing carrots in a morning veggie cocktail; sautéing carrots in a veggie omelet to add color, texture and nutrition to a traditional breakfast; adding slivered, sliced, or grated carrots to salads, pastas, roasted veggie medleys, and stews; and cooking pureed carrots with stock and rue to make a great soup base.

Cookcarrots.com (a site sponsored by the

Gourmet Heartbeat blog that combines carrot recipes, nutritional information and other carrot content) offers a wide variety of recipes such as carrot cake, carrot soup, carrot salad, and carrot casserole.

### Appealing to the Little Ones

People have been trying to get kids interested in vegetables forever, and a way to get carrots on their radar is through packaging.

“Children are intrigued by color; a bright rainbow display with some fun veggie characters promoting carrots would be attractive to children,” says Babé Farms’ Manos. “Cross merchandise with kid-friendly dips, hummus or dressings and have a demo station.”

McFarland says cross-merchandising

Colorful Harvest mini-carrots with other children’s munchables is a great way of reminding families of this healthful snack option.

S. Katzman’s Panjwani also believes that the industry should be investing heavier in innovative and attractive packaging as a way to appeal to children.

“As adults we may know the nutritional benefits of including carrots in our diet, but we must focus on making them appealing to children,” he says. “The packaging must be small enough to fit in a lunch box, and attractive enough for a child to choose carrots as an alternative to the usual range of confectionery available to them. If we can achieve that, then we are approaching our goals on many levels.”

**pb**



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# How To Build Stronger Packaged-Nut Sales

The category offers retailers numerous sales opportunities through variety, convenience and higher pricing. **BY MICHELE SOTALLARO**



Industry veterans agree that it's important to stay informed about the next iteration in packaged nuts as well as appealing displays for strong sales.

**P**ackaged nuts are a prime example of convenient and healthy snacking choices showcased in produce departments. They are also one of the most versatile items to merchandise in the department because of their nutritional benefits, practical packaging and flavor profiles.

Marketers compete for placement, retailers play with display options and consumers love to try new varieties. Industry veterans agree that with all this attention, it's important to stay informed about the next iteration. Signage for the category is not about how big a display is for these smaller to-go items, but about what's attractive to the consumer through both visual aesthetics and messaging. Lastly, people are interested in health and nutrition, and they are willing to pay for it.

## Staying Ahead Of The Curve

According to *The New York Times*, frequent nut consumption has been linked to a reduced risk of major chronic diseases, including heart and blood vessel disorders and Type 2 diabetes.

"We are always researching and monitoring trends to help inform our next exciting product offering," says Marc Seguin, vice president of

marketing at Paramount Farms, Bakersfield, CA. "We pride our brand teams on working with consumers and retailers to provide them with exactly what they want, such as our latest Sweet Chili flavored Wonderful Pistachios." This spicy chili flavored nut has a sweet finish and includes vitamins and minerals.

"We're seeing a lot of trending ingredients and flavors being introduced into snack items," says Erika Cottrell, vice president of marketing for Sahale Snacks out of Seattle, WA. "For example, coconut in various forms, spicier flavor profiles, and continued influence from Asian and Latin American cuisines will be trends to look for in the natural trail mix and fruit and nut blend sectors.

"I'm a big fan of putting snack mixes in the produce department, and not just the snack mix aisle," says Chad Hartman, director of marketing for Tropical Foods in Charlotte, NC. One of the company's signature callings is adding flavored nuts to traditional mixes. "We're always cultivating new mixes. One of our owners does a lot of prep work for future variations. We follow along with food trends. We really pay attention to flavor trends — as to what's new and what's hot; we'll always try to incorporate those items into what we do.

"Within the past year we launched two lines of snack-mix bags. One was part of our classic mix line and the other was five newer mixes," explains Hartman. "These items all had unique flavor profiles. One was a peanut butter and jelly mix, another was called 'Sweet Heat,' which was a mixture of sweet and spicy nuts. 'Mango Tango' was another with coconut peanuts in it. It's what people seem to like right now."

"Waymouth Farms Inc. [out of New Hope, MN] is coming out with a lot of options," says Rick Hogan, produce department supervisor and manager of Hugo's Family Marketplace in Grand Forks, ND. "Right now we're trying to micromanage that section of produce a bit more. We want to take out the items that are not selling as well and consider new items that can possibly increase sales."

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for the Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets, says the company places a heavy focus on the store's private label nuts in Produce as a way to introduce new mixes.

Joseph Setton, vice president of domestic sales and marketing for Setton International Foods Inc. in Commack, NY, suggests that launching new and innovative products will

**“We’ve found that consumers — more so now than ever — are willing to pay a little more to ensure that the foods they’re eating are made with high-quality, preservative-free ingredients, which are thoughtfully sourced, and most importantly, taste great.”**

— Erika Cottrell, Sahale Snacks

help capture a larger portion of the consumer’s stomach. “We created our All Natural Pistachio Chewy Bites, which contain over 50 percent shelled pistachios in order to get our pistachios to a much larger audience,” says Setton. “With the Chewy Bites, we picked up a larger portion of the active lifestyle and healthy eating consumers who traditionally relied on energy and granola bars.

### Attracting Attention

As a retailer, knowledgeable employees and knowing your customer base are two essential elements for deciding the best placement for packaged nuts in Produce. Experts agree that it is also crucial to present inviting and attractive displays for shoppers.

“The addition of our freshness bins has been an important innovation for Wonderful Brands,” says Paramount’s Seguin. “This display technique is used as a vehicle to communicate our brand to consumers as they shop. The bins not only solve shelving issues for retailers with stand-up and gusseted items, but they also provide an efficient way of using floor space.

“Another unique element to Paramount Farms’ merchandising efforts is that our in-house merchandising team works directly with retailers to create the perfect displays and provides merchandising support — including special promotional add-ons.

“The freshness bins can be considered unique signage themselves, because they serve as a billboard in-store for our products within the produce department.”

Tropical Foods’ Hartman couldn’t agree more. “We help accommodate retailers with their specific needs, so we’ll come up with signs for whatever their application is. We see the trend toward stand up resealable bags, which is an interesting twist to signage. We’ve started moving toward this packaging within our line of products. Those bags are a sign in itself. We’re talking about a 5-inch by 7-inch front-facing package that tells the whole story.”

Hugo’s Hogan believes in simple signage and displays for packaged nuts. “Don’t make

it bigger than it has to be. Nice, clean signage for a product can sell well. We keep a mini section of packaged nuts in a designated spot so customers know where to look for these items. We try to keep them together as much as possible.”

The store uses the Waymouth Farms program for soy nuts and almond mixes as well as product from Bergin Fruit and Nut Company (of St. Paul, MN). “The red bags from Bergin hang on pegs or can stand alone,” explains Hogan. “Our Waymouth selection strictly hangs, and they have shippers for those products as well. We are trying to go cardboard-free in Produce, so we don’t stock the shippers. We’re trying to create a clean aisle experience so customers can shop with ease.

“Packaged nuts are so unique in their own way that once customers learn where they are, they go for what they need/want. There is also a segment of new customers who stumble upon that section in Produce and simply try product because they haven’t experienced it.”

If you are striving for a more simplistic display, then Setton of Setton International Foods suggests “providing retailers with easy, all-inclusive displays. Our Setton Farms quarter-pallet display requires no assembly and is rolled right onto the floor. This ensures that our displays are used versus being discarded before it gets onto the sales floor.”

“We also found success with retailers that have built Better-for-You sets that include Sahale Snacks as well as other premium brands,” says Cottrell. “With attractive signage, these Better-for-You sets entice new consumers who are looking for exciting and delicious ways to eat healthier.”

Publix adheres to a more simplistic regimen as well. “We package our nuts in clear containers for ease of shelf space and customer convenience,” says Publix’s Brous.

Setton from Setton International Foods reminds us to “work with product ambassadors that help consumers connect and understand the benefits of the products. Do product demos for new products. Demos not only bring atten-

tion to new products, but they also bring attention to our entire line that is sold alongside the Pistachio Chewy Bites.”

### Quality Wins Over Price

According to a recent study by AlixPartners (a global business advisory firm based out of New York, NY), Americans who spend more than 40 percent of their food and beverage budgets on health and wellness-related products account for 60 percent of total spending for the sector — which comprises only 26 percent of the population.

“We’ve found that consumers — more so now than ever — are willing to pay a little more to ensure that the foods they’re eating are made with high-quality, preservative-free ingredients, which are thoughtfully sourced, and most importantly, taste great,” says Sahale’s Cottrell. “We also found that gluten-free messaging resonates well with customers across the board. We are currently working on our non-GMO verification, which will be proudly marked on our packaging and signage.”

“Highlight the health benefits of your products on the merchandising vehicle,” offers Setton. “On all of our merchandising displays, we ensure to highlight that our pistachios have the AHA (American Heart Association) Checkmark and many other health benefits. Customers today are looking for healthy snacks that taste great, and you need to make sure the customers are aware of all the health benefits.”

Hugo’s Hogan says that Waymouth and Bergin brands focus on healthy packaged nut mixes, so the store likes to run promotions on certain items. “Don’t be afraid to run promotions in store ads. It may not be a high-volume item, but it’s more of a one-more-item-in-the-basket mentality.

“With Waymouth, we introduce newer items at 2-for deals ... 2 for \$6, 2 for \$7. It looks like a better value, and sometimes customers will jump on that. We kept the Bergin’s items as an EDLP (Every Day Low Price) program.”

“Whenever we start development of a new product, we consider early on what we can price the item at,” explains Tropical Foods’ Hartman. “There’s always a threshold. Can I hit \$1.99 or \$2.99? What about \$4.99? Unless it’s a super luxurious, praline variety, I don’t want to go over that \$4.99 tag.

“If it’s grab-and-go, then I really want to stick around that \$1.99/\$2.99 mark,” says Hartman. “We love to do in-store specials with member cards or loyalty programs. To be effective, you have to do them consistently throughout the year — it helps the retailers and it helps us.”

**pb**

# FACING CROSSROADS IN 2014



**A**s we enter a new year, we all look forward to increased success and prosperity. Management, both in supply and retail, is looking forward to continued growth and business as usual. Business leaders anticipate the continuation of success based on the past and recent growth. It seems like they see nothing in their path to deter their drive for additional sales and profits. Most industries, represented in the retail grocery arena, are looking forward to continued

growth as part of a normal economic cycle. While that may be true in other industries, produce, because of its unique nature, does not behave like other industries. Upper management often ignores this difference.

The challenges facing the produce industry have been well documented in various industry publications. Unfortunately, 2014 will be a year where the culmination of these challenges will force the industry to face a crossroads of decisions on how to move forward. With the specters of additional food safety incidents without a full traceability system, labor uncertainty, transportation limitations, consumption concerns, consumer indifference, water shortages, and the usual weather variances, the produce industry is faced with significant barriers to continued growth. To be successfully negotiated, these barriers must be addressed by the industry as a whole. Only a united effort from all corners of the industry will result in the desired outcome.

We're all frustrated by the gridlock that has taken root within our government's institutions, most especially Congress. The produce industry is basically in the same situation. Initiatives to address problems are fractured by various factors working to further their own goals without concern for the overall good of the industry. The traceability initiative is a good example. Many years of effort have gone into the initiative without universal success because there has not been a unified effort from the industry to come up with a solution for all. Instead, various companies — some new to the industry and

some not — have tried to gain a competitive advantage over others by instituting their own system. This “multitude of systems” and fractured approach presents a bigger problem than the overall lack of complete traceability. Retailers, because of their position in the industry, have a responsibility to facilitate solutions that benefit the entire industry and maintain efficiency. Retailers also have to find solutions that keep costs to a minimum.

There are, however, many examples where the produce industry has come together for a common solution. One case in point is the adoption of PLU codes to identify produce at store checkouts. With major retailers working with key suppliers, the adoption of a standardized system of identification was developed that provided benefits to not only retailers but also suppliers in terms of efficiency with a minimum of cost. This model should be used to address the traceability impasse as well as the other serious challenges facing the industry. In past crisis situations the industry has come together to face these

**Retailers, working together, must “take off their company hat” and work with the industry to come up with solutions for the common good.**

challenges head-on and create solutions that are a win-win proposition for the good of all.

While all of the barriers facing produce cannot be solved by the industry itself, it is vital that a unified direction on each of these issues is established. The retail segment of the industry is the primary contact with the consumer. Consequently, because of the retail segment's influential position, they are obligated to initiate and help develop a unified direction with the rest of the industry and provide suggested solutions to regulatory agencies and Congress. Retailers, working together, must “take off their company hat” and work with the industry to come up with solutions for the common good. This will not be easy; however, any enterprise worth the survival and continued prosperity of the produce industry is certainly worth the effort. We should not shy away from addressing these barriers because they are difficult to overcome. We should face them together to forge the necessary solutions — no matter how much effort it takes.

The time for unified action is now! If we do so, 2014 will be remembered as the year when a unified produce industry set a course to ensure continued growth and prosperity. **pb**

**By Don Harris**

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to [editor@producebusiness.com](mailto:editor@producebusiness.com)



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# 2014 FRUIT LOGISTICA INNOVATION AWARD

More than 2,600 exhibitors from 84 countries representing the entire value chain of fresh produce trade, plus some 58,000 trade visitors from more than 120 countries were in Berlin from February 4 through 6 for the FRUIT LOGISTICA Conference — the leading trade fair for the international fresh produce industry.

Numerous industry innovations that serve as valuable driving forces in produce were presented. Ten candidates were nominated for the coveted Innovation Award. Here is a review of the winner and the contenders (listed alphabetically).

## WINNER

**COMPANY:** eisberg Group, Switzerland  
**PRODUCT:** BBQ Grill-Mix

The BBQ Grill-Mix consists of washed, sliced “ready-to-grill” vegetables, which are served in a 100 percent recyclable aluminium tray, suitable for grilling on the barbecue or roasting in the oven. Each tray is sealed with a special film that keeps the product under vacuum and can be removed without any trace of plastic or glue being left on the aluminium tray. This technology offers longer freshness and optimal presentation at POS.



**COMPANY:** Aureli Mario, Italy  
**PRODUCT:** Vegetable Crumbs

Vegetable Crumbs are a pure vegetable coating available in the varieties Carrot Crumbs, Purple Carrot Crumbs, Celery Crumbs, Spinach Crumbs and Red Beet Crumbs. They are free of preservatives or other additives and are gluten-free. The production method maintains fiber and secondary ingredients in nutritionally relevant quantities.



**COMPANY:** Azienda Agricola Campobasso Marco, Italy  
**PRODUCT:** Fette di Sole

Fette di Sole are dried orange slices produced using a very slow drying process which maintains the natural characteristics of the oranges. As no sugar is added, they can help form part of a low calorie diet. The oranges are sourced exclusively from organic production so that the peels can also be consumed.



**COMPANY:** BrimaPack B.V., Netherlands  
**PRODUCT:** Extended Shelf Life Packaging

Extended shelf-life packaging was developed to give broccoli significantly increased shelf-life by creating a special natural atmosphere inside the packaging film without chemicals or gases. Used in conjunction with the NicePack system, it combines innovative packing (tight packing film with a seal at the butt) with an efficient modular machine. A single unit can clean and pack up to 17 items per minute. One person can operate two units simultaneously.



**COMPANY:** Home Harvest Salads Ltd, UK  
**PRODUCT:** Oriental Mixed Living Salad

Oriental Mixed Living Salad is a unique combination of salad leaves available straight from the growing pot to the table. The mixture



includes coriander, mustard, tatsoi and pak choi. This unusual salad mix in a pot introduces consumers to new varieties while offering freshly harvested lettuce leaves. The growing tray can be placed on a windowsill and with light watering can be harvested for up to ten days.

**COMPANY:** IFCO Systems GmbH, Germany  
**PRODUCT:** Folding Reusable Plastic Containers

The Caja de Oro™ is a foldable, reusable plastic container (RPC) for bananas made of 100 percent recyclable polypropylene. Bananas are packed directly in the RPC at the farm and remain in the containers during transport, storage and ripening. The attractive container can also be used at POS, avoiding repacking and waste disposal. After use, the RPC is folded, collected, checked, cleaned and made available for re-use. In storage, the stacking weight is borne entirely by the crates. Air vents enable optimal cooling.



**COMPANY:** Int. Fruchtimport Ges. Weichert GmbH & Co. KG, Germany  
**PRODUCT:** Uurú - The Original Banana

Uurú, “the original banana,” is a new organic variety from Ecuador — very different from the Cavendish variety in terms of appearance and taste. The fruit reaches its full aroma and is ready to eat at color index grade 4 (more yellow than green). Fully ripe, the banana has a brilliant yellow color, the fruit flesh is more aromatic and firmer. Production is GlobalGAP and Bio-Standard certified.



**COMPANY:** Tokita Seed Co. Ltd., Japan  
**PRODUCT:** Fioretto

Fioretto is a long thin-stemmed variety of cauliflower with tiny heads. Its evenly long bright green stems and snowy white heads have the appearance of a flower bouquet. The flesh is somewhat softer than conventional cauliflower while remaining nicely firm. Cooked or raw, it is sweeter tasting and more aromatic.



**COMPANY:** Verpackungszentrum Graz, Austria  
**PRODUCT:** Compostable Packaging Nets

The compostable packaging nets are produced from modal cellulose fiber and are environmentally friendly both in production and in waste disposal. The raw material is derived of beechwood from the thinning of PEFC and FSC certified forests. The compostable nets can be used with standard clipping machines and are available in different widths.



**COMPANY:** ZTI Mechatronics BV, Netherlands  
**PRODUCT:** Grape Destemming Machine

The grape destemming machine is the first machine to remove grapes neatly and automatically from their stalks. Grape bunches are placed at the top of the machine. It then neatly loosens the grapes from the stem in a rolling motion without damage to the fruit, and places them onto the conveyor belt below, where personnel can visually control the finished product.



# Celebrating Produce Through Song



The Pooyai Band

We thought the band at last year's BeachSide booth at PMA's convention in New Orleans had some great tunes that got everyone singing and dancing down the aisles. Here are our choice favorites:



Dani McKinsey, BeachSide Produce

## LOW RIDER-BOK CHOY

All my friends, all like Bok Choy  
 Bok Choy is very good for you  
 —HORNS—“bok choy”  
 Eat a little bit, take a little nip—with me  
 Bok Choy has a very funny name now  
 But not as funny as Cilantro  
 —Horns—“bok choy”  
 Eat a little bit, take a little nip—with me  
 Bok choy grows very slow now  
 Good for your body, good for your soul now.  
 —HORNS—“bok choy”  
 Eat a little bit, take a little nip—with me  
 solo—“bok choy”-3x  
 —HORNS—“bok choy”  
 Eat a little bit, take a little nip—with me  
 Bok Choy comes from Guadalupe  
 Once you taste it you'll say “yippee”  
 —HORNS—“bok choy”  
 Eat a little bit, take a little nip—with me  
 Bok Choy - Guadalupe - Beachside Produce

## OH! SUSANNA

I come from California with my Beachside broccoli  
 I'm going to Louisiana, for a produce show to see  
 It rained all night the day we planted, good for broccoli  
 Then the sun came out and helped them grow, yummy broccoli  
 Chorus:  
 Oh! Louisiana, come and dine with me  
 For I come from California with my Beachside broccoli  
 I had a dream the other night, when everything was still;  
 I could see the broccoli fields, of Beachside Company,  
 Louisiana is the place to be, they cook from their soul  
 I can just taste it now, “YUMMY” a broccoli casserole.  
 We're trying to find Cajun place [to eat] crawfish Étouffée  
 Maybe we could combine it, with my broccoli casserole  
 Louisiana is know for boiling stuff — crawdad, crabs and shrimp  
 Why not add some vegetables like “Beachsides” broccoli  
 —Chorus:

Oh! Louisiana, come and dine with me  
 For I come from California with my Beachside broccoli  
 Soon I'll be in New Orleans, and then I'll look around,  
 'Till I find a Cajun place and eat Crawfish broccoli  
 Broccoli's high in vitamin C and dietary fiber;  
 Full of anti-ox-idents, and great for your survival  
 Chorus:

Oh! Louisiana, come and dine with me  
 For I come from California with my Beachside broccoli  
 Soon I'll be in New Orleans, and then I'll look around,  
 'Till I find a Cajun place and eat Crawfish broccoli

## ROMAINE (ERIC CLAPTON 'COCAINE' REMIX)

It's thick and rich, and you won't get sick: eat Romaine  
 It's good for your colon, so you won't get swollen: Romaine  
 It's alright, it's alright, it's alright: Romaine  
 If your waist line's on the rise, turn to Beachside: eat Romaine  
 If your sides are hanging out, and you're starting to sprout: eat  
 Romaine  
 Beachside, Beachside, Beachside: For Romaine  
 —solo—“Beach side”  
 “From our Family Farms...To Your Family's Table” [we ship]:  
 Romaine  
 Beachside will deliver, real fast and swifter: Romaine  
 Beachside, Beachside, Beachside: For Romaine  
 If you need an order, Beachside can ship it smarter: Romaine  
 They will find a way, so that there's no delay: Romaine  
 Romaine, It's alright, Beachside: Romaine  
 Beachside, Beachside, Beachside: For Romaine  
**YOU WON'T GET SICK**  
 If you wanna hang out, You've got to take her some: Romaine  
 If you wanna get down, down on the ground: Romaine  
 It won't die, it won't die, it won't die: Romaine.  
 If you got bad news, you wanna kick them roots: Romaine.  
 When your day is done and you wanna run: Romaine.  
 It won't die, it won't die, it won't die: Romaine.  
 If your fun is gone and you wanna grow on: Romaine.  
 Don't forget this fact, you can get it back, Romaine.  
 It won't die, It won't die, it won't die: Romaine.



# 40 UNDER 40

## TENTH ANNUAL



PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Tenth Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1, 2014 (People born after January 1, 1974).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 12, 2014, and fax back to 561-994-1610 OR go to our website at [producebusiness.com](http://producebusiness.com) and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

Once nominated, the candidate will be interviewed by one of our editors, and will receive forms to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

**ABOUT THE NOMINEE:**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Approximate Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Company \_\_\_\_\_  
Position \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Country \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:  
(You can use a separate sheet for this)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Company \_\_\_\_\_  
Position \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Country \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)



# CULTIVATING A HOMESTEAD

**T**homas Cyle Mathison of Stemilt Growers — a grower, packer, shipper and marketer of fresh apples, pears, cherries, peaches, nectarines, and apricots — believed that in order to create a future, and have longevity in business, he had to continue to grow and to go beyond his comfort zone.

“There were a few occasions when his partners or business associates would say his ideas sounded ‘a little too risky,’” says West Mathison, the current president of Stemilt and grandson of Thomas (known to friends and family as Tom). “He realized that no one was going to solve our problems for us. That philosophy sparked a lot of innovation. He continued to unravel issues to understand them better.

“He would talk to the people in the field and get their feedback, and he would demonstrate his passion for his work,” adds West. Exemplifying this trait in this early 1950’s photo holding d’Anjou pears, Tom was very hands on with his business and work ethic.

“When working with clients, he would climb up on racks to inspect pallets and pack dates. He would say, ‘You know, West, if you don’t care, they don’t care.’”

Today, Stemilt partners with over 100 independent family growers and exports to around 30 countries each year. “The export business is definitely important to our business,” says West, “but the core of our business is right here in North America. We have a great impact on growers in Washington State and Central Valley of California.”

Stemilt also has a private R&D lab and scientists on-site in Wenatchee, WA, where they conduct trials in-field with horticulture as



well as post harvest practices. “Our No. 1 goal is to improve the eating experience and the consistency of the fruit we grow,” says West. “My grandfather always said, ‘Good fruit starts with balanced soil, balanced soil helps to produce a balanced tree, balance tree produces fruit with better shelflife — it’s firmer, sweeter, and juicier.’”

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com

## INFORMATION SHOWCASE

Receive supplier information fast using the PRODUCE BUSINESS Information Showcase. Here's How:  
Contact the advertiser directly via the website, e-mail, or phone listed in the ad.

**FEBRUARY 2014**

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
Albert's Organics	47	415-673-5555	www.pacorg.com
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	73	800-437-4685	www.apgspud.com
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	79	201-807-9292	www.auerpak.com
Basciani Foods, Inc.	59	610-268-3044	www.bascianifoods.com
Berry Breeze	24	702-363-5343	www.berrybreeze.com
Big Red Tomato Packers	58	772-466-0700	www.bigredtomatopackers.com
Blue Book Services	85	630-668-3500	www.producebluebook.com
Wm. Bolthouse Farms	77	661-366-7270	www.bolthouse.com
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	31	613-226-4187	www.cpma.ca
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	24	515-981-5111	www.capitalcityfruit.com
L. Cherrick Horseradish Co., Inc.	30	314-421-5431	
Christopher Ranch	79	408-847-1100	www.christopherranch.com
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	60	610-268-3043	www.countryfreshmushrooms.com
Del Monte Fresh Produce	92	800-950-3683	www.freshdelmonte.com
Del Rey Avocado Co.	47	760-728-8325	
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	818-879-6600	www.dole.com
dProduce Man Software	68	888-PRODMAN	www.dproduce.com
European Flavors/CSO	7	39-0532-904511	www.europeanflavors.eu
Fierman Produce Exchange	23	718-893-1640	
Floral Business	15	561-994-1118	www.floralbusinessmagazine.com
Foodsource Organics	47	800-366-8755	www.buyfoodsource.com
Fresh Origins, LLC	47	760-736-4072	www.freshorigins.com
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas	91	520-287-2707	www.freshfrommexico.com
Garber Farms	37	337-824-6328	www.garberfarms.com
The Garlic Company	80	661-393-4212	www.thegarliccompany.com
Gills Onions	67	800-348-2255	www.gillsonions.com
Giorgio Fresh Co.	61	800-330-5711	www.giorgiofoods.com
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC	80	610-345-1113	
Harris Produce Vision	58	269-903-7481	
Highline Mushrooms	59	519-326-8643	www.highlinemushrooms.com
Hollandia Produce	43	805-684-4146	www.livegourmet.com
House Foods America Corporation	35	714-901-4350	www.house-foods.com
I Love Produce LLC	81	610-869-4664	www.iloveproduce.com
Idaho Potato Commission	71	208-334-2350	www.idahopotato.com/retail
Jem D International	45	519-733-3663	www.jemdfarms.com
J.R. Kelly Company	36	888-344-4392	www.jrkelly.com

COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	47	661-854-3156	www.kemridge.com
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	78	661-854-3156	www.kemridge.com
Kerry's Kitchen Gardens Inc.	44	305-247-7096	
Kingdom Fresh	40-41	956-668-8988	www.kingdomfresh.com
L&M Companies, Inc.	57	509-698-3881	www.lmcompanies.com
Lakeside Hot House Ltd.	42	519-322-1959	www.lakesideproduce.com
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	23	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	33	800-796-2349	www.lgssales.com
Litco International, Inc.	64	330-539-5433	www.litco.com
Maine Potato Board	73	207-769-5061	www.maineptatoes.com
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	11	800-884-6266	www.veggiesmadeeasy.com
McKay Transcold LLC	65	612-308-8493	www.mckaytranscold.com
MIXTEC Group	36	626-440-7077	www.mixtec.net
MJB Sales, Inc.	60	610-268-0444	www.mjbsales.com
Monterey Mushrooms	60	636-587-2771	www.montereymushrooms.com
National Mango Board	53	877-MANGO-1	www.mango.org
Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.	72	218-773-3633	www.redpotatoes.net
Pacific Organics	47	415-673-5555	
Paramount Citrus Association	5	213-612-9957	www.paramountcitrus.com
Peco Pallet	63		www.pecopallet.com
Peri & Sons Farms	68	775-463-4444	www.periandsons.com
Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market	19	215-336-3003	www.pwpm.net
Ponderosa Mushrooms	61	604-945-9700	www.ponderosa-mushrooms.com
Produce for Better Health Foundation	75	302-235-2329	www.pbhfoundation.org
Pure Hothouse Foods, Inc.	46	519-326-8444	www.pure-flavor.com
Silver Creek Software	48-49	208-388-4555	www.silvercreek.com
South Georgia Produce, Inc.	34	229-559-6071	
Southern Produce Distributors, Inc.	37	800-866-YAMS	www.southern-produce.com
Spice World, Inc.	79	800-433-4979	www.spiceworldinc.com
United Fresh Produce Association	87	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	8	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Village Farms	39	888-377-3213	www.villagefarms.com
Vision Import Group LLC	51	201-968-1190	www.visionimportgroup.com
Vision Produce Company	51	201-968-1190	www.visionimportgroup.com
Williamson Produce	37	800-726-8899	
J. Roland Wood Produce	37	919-894-2318	www.jrwoodfarms.com



# AMERICA TRADES PRODUCE

THE U.S. / MEXICO  
TRADE CONFERENCE

Hosted by:



in conjunction with:



March 12–13, 2014 | Tubac Golf Resort and Spa, Tubac, Arizona

Visit [www.americatradesproduce.com](http://www.americatradesproduce.com) to learn more!

The fourth annual America Trades Produce Conference is fast approaching, and promises to build upon previous events by examining big-picture US-Mexico trade dynamics, as well as the nitty-gritty of daily business. It is scheduled for March 12 – 13, 2014 at the Tubac Golf Resort and Spa in Tubac, AZ.

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas and the Texas International Produce Association are teaming up again to bring the most timely, informative educational sessions available anywhere, covering issues of immediate concern to the cross-border trade in fresh fruits and vegetables. Experts from the private sector and government in Mexico and the U.S. will address such wide-ranging subjects as food safety, the challenges in the North American tomato market, expectations on how U.S. and Mexican administrations will approach trade and the economy, just to name a few.

***"America Trades Produce Conference offers hope of historic accords between the U.S. and Mexico."***

– The Produce News

The two-day conference will feature many dynamic sessions with influential speakers. On the food safety front, one of our confirmed speakers is Mike Taylor, Deputy Commissioner for Foods at FDA. There will be a tour of the \$200 million dollar Mariposa Port of Entry, a National Mango Board outreach meeting and also for the first time, we are partnering with the Center for Produce Safety on a U.S.-Mexico Food Safety Symposium, which is a separate registration. Attendees will include Mexican growers and distributors, U.S. buyers, importers and distributors, custom brokers and government officials from Mexico and the U.S., including SAGARPA, FDA, DOC, CBP and more.





## Your Expectations

**We refresh your expectations by using our own refrigerated fleet and regional distribution centers.**

That way, we get the freshest produce from our farms into your stores in continually monitored cold chain logistics. Del Monte offers:

- An exclusive, worldwide license to Controlled Ripening Technology (CRT®)
- 22 U.S. distribution centers and fresh-cut facilities providing inventory that arrives just-in-time nationwide
- A depth and breadth of inventory and resources across categories to support major promotional initiatives
- An extensive consumer database to assist in making fact-based decisions

