

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

25
YEARS
INITIATING
INDUSTRY
IMPROVEMENT

Retailers Build Equity With Store Brands

Private label produce serves to differentiate the store and attract consumers.

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT DREAMS COMING TRUE • MARKETING IN CLAMSHELLS
MUSHROOM MARKETING • MEXICAN PRODUCE • SPECIALTY CITRUS
CHILEAN FRUIT • FOODSERVICE BUYING ALTERNATIVES • TROPICAL FRUIT
BULK LETTUCE MERCHANDISING • PEANUTS • TROPICAL PLANTS

25 INNOVATIONS



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To learn more, please contact your Dole sales representative or visit dole.com/saladkits

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Mike Harmon

Regional manager, Domex Superfresh Growers
Birmingham, AL

Mike Harmon has spent most of his career in the produce industry. Before joining Domex Superfresh Growers, where he has worked for nine years, he worked for Chiquita, as well as a subsidiary it owned called California Day-Fresh Foods, the manufacturers of Naked Juice.

As a regional manager for Domex, "I cover a piece of geography in support of our selling, execute promotional planning and attempt to get new customers and new distribution," he says. "I handle the Southeast and Midwest, speak with retailers, wholesalers and a few

foodservice companies, too."

Mike loves the daily interaction with customers that his job offers. "We — my customers and myself — both have the same goal in mind. We want to sell more apples, pears and cherries, so it's great to work together," he says.

Mike has been reading PRODUCE BUSINESS "at least 10 years. The articles are timely and stimulating, in that you have an opportunity to look at your category and gain a new perspective," he says. "I also like to read articles on other commodities so I can learn something new and find something transferable."

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

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QUESTIONS FOR THE JANUARY ISSUE

- 1) Name three people on the Corona Marketing sales team. _____
- 2) How many distribution centers does JemD have? _____
- 3) What is the contact number for Booth Ranches? _____
- 4) During what months will Tanimura & Antle offer its "Get In Shape" Artisan Lettuce? _____
- 5) What are the dates for PBH's Annual Meeting, Golf Tournament & Gala on the Coast? _____
- 6) What is the slogan for Blue Book Services? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
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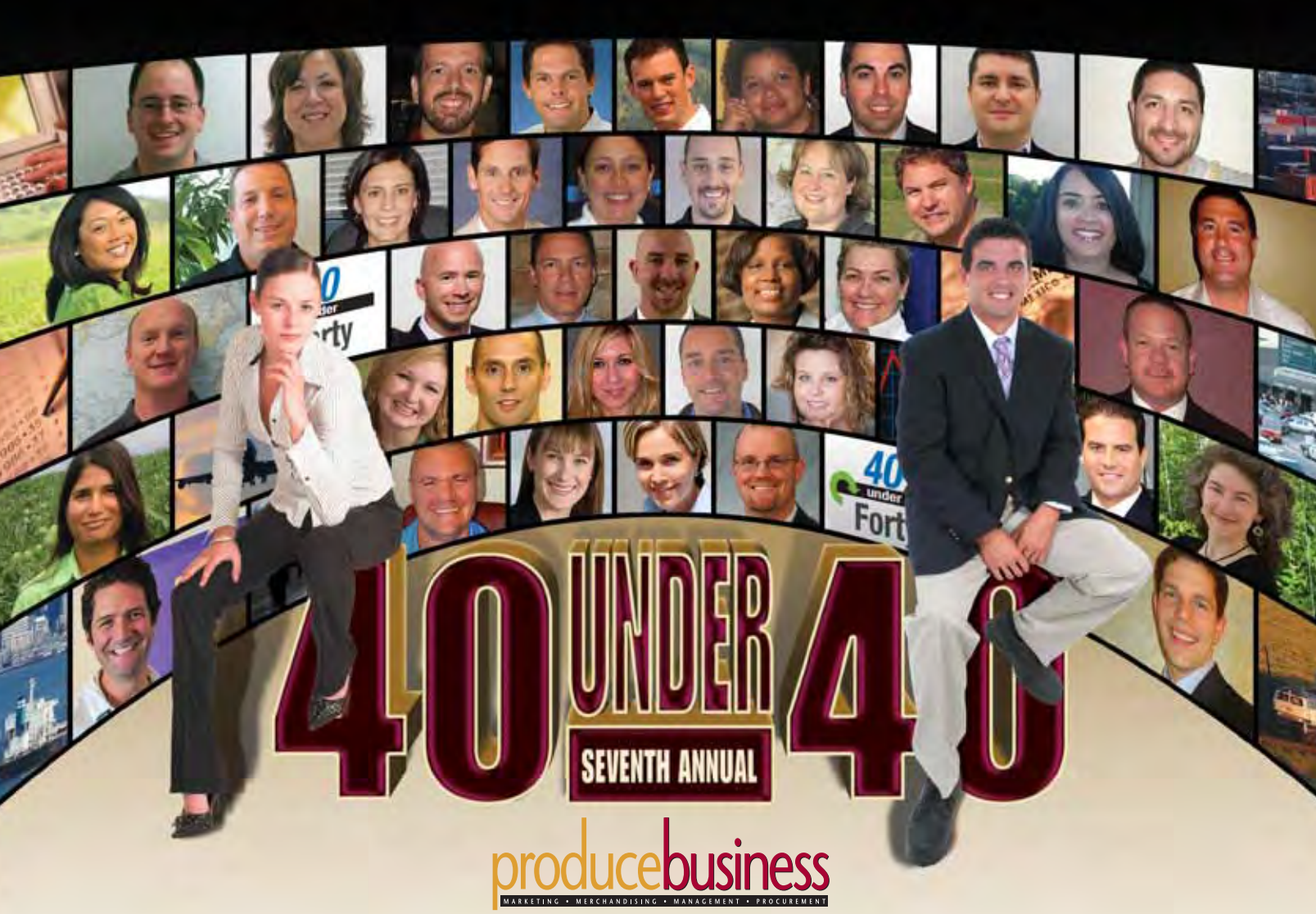
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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Seventh Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

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 (People born after January 1, 1971).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by March 1, 2011, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

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



MAKING THE CONNECTION: CHILD NUTRITION SUCCESS AND YOUR BUSINESS

By Patrick Delaney
Communications Manager
United Fresh Produce Association

Early last month, President Barack Obama sat at a desk at Washington's Harriet Tubman Elementary School and signed into law the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Several weeks before that, First Lady Michelle Obama joined students at Miami's Riverside Elementary for the launch of *Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools!* In doing so, both members of the First Family shined a spotlight like never before on the way America's children are fed at school, in childcare settings and through federal feeding programs. It was by no exaggeration a huge step forward for the health of children across the country, and a great and historic month for nutrition advocates in the United States.

Still, many in the produce industry may not immediately recognize the long-term ramifications of these developments. Our members are hard-working men and women with countless demands on their time, and paying attention to the inner workings of Capitol Hill is assuredly not high on their to-do lists. While it is incumbent upon each to act as a good corporate citizen and serve the communities in which they live and operate, a business is a for-profit endeavor, and if not profitable, cannot remain solvent long enough to serve anyone.

Why, then, has United Fresh — an organization charged with effecting positive change on the collective bottom line of the entire produce industry — made it such a priority to remain a tenaciously present voice in the child nutrition discussion? The answer lies in the millions of children for whom the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, the WIC program, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, *Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools* and other similar initiatives mean added exposure to the healthy fruits and vegetables our member companies grow,

process, pack, ship and sell.

Among other improvements, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act provides an increase of six cents in the per-meal reimbursement rate — tied directly to serving more healthful food like fruits and vegetables — for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. While on its face, six cents may not seem like an influential number; when multiplied by the 31 million children who eat school meals every day, and once more by the average 180 school days, results in a potential sea of change not only in the eating habits of America's schoolchildren, but perhaps more importantly, in the purchasing habits of America's school foodservice directors. Add to that the new funding provided for farm-to-school and local produce programs, improved nutrition standards consistent with updated Dietary Guidelines (which advocate increased produce consumption) and several other produce-centric stipulations, and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act becomes one that not only features fresh fruits and vegetables as the linchpin in the effort to build healthier public-sector meals for children, but also provides schools with the all-important money to purchase those products.

The progress of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act is buttressed by success made in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). As the result of a nationwide rollout in October 2009, 9 million WIC moms and kids have the opportunity to use \$600 million in vouchers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at grocery stores and many farmers' markets. What's more, pilot programs have shown that the vouchers for fruits and vegetables are redeemed with greater frequency — 91 percent

— than the vouchers for any other item. Put simply, the WIC program is contributing millions of dollars in produce sales each month in communities across the nation.

The success hardly stops with the WIC program. Three million students in elementary schools in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Territories receive a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every school day through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). Expanded nationally in the 2008 Farm Bill, FFVP will provide \$101 million for the purchase of fruit and vegetable snacks in the 2010-2011 school year, and that total will increase to \$150 million for the 2011-2012 school year.

Add to those successes the recent announcement of the *Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools* initiative, and you have a coordinated, effective, well researched and well funded strategy to get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables, and that, at the end of the day, is a fight in which we all have a stake.

In the advertising and public relations arena, a great deal of stock is placed on the number of impressions garnered over the course of a campaign. These improved and expanded child nutrition programs are creating more impressions for our industry. They are affording produce businesses the opportunity to get their products in front of no less than a generation of potential consumers; one that has been largely underserved when it comes to the amount of fresh, healthful food made available to it at school. More fruits and vegetables consumed at restaurants, purchased at grocery stores and served in schools means more produce sold, burgeoning demand, new customers and the all-important increase in revenue.



Just Before Midnight At Disney...A Boy's Merry Christmas 'Miracle' With A Lesson For Seeking Opportunities In Business...And Life

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 12.24.2010

The Pundit family spent last weekend at Walt Disney World attending Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party. We split up at one point and the Pundit was with Junior Pundit Primo, aka William, age nine. It was 11:32 pm and, though tired, he very much wanted to take a photo with Winnie the Pooh in his Christmas outfit. Alas, we had gone to City Hall where he had stood the previous year, but this year, we were told he was by the Winnie-the-Pooh ride on the other end of the park.

The park, however, was to close at midnight and the characters usually stop greeting people 30 minutes before it closes. So at 11:32 they were already gone or, certainly, they had ended the line. The cast member explained this all to William, who already knew the rules and still listened politely. Then, when Dad suggested that since it didn't look like Winnie-the-Pooh was going to happen we find a last ride or show to catch before the close, William turned and pronounced: "C'mon Dad, we are at Disney. Why don't we make a little magic happen? If we cross our fingers, run as fast as we can and say, 'Dreams come true,' as we run — I bet we can get a picture with Christmas Winnie-the-Pooh."

It is those who believe they can accomplish great things who find themselves at the place where they can seize opportunities.

Perhaps a better father would have used the moment to disabuse the child of such foolish fantasies. He would have explained that there is no magic and dreams come true from hard work, not finger-crossing and mindless repetition. This father, however, just couldn't bring himself to burst this particular bubble and so, at high gallop we traversed the park with fingers crossed as



we both chanted, "Dreams come true," for all around us to hear.

At the Pooh ride we were told the characters could be found at the entrance to Toon Town, but were probably in for the night. Yet we ran forward, fingers still crossed and still chanting about dreams coming true, and then, at 11:52, in contra-

crossing of our fingers and the chanting out loud didn't keep those characters out late. We just got lucky.

Yet that is not completely true. For only one who believed so intently in one's ability to change reality would have bothered to run at all. And if we hadn't run, we wouldn't have been in a place to take advantage of what was happening that night.

William comes from a long line of entrepreneurs, and with Christmas beckoning, well, maybe in his actions he tapped into that entrepreneurial vein and, in his own way, reminded us that very often, it is those who believe they can accomplish great things who find themselves at the place where they can seize opportunities.

After all, it may have been a small dream, but the point was clear. Attempting something doesn't mean the dream will come true, but not attempting it guarantees it won't.

There is a line in the Oscar & Hammerstein musical, *The King and I*, that says: "If you become a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught." The same thing can be said about being a parent.

vention to all we knew about Disney policy, there was Pooh and Piglet, in their Christmas scarves still posing for pictures.

William, certain he had made some magic happen, just grinned, and the photo was snapped — a little Christmas miracle to take home with us.

It is all silly, of course. Rational as we are, we know that the intensity of our belief, the

IS PRIVATE LABEL A MISTAKE FOR FRESH PRODUCE?

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



Across the entire store, the problem with private label is obvious. Retailers are drawn to such programs because they can purchase products less expensively and thus realize higher margins. Only a small part of this lower price, though, is accounted for by reducing manufacturer profit. Most comes about by eliminating costs such as advertising and research and development.

Yet eliminating these costs is problematic.

In the short run, the category may do well; in the long run, the absence of investment in R&D and marketing will prevent the category from achieving the growth it could have.

In other words, Chiquita's marketing of bananas did not just help Chiquita. These efforts helped build the category. Today we see similar concerted efforts by companies such as Dole with its Dole Salad Guide to build the salad category.

In a sense, private label programs leach on the efforts of branded companies to develop the potential of the category. When such programs were small grocery-based programs and mostly focused on consumers who were highly price-focused, they didn't matter much, and one could at

least argue that by providing a low cost alternative, private label products could serve as a portal of entry into the category.

In produce, private label combines being of little value to the retailer with being particularly deadening to the future growth of the category. Many a supermarket CEO has demanded that his produce VP do a private label program in fresh produce so that the retailer can realize the additional margin. In virtually every case, those CEOs have been disappointed in the results... and they don't know the half of it.

The problem is that, in other categories, there are fat expenditures on things such as marketing, and so a switch to private label can realize large savings. Marketing expenditures on produce, however, are thin, so it is simply not possible to realize the large margin boosts that grocery delivers. This is why the CEOs are inevitably disappointed with private label efforts in produce.

The other half of the matter is that the private label efforts disappoint consumers and deaden the categories on a totally different scale from their impact in grocery. The grocery aisles are filled with private label product, but only a few specialized stores sell private label product solely. At most supermarkets, private label is still just an option.

In fresh produce, it is typical to sell only one brand of each item, and the refrigerated shelf space is severely limited. So very often the decision to sell private label produce is not a decision to give consumers an additional option, but, rather, a decision to bump a branded supplier off the shelves and replace the facing with a private label product.

We've received many unsolicited letters from consumers here at PRODUCE BUSINESS telling us they miss their favorite brands when this happens. They claim the quality is lower; they claim they miss out on various promotions that the branded players used to run, and some have told us they have switched stores to get the product they want. This makes one wonder if the use of private label in fresh produce is really driven by a focus on the consumer or by chains looking to boost their own margins or to maintain uniform presentations in the store.

Interestingly enough, the more extensive private label becomes, the less likely it is to contribute much to retail margins. If a producer has a fresh-cut factory, for example, and it is running at 90% of capacity, a retailer can often cut a great deal to do private label with that last 10% of capacity. Producers will be tempted to go for the boost in their short-term profits and offer a great price.

Whether this is wise is another question. After all, the retailer who gets this great private label price will be selling in direct competition

with the retailers buying the branded product that supplies 90% of the volume and more than that of the dollar sales. For a producer to empower a competitor to its branded lines with marginal cost pricing may not be a brilliant business strategy.

In any case, this deep discount model can only work as long as the

vast majority of the sales and production are branded and paying the overhead. As private label grows, increasingly private label will have to carry the overhead of the plant and the business. This means the savings from going the private label route can only be realized by not doing things such as R&D and marketing that branded marketers do.

Some facts speak to the truth of the matter. Although many older retailers own their own dairies or manufacturing facilities, it is notable that Wal-Mart, which can get money very cheaply, has eschewed investment in such facilities because its executives do not believe they can realize a desirable rate of return. This makes us suspect that much of the rush to private label is based on the fact that enormous retail buyers in a consolidating market can demand prices that are not sustainable. That is to say they can demand prices that do not provide a sufficient return to justify building food production facilities.

Doing this may goose this quarter's numbers, maybe this year's numbers, maybe even a few years' numbers. Long term, though, retailers depend on a vibrant supply sector, a supply base willing and able to invest in new facilities, pour money into R&D to develop the products of the future and a supply base prepared to invest in marketing to persuade the consumer to engage with the category.

In an age where sustainability is all the rage, there is a real question as to whether today's focus on private label isn't just a manifestation of unsustainable thinking, where today's profit margins are enjoyed by gutting the future potential of the category and the industry. **pb**

Private label combines being of little value to the retailer with being particularly deadening to the future growth of the category.



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Reader Service # 38

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL OXNARD, CA

Tom Hall has joined Freska as sales manager. He brings more than 10 years of experience in sales of mangos, bananas, pineapples and other fresh commodities. He has worked for Coast Tropical, Maui Pineapple and Del Monte. He possesses extensive contacts and a solid understanding of the business.



F&S PRODUCE ROSENHAYN, NJ

Lou Cooperhouse has joined as president and chief operating officer. He will be focused on developing strategic customer relationships, alliances, licensing and partnering and acquisition opportunities in an effort to achieve significant company growth. He was formerly the director of the Food Innovations Center at Rutgers University.



PRO*ACT MONTEREY, CA

Judy Henrichsen was hired as director of business development. She will be developing new niche markets, targeting companies and organizations that will benefit from the company's industry-leading procurement, food safety and supply-chain management programs. She was most recently national accounts sales manager for Brothers Produce in Houston, TX.



MONTEREY MUSHROOMS WATSONVILLE, CA

Mark Kreiner was hired as the Northeast region sales manager. He will manage all fresh mushroom sales with both retail and foodservice customers operating in the Ohio to New York corridor, including the Greater New England states. He worked in various sales positions ranging from regional manager to vice president of sales.



NEW PRODUCTS

PACKAGED GREEN BEANS

Colorful Harvest, Salinas, CA, introduced a new line of packaged green beans at the PMA Fresh Summit Show in Orlando, FL. The new packaging options for its innovative and colorful products will give shoppers a higher level of convenience. The company has hired a veteran product development director to drive the new value-added program.

Reader Service Number 300



BIO-TURBO 100

Miatech Inc., Portland, OR, introduced a newly developed Bio-Turbo 100 at the PMA Fresh Summit Show in Orlando, FL. This is a much smaller, lighter, more affordable version of Miatech's innovative airborne pathogen and ethylene gas-removing Bio-Turbo. It is well suited for retailer produce walk-in coolers and small storage rooms.

Reader Service Number 301



HAND-LABELING SYSTEM

Sinclair Systems, Fresno, CA, has developed a Hand Labeling System (HLS) complete with a unique tethered mechanism that features both mobility and an ultra-lightweight applicator. It is ideal for labeling any small lots packed in trays or loose produce, including tomatoes, apples, citrus and exotics, such as bananas and mangos.

Reader Service Number 302



ANTIOXIDANT-BOOSTING BROCCOLI

Apio Inc., Guadalupe, CA, and Monsanto Vegetable Seeds, Oxnard, CA, collaborated to develop Beneforté Broccoli, a new product that naturally boosts the body's antioxidant enzyme levels at least two times more compared to other leading broccoli varieties. Beneforté broccoli is the result of more than 10 years of plant breeding.

Reader Service Number 303



BOLD NEW PACKAGING

Coastline has repositioned its product line with an attractive new packaging. The new color scheme and bold design give the company's package a fresh new look while complementing its commitment to outstanding quality. It also created and added the Tree of Life icon for all of its packaging, which illustrates how essential the nutrients and vitamins are for a healthful living.

Reader Service Number 304



PAULA DEEN SOUTHERN DISHES

WP Rawl, Pelion, SC, introduces Paula Deen Southern Dishes. The new line capitalizes on Paula Deen's brand power that extends from TV and restaurants to cookbooks, magazines and a host of licensed products. All items are expected to retail for about \$3.99 and be supported with a consumer-marketing program.

Reader Service Number 305



ANNOUNCEMENTS

SEALED AIR LAUNCHES NEW WEB SITE

Sealed Air Corp., Elmwood Park, NJ, launched its new Web site, which focuses on establishing a closer relationship with customers, suppliers, investors and other stakeholders. Online users can read the latest information on Sealed Air's businesses, view up-to-date news and events, access investor data and learn about the company's sustainability initiatives.

Reader Service Number 306



CHIQUITA REDESIGNS FRESH EXPRESS WEB SITE

Chiquita Brands International Inc., Cincinnati, OH, announced a redesign of the Fresh Express Web site complete with improved and expanded recipe categories, an opportunity to swap recipes and view detailed product and promotional information. Consumers can also access nutritional information and links to other products from Fresh Express.

Reader Service Number 307



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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ROYAL ROSE CELEBRATES NATIONAL CHEESE LOVER'S DAY

Royal Rose Radicchio, Salinas, CA, is celebrating National Cheese Lover's Day on January 20 with radicchio recipes and pairing suggestions. Consumers are discovering the strengths of radicchio as well as its alluring color, satisfying bitterness and refreshing crunch. Like radicchio, cheese is protected and categorized by its geographic origin in Italy.

Reader Service Number 308



IPC ISSUES COMPREHENSIVE RETAILER HANDBOOK

Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID, has distributed hundreds of its comprehensive Retailer Support Guides to interested retailers across the country. The guide highlights IPC's retail marketing programs and consumer pull programs that produce managers can leverage to help boost Idaho potato sales.

Reader Service Number 309



CHANGE OF COLOR IN POTATO MIX

The Specialty Potato Alliance, Bakersfield, CA, is changing the color of its potato mix, making it uniform and clean with a rainbow of colors. Using the Red Rebel and Rocky Rose has helped achieve this look. SPA believes the Rocky Rose will most likely replace the Ruby Crescent within the next couple of years.

Reader Service Number 310



CUSTOM PAK PARTNERS WITH TRG MOTORSPORTS

Custom Pak, Immokalee, FL, partnered with TRG Motorsports as an associate sponsor of the No. 71 racecar driven by Andrew Lally for the NASCAR Sprint Cup season finale at Homestead Motor Speedway in Florida.

Reader Service Number 311



ALSUM FARMS INTRODUCES MICROWAVE-STEAMED POTATO PRODUCT

Alsum Farms & Produce Inc., Friesland, WI, has launched Fast & Fresh Potatoes, a new product offering triple-washed potatoes that are packed in a microwavable 12-oz. steamer bag. Introduced at the PMA Fresh Summit in Orlando, FL, Fast & Fresh Potatoes are available in Red or Golden varieties.

Reader Service Number 312



OCEAN MIST ADDS SUSTAINABILITY SECTION TO WEB SITE

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, added a new section to its Web site dedicated to reporting the company's sustainability initiatives. Sustainability and environmental stewardship is a core value for Ocean Mist Farms with a commitment to preserving natural resources and ecosystems.

Reader Service Number 313



MARKON COOPERATIVE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS IN BUSINESS

Markon Cooperative Inc., Salinas, CA, celebrated 25 years in business. Markon's unique services and focus on meeting operator needs have helped maintain its position as an industry leader. According to Tim York, Markon's president, today, Markon's North American member distributors service over 75,000 accounts with annual sales in excess of \$19 billion.

Reader Service Number 314



DOLE LAUNCHES MIX IT UP! IPHONE APP

Dole Foods, Monterey, CA, has launched *Mix it Up with Dole* iPhone app, one of the world's first phone applications dedicated to consumer-friendly salad shopping and menu development. A comprehensive recipe and nutrition resource designed specifically by Dole to complement its Dole Salads line, the app is free to all Apple iPhone or iTouch users.

Reader Service Number 315



DRISCOLL'S ACQUIRES NON-FARMING OPERATIONS OF ALCONERAS

Driscoll's of Europe has acquired the non-farming operations of Alconeras, a Spanish-based cultivation and fruit production company owned by the Garrido family. The acquisition creates a unified European-wide organization that provides a single entity to serve Driscoll's customers.

Reader Service Number 316



FIRSTFRUITS KICKS OFF APPLE DONATIONS

FirstFruits Marketing, Yakima, WA, has shipped the first apple donation associated with its national *Take a Bite Out of Hunger* campaign. Nearly 700 cases of fresh apples were delivered to food banks in rural Georgia thanks to Harvey's Supermarkets participation in the program. Before January 13, FirstFruit grower-owners aim to donate one million apples to local food banks throughout the United States.

Reader Service Number 317



CAMEO GROWERS INTRODUCE NEW RETAIL PROMOTION PLATFORM

The Cameo Apple Marketing Association, Wenatchee, WA, is introducing a new promotion kit to help retailers drive winter apple sales. This kit focuses on three aspects to communicate to the consumer: In-store merchandiser bin displays, Web site downloads and social media. The promotion highlights the Cameo variety's crunch to consumers through its theme of "Experience the Flavor and Crunch of Cameo Apples."

Reader Service Number 318



ZESPRI KIWIFRUIT PARTNERS WITH TAJIN FRUIT SEASONING

Zespri, Redwood, CA, has partnered with Tajin Fruit Seasoning to introduce and educate Hispanic consumers about the unique taste, five-star nutrition and versatility of New Zealand kiwifruit. Tajin, the Mexico-based manufacturer of the popular tangy, spicy seasoning powder capitalized on familiarizing the Hispanic consumer with kiwifruit.

Reader Service Number 319



JANUARY 5 - 7, 2011
POTATO EXPO 2011

The POTATO EXPO is the one event that brings the potato supply chain together to be educated and energized. The POTATO EXPO is the largest conference and tradeshow for the North American potato industry.

Conference Venue: Rio All-Suite Hotel, Las Vegas, NV
Conference Management: National Potato Council
Phone: 202-682-9456 • **Fax:** 202-682-0333
Email: questions@potato-expo.com
Website: www.potato-expo.com

January 19 - 21, 2011
PMA LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM 2011

This two-and-a-half-day program is designed for decision-makers who currently drive strategy and growth in an organization. The Symposium addresses today's leadership challenges from unique global perspectives and formulates innovative strategies and implementation methodologies to surpass them. The Leadership Symposium is designed specifically for senior executives from all segments of the globe.

Conference Venue: Omni Dallas Park West, Dallas, TX
Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association
Phone: 302-738-7100 • **Fax:** 302-731-2409
Email: solutionctr@pma.com
Website: www.pma.com

January 19 - 21, 2011
TIPE — TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXPOSITION 2011

The Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TIPE) is the trade event showcasing the latest trends in foliage, floral and tropicals in warm and inviting South Florida.

Conference Venue: Broward Convention Center, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Conference Management: Florida Nursery Growers & Landscape Assoc.
Phone: 407-295-7994
Email: info@fngla.org
Website: www.fngla.org

January 23 - 25, 2011
SWEET POTATO CONVENTION 2011

The main national organization for the promotion and marketing of sweet potatoes.

Conference Venue: Perdido Beach Resort, Orange Beach, AL
Conference Management: United States Sweet Potato Council
Phone: 803-788-7101 • **Fax:** 803-788-7101
Email: cwalker12@bellsouth.net
Website: www.sweetpotatousa.org

FEBRUARY 9 - 11, 2011**FRUIT LOGISTICA 2011 / FRESHCONEX 2011**

The world's leading trade fair for the fresh fruit and vegetable business, co-located with an international trade fair for fresh produce convenience.

Conference Venue: Berlin Exhibition Fairgrounds Hall 1-25, Berlin, Germany
Conference Management: Messe Berlin GmbH, Berlin, Germany
Phone: 493-030-382048 • **Fax:** 493-030-382020
Email: berlin@exhibitpro.com
Website: www.fruitlogistica.com

February 13 - 16, 2011
SUPERMARKET SYNERGY SHOWCASE 2011

The National Grocers Association (N.G.A.) is the national trade association representing the retail and wholesale grocers that comprise the independent sector of the food distribution industry.

Conference Venue: Paris Las Vegas Hotel, Las Vegas, NV
Conference Management: National Grocers Association
Phone: 703-516-0700 • **Fax:** 703-516-0115
Email: info@nationalgrocers.org
Website: www.nationalgrocers.org

February 23 - 27, 2011
NATIONAL WATERMELON CONVENTION

You are cordially invited to join your international water-

melon family in Sunny California to celebrate the 97th convention of the National Watermelon Association

Conference Venue: Hyatt Regency, LaJolla, CA
Conference Management: National Watermelon Association Inc.
Phone: 863-619-7575 • **Fax:** 863-619-7577
Email: nwa@tampabay.rr.com
Website: www.nationalwatermelonassociation.com

MARCH 1 - 4, 2011
FOODEX JAPAN 2011

FOODEX JAPAN is the largest food and beverage tradeshow in Asia and has been a highly successful annual trade event since its debut in 1976.

Conference Venue: Makuhari Messe (Nippon Convention Center), Tokyo, Japan
Conference Management: IMEX Management
Phone: 704-365-0041 • **Fax:** 704-365-8426
Email: info@imexmanagement.com
Website: www.imexmgmt.com

March 3 - 5, 2011
SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 2011

This show aims to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in FL, GA, AL, MS, LA, TN, NC, SC, KY and VA through good fellowship, cooperation and mutual interest among its members.

Conference Venue: Caribe Royale Resort & Convention Center, Orlando, FL
Conference Management: Southeast Produce Council Inc.
Phone: 813-633-5556 • **Fax:** 813-653-4479
Email: info@seproduceccouncil.com
Website: www.seproduceccouncil.com

March 8 - 10, 2011
WORLD FLORAL EXPO 2011

The international floriculture trade fair for the US flower buyer.

Conference Venue: Miami Airport Convention Center, Miami, FL
Conference Management: HPP Exhibitions
Phone: 305-969-3301 • **Fax:** 305-436-3772
Email: melvin@hpp.nl
Website: www.hppexhibitions.com/floriculture

March 9 - 11, 2011
ANTAD 2011

Mexico's largest retail and supermarket show.

Conference Venue: Expo Guadalajara Convention Center, Guadalajara, Mexico
Conference Management: US Agricultural Trade Office (ATO)
Phone: 202-690-1182 • **Fax:** 202-690-4374
Email: Tobitha.Jones@usda.gov
Website: www.antad.org.mx

March 11 - 13, 2011
NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST 2011

Expo West is the world's largest natural, organic and healthy products trade show.

Conference Venue: Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA
Conference Management: New Hope Natural Media
Phone: 303-998-9216 • **Fax:** 303-939-9559
Email: tradeshows@newhope.com
Website: www.expowest.com

March 30, 2011
NORTHERN CA EXPO 2011

Since 1965, the Fresh Produce & Floral Council has been providing unique networking and business growth opportunities for professionals in the produce and floral industries in California. Our members include growers, shippers, wholesalers, brokers, distributors and retailers of produce and/or floral items.

Conference Venue: Alameda Fairgrounds, Pleasanton, CA
Conference Management: Fresh Produce & Floral Council
Phone: 714-739-0177 • **Fax:** 714-739-0226
Email: info@fpfc.org
Website: www.fpfc.org

To submit events to our Forward Thinking calendar, please email info@producebusiness.com

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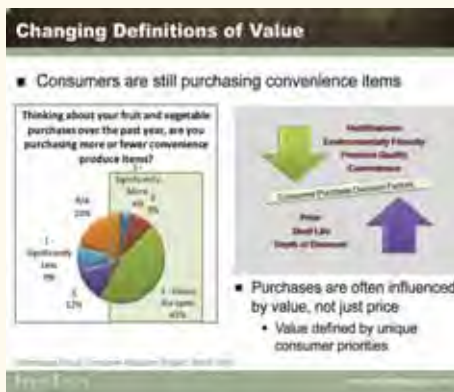
WWW.NYPRODUCESHOW.COM

Fresh-Cut Produce in the U.S.A.

By BETH PADERA, PERISHABLES GROUP

Fresh-cut produce continues on an upward trend across the United States. There are a number of motivations behind this growth, only one of which is people's desire to eat more healthful and nutritious items. While the nation as a whole has become more health-conscious, consumers are busier than ever, and just as they are starved for healthful choices, they are equally starved for the time needed to make positive food choices. All of these occurrences come together to lead consumers toward fresh-cut produce, as it fulfills both the health and convenience needs of today's shoppers.

Additionally, there are a number of industry trends that are influencing the performance of fresh-cut produce. Despite the sluggish economy, consumers are still purchasing convenience items, such as bagged lettuce or fresh-cut fruit and vegetables. After all, many people are spending increased time at home and eating more home-cooked meals. Thus, discretionary funds that were once used to eat out can now be added to the grocery fund. Either way, 58 percent of consumers say they are purchasing about the same or more convenience produce items than last year.



Growth Motivators

Purchases are often influenced by value, not just price. Consumers might find themselves asking, "How much time will this bagged lettuce save me?" Each consumer defines "value" by his or her own unique

priorities. To some consumers, healthfulness ranks highest, while others are focusing on sustainability and convenience factors. Surprisingly, price, shelf-life and depth-of-discount are lower motivators than healthfulness, the environment, premium quality and convenience.

Other factors weigh in on consumers' motivation to purchase fresh-cuts. Publicity about The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity and First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move Campaign are giving fresh produce a higher priority in the national debate to reduce childhood obesity.

Pharmacies, fast food outlets and even video stores are getting in on the fresh-cut action, offering healthful fresh-cut produce choices to their shoppers. What's more, when retailers add fresh-cuts to their inventory, it boosts consumers' impressions of the store. In one recent study, half of more than 500 households indicated that their impressions of both Wal-Mart and Target are more positive as a direct result of expanded grocery inventories in many of their "super" stores. Even convenience stores are investing in fresh foods.

Who Is The Fresh-Cut Produce Consumer?

Fresh-cut consumers are affluent and suburban. That said, fresh-cut vegetables also appeal to upscale urban consumers. Households with children, large households, college-educated and primarily Caucasians are attracted to fresh-cuts. The category also appeals to Asian consumers.

Fresh-cut consumers are a valuable asset to retailers. A loyalty card analysis of 200,000 households that shopped at East and West Coast retailers revealed that when there was no prepared produce in a market basket, the ring averaged \$40.64. However, when prepared fruit and vegetables were included, the ring more than doubled, at an average of \$98.73 and \$103.56, respectively.

Fresh-Cut Performance At Traditional Supermarkets

Fresh-cut produce is making a comeback. According to FreshFacts® Data gleaned from approximately 13,000 stores nationwide, since 2005, sales of prepared vegetables have increased 34.8 percent, while sales of prepared fruit have increased 23.3 percent.



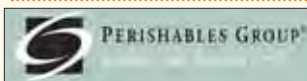
Moreover, prepared vegetable bags and prepared fruit clamshells are the most popular packaging types, garnering 44.7 percent (an increase of 1.5 percent) and 67.6 percent (an increase of 2.8 percent) of respective dollar shares in the past year.

All but one of the top fresh-cut fruit types grew in dollar sales over the past year. Fresh-cut fruit grew 7.3 percent, driven by: watermelon (+10.8 percent), pineapple (+10.3 percent), cantaloupe (+6.4 percent), mixed fruit (+5.3 percent) and apples (+3 percent).

The Future Of Fresh-Cut

With such impressive growth in the fresh-cut category, the future is bright, and a number of new innovations — ranging from shelf-life-enhancing treatments to convenience packaging to new avenues of marketing — are coming down the pipeline.

Understanding consumer demand is key to value-added produce profits, and new opportunities for increasing value-added sales are up for the taking.



The Perishables Group is an independent consulting firm focused on innovation and creating value for clients in the fresh food industry. Find them online at www.perishablesgroup.com

Razor-sharp Industry Focus Needed To Move Forward

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

How consumers handle a recession — and the impact of those decisions on consumer purchasing — is a perfect example of why many assumptions regarding consumer behavior are so often wrong. It seems like a no-brainer, for example, to think that consumers, pressed for cash, would cut down on the purchase of convenience items and more expensive foods. Yet, as Beth Padera points out, that is not always the case.

Beth focuses on the trade-down effect, where consumers who might be tightening budgets trade down from eating out to eating at home. This can certainly explain higher retail sales of any food item. In addition, people who used to eat out may not have the competency to prepare all types of items and so buy fresh-cut or otherwise prepared items to make meals in the only way they know how.

One issue is what income statistics to analyze. Overall numbers can easily hide the effect of a recession on large cohorts of the population. For example, even in very serious recessions, most people do not lose their jobs and do not get pay cuts. They may, however, be cautious and uncertain regarding the future. In addition, social pressures may lead them to not want to show off how well they are doing.

These families typically defer big-ticket expenditures. So they don't rent a beach house for the summer, don't buy a vacation home, postpone an addition to their house, defer buying a new car, cancel the ski trip and go visit grandma instead. The impact of all this is that the actual discretionary income of these families is likely to increase, not decrease, during a recession.

This often leads to increased expenditures on "small indulgences," so if the family cancelled the summerhouse and can't go skiing, they indulge with some raspberries or by allowing someone else to chop their vegetables. It is difficult to say with certainty, but the data used by the Perishables Group, which excludes Wal-Mart, may even exaggerate this effect. If those who lose

their jobs trade down from conventional supermarkets to Wal-Mart, the remaining retail customers would be disproportionately likely to be job-holders whose incomes have not declined and thus disproportionately likely to have found their actual discretionary income increasing as they cut back on big-ticket items.

We also have to be cautious in interpreting consumer expressions about their purchase habits. Although consumers may say they value things such as healthfulness and the environment over price, we have some reason to think we ought to carefully assess what this claim means and what impact it has on purchases. One possibility is that consumers just "guild the lily" a bit. They feel that healthfulness and love for the environment are the "correct" answers and don't want to be perceived as a miser only focused on price.

Even taking these polling reports at face value, it is still unclear how this would be expressed in purchasing. In the case of those consumers who say they value the environment over price, a very tiny minority of consumers may elect to go shop in specialized stores such as Whole Foods. Of those who shop in conventional supermarkets, some may buy specialized products such as organics. But for most, how precisely will they judge if this particular head of lettuce is helping the environment?

Very often, issues such as price, cleanliness and assortment get devalued as a shopper-motivator because all the players are very competitive on these factors. So with the major retailers all offering well-priced stores that are very clean and stock a wide assortment, the differentiating factor that draws consumers to prefer one store over another may be the extent of its fresh-cut section, organic section, etc.

Fresh-cut items offer the opportunity for produce to move into new convenience categories. Wider distribution in more outlets is almost certain to increase sales. No question that this increased consumption will be

good for public health and a sales boost for companies that make these convenience products. One question is how significant this increased consumption will be for the whole industry. Although sales of fresh-cut fruit and vegetables are growing robustly, their volume is dwarfed by the fresh-cut salad category, and sales in this much larger category have suffered ever since the spinach crisis of 2006.

If we are to move forward briskly, we also need to interpret such research shrewdly.

There is little question that innovative packaging can make a big difference. Marginal sales growth is very likely to come from innovations that make it easier to eat such products in the car and for them to be sold in vending machines and convenience outlets.

Financial viability of centralized fresh-cut fruit operations is another issue. Sales can increase with in-store processing, but if we are to see giant boosts, we will need to have centralized processing facilities.

Only a razor sharp focus on the consumer can help us, as an industry, to realize the potential of convenience produce. This task is formidable, however, because the future doubtless holds many ways of making life easier that we can't easily visualize. We need research and data such as that done by the Perishables Group to help us move forward. If we are to move forward briskly, we also need to interpret such research shrewdly.

Twenty-Five INNOVATIONS THAT SHAPED THE INDUSTRY

Following the cover story from October's 25th Anniversary Edition of PRODUCE BUSINESS, as well as November and December's continued commentary, industry leaders carry on the discussion of innovations that shaped the produce industry.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

As PRODUCE BUSINESS continues to explore the innovations affecting change in our industry over the past 25 years, we highlight five more from the original list of 25 innovations that were included in our October issue. The first 15 improvements that were covered in the October, November and December issues were:

1. Communication Technology
2. Consolidation
3. Value-Added
4. Club Stores
5. Supercenters and Global Trade
6. Category Management
7. Food Safety and Traceability
8. Government Involvement
9. Clamshell Packaging
10. Logistics
11. Greenhouse Produce
12. Organics
13. Large Scale Organic Farming
14. Locally Grown
15. Sustainability

These next five innovations highlight changes brought about by social developments like retail formats and the advent of social media, as well as those pushed by technology, which include packaging, pallet and ripening innovations.

Here, industry veterans further discuss the next five innovations affecting industry change in the past 25 years.

16. LIFESTYLE RETAIL FORMATS

As consumers' lifestyles have changed over the past 25 years, so have retail formats. "It's become all about customer segmentation," says Veronica Kraushaar, president of VIVA Global Marketing LLC, based in Nogales, AZ. "Safeway started the lifestyle positioning, then Wal-Mart picked up on it. Many have been challenged to do it well, and mostly the smaller regional stores have seen success in this area."

Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service Inc., based in Mon-

rovia, CA, explains, "These include the newer smaller format stores like Fresh and Easy (10,000 square feet), Trader Joe's (8,000-15,000 square feet), Henry's, Sprouts and Sunflower (all at 20-25,000 square feet), Aldi and Save a Lot (10,000 square feet), Smart and Final Extra (20,000 square feet), Wal-Mart's Marketside (20,000 square feet), and a proposed Wal-Mart new concept store (30,000-60,000 square feet). All of these are well below the larger conventional chains best efforts at 55,000-75,000 square feet."

Continues Spezzano, "Most of these stores have a greater proportion of space devoted to produce and other perishable departments. They are trying to attract the health-conscious and/or the value-conscious customer. Because of their small size, they can obtain real estate much cheaper, easier and develop the property quicker and often take over real estate that has been vacant for a long time. Some of these formats are capitalizing on real estate opportunities that don't usually become available, such as the closing of all Circuit City stores."

17. PACKAGING DEVELOPMENT

Major innovation in packaging led to the rise of entire new categories in the produce department. From bagged salads to fresh-cut vegetables and fruit, packaging innovation paved the way for innovation in

many other areas.

"Over the past 25 years, the produce industry has experienced enormous change in the way products are packaged," says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging, located in Elk Grove Village, IL. "Certainly, hermetically sealed bagged lettuce in modified atmosphere revolutionized the way lettuce is distributed throughout the world. In addition, new processing and packaging technologies significantly improved food safety. Fresh-cut fruits and vegetables were developed in easy-to-consume, single-serve formats. Multi-packs came to market, such as the Cool Cut Carrots and Dip that incorporated Bugs Buggy and Daffy Duck graphics, which appeal to children. Breathable packaging evolved to help extend freshness by controlling inflow and outflow of oxygen and carbon dioxide within a bag or tray. Packaging will continue to be an important point of differentiation for processors and retailers."

18. RETURNABLE CONTAINERS AND PALLETS

On the shipping and logistics side, the development and widespread use of returnable pallets and containers added efficiency to the industry. "The implementation of returnable wooden pallets in the U.S. produce industry has had benefits impacting the environment and safety," says Ed Treacy, vice president of supply

"Among the most innovative changes in the industry was the move to standard-sized pallets throughout the industry. Before that occurred, trying to properly and safely store many items, particularly grapes and stonefruit, was a labor nightmare."

—John Vena, John Vena Inc.



chain efficiencies for Produce Marketing Association, (PMA) in Newark, DE. "Returnable pallets have significantly reduced the amount of scrap pallets being sent to the landfills and have reduced the amount of trees being harvested for pallets. Previous to their introduction, pallets were primarily used one-way and then scrapped. The effects of this are huge as there are over 2 billion pallets in use in North America at any given time with over 450 million new pallets made every year."

Fred Heptinstall, president and general manager at IFCO RPC Management Services, N.A., based in Tamps, FL, points out, "Produce RPCs were introduced to the USA in 1996, and have been one of the leading improvements to the end-to-end supply chain in the U.S. produce market during the past 20 years. The use of RPCs for produce has grown more than 25 percent annually for the past four years in North America, and we expect the numbers of DCs and retail stores using RPCs to increase by at least 25 percent in 2011."

Returnable pallet success set the stage for increased use of plastic shipping platforms. "We have seen an increase in the use of plastic shipping platforms, primarily used in the pick, pack and ship process in grocery retail and foodservice distribution operations," explains Treacy. "They are not conducive to rack storage, but are significantly lighter than wooden pallets. They have enabled some retailers to increase trailer utilization and decrease stock room storage requirements because of their light weight and ability to stack nested taking up half the space of wooden pallets."

The standardization of pallets greatly affected the industry's ability to handle product. John Vena, president of John Vena Inc., in Philadelphia, PA, explains, "Among the most innovative changes in the industry was the move to standard-sized pallets throughout the industry. Before that occurred, trying to properly and safely store many items, particularly grapes and stone-fruit, was a labor nightmare. NAPAR, the North American Association of Agricultural Receivers, of which I am a member, was deeply involved in that battle."

19. RIPENING TECHNOLOGY

As developments in the past two decades challenged the produce industry to ship further, store longer, and yet still provide high quality produce, innovations in ripening technology gave aid to several commodities. "The cooling technology, which happened in the 1970s, gave us the ability to ship and to keep produce like never before," says Pete Carcione, president of Carcione's Fresh Produce Co. Inc., in South San Francisco, CA. "Pressurized

"Ripening technologies have revolutionized consumers' demand for impulse purchases, allowing the offering of ready-to-eat produce whenever the consumer desires it."

— Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission



banana rooms arrived on the scene in 1990, and what a difference they have made. Today, through genetic improvements and the wonderful advancements in refrigeration, produce has never been better."

"Ripening technologies have revolutionized consumers' demand for impulse purchases, allowing the offering of ready-to-eat produce whenever the consumer desires it," states Jan DeLyser, vice president marketing for the California Avocado Commission (CAC) in Irvine, CA. "These technologies have allowed retailers to fine-tune their in-store offerings of produce (Ripe for Tonight, Ripe for Tomorrow, etc.). They have improved the consumer's ability to select produce items based on the level of ripeness, and reduced shopper handling of fruit on display. This technology has also increased the number of turns of items on the display, increasing volume and reducing shrink."

20. SOCIAL MEDIA

While social media is a much newer innovation, its fast paced rise in our society has quickly placed it in a position of importance for anyone in business. "A lot of people like to talk about the death of traditional media and how much things are changing with respect to how we gain access to news and information," reports Ray Connelly, general manager with TRUE-TRAC LLC in Salinas, CA. "Radio and then television were once widely considered new media, which just goes to show that the more things change the more they really stay the same."

Connelly continues, "This time around, however, we — the business owners and brand managers — have been given access to tools that allow us to report our own news. Easy-to-use content management systems that affordably power Web sites and blogs, social networking sites and services like Facebook and Twitter, and affordable video cameras that allow us to shoot our own footage have worked in combination to level the playing field for all brands, including those in the produce business. Consumers hungry for company-generated news and information shouldn't be ignored. Instead, they should be lever-

aged, and social media is the tool du jour for giving them what they want."

"Social media provides produce marketers with new opportunities to interact with consumers and build closer relationships with them," adds DeLyser. "CAC's social media program helps build the relationship with avocado consumers who become active and engaged fans and followers through social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Having launched on Facebook just this year, the CAC already has more than 50,000 fans who engage with us and each other."

However, social media also provided avenues for mis-information during times of crises, like food safety, in the industry. "We're all so vulnerable with our businesses because of social media technology," says Tim York president of Markon Cooperative Inc., in Salinas, CA. "If someone has an issue about pesticide residues, they can write what they want and send it to thousands of people. Traceability and transparency will tie into the social media arena. It's about being able to go to a Web site and see exactly where strawberries were grown, how they were shipped, etc."

"This is an innovation that is just starting to be utilized in the fresh produce sector," says Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "We are just learning how to use this very inexpensive and very targeted marketing tool. I don't think that any of the marketers would say they have mastered this. I believe that this will be huge if properly harnessed."

pb



Write To Us

PRODUCE BUSINESS invites you to comment on the top 25 Innovations mentioned in this feature -- as well as which innovations you think will change our industry going forward. Please email your comments to

Innovations@producebusiness.com



Retailers Build Equity With Store Brands

Private label produce serves to differentiate the store and attract consumers. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

The private label industry no longer views itself as the value-priced alternative to national or regional brands. While generics or store brands were once considered the dreaded Brand X — destined to be lower in quality, just as they were lower in price — store brands are now just that — brands. As a result, they are being afforded the same careful tending and nurturing that a national consumer products company would give to their brands.

Even the vernacular once associated with store brands is now shunned. Terms like “private label” or “generic” are now considered “hopelessly outmoded by the levels of marketing sophistication and expertise that retailers are wielding with respect to their store brands,” according to Dane Twining, director of public relations for the Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA), in New York, NY.

“Retailers are really starting to market themselves as CPG companies,” says Lorri Koster, vice president of marketing and co-chairwoman for Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing Co. Inc. “They’ve got their own brand managers and they are really starting to market it as a true brand.”

Store offerings play a key role in building the reputation of

the retailer. Indeed, many retailers consider their store brand to be one of their leading marketing initiatives, expresses Kim St. George, director of marketing at River Ranch Fresh Foods LLC, in Salinas, CA. The rationale is simple — private label brands drive consumer loyalty by enhancing the image of the store brand and allowing for differentiation to national or regional brands on the shelf. And since consumers typically choose their grocery store based on its produce department, St. George says, retailers would be well-advised to ensure they have a strong private brand program in place in the produce category. “A strong private brand program not only strengthens a retailer’s corporate brand and identity, it also builds brand and store loyalty for consumers,” she says. “Retailers can differentiate themselves from

“A strong private brand program not only strengthens a retailer’s corporate brand and identity, it also builds brand and store loyalty for consumers. Retailers can differentiate themselves from competitors based on the strength and breadth of their private brand program.”

— Kim St. George, River Ranch Fresh Foods

competitors based on the strength and breadth of their private brand program.”

BUILDING IDENTITY

Increasingly, that is exactly what retailers are striving to do throughout their stores — and produce is certainly no exception. According to St. George, store brands have actually become more prevalent than national brands in some produce departments. That’s particularly true among large retail chains that have the kind of economies of scale necessary to be able to support extensive store brand offerings. That said, many categories within produce simply cannot support both a store brand and a grower brand, and with the ever stronger emphasis being placed on growing the store brand, there’s little

doubt with regard to which is increasingly going by the wayside. “The velocity isn’t there and the space isn’t there, so it’s either the Mann brand or the retailer brand,” contends Koster. “You hate to lose that brand identity, but you need to adapt and change with the marketplace.”

Virtually any kind of produce is a good candidate for private label, as literally anything with a bar code would work. Basically, anything but bulk would work, according to Bill Bishop, chairman of Willard Bishop LLC, based in Barrington, IL. “Private label just needs to have a place to put the label, so anything that’s bagged, wrapped, boxed or very prominently labeled will do,” he says.

That said, some types of produce are better candidates for private label than

others. Strawberries would not be a good option, says Koster, simply because companies such as Driscoll’s have done such a good job building brand equity there. Likewise, the POM brand dominates the pomegranate category so strongly, Bishop is doubtful that category would hold much opportunity for a store brand. “It would take a huge amount of effort for a retailer to come in and duplicate that,” he says.

Phoenix, AZ-based Sprouts Farmers Market LLC recently began testing the private label waters in its produce departments with the debut of Sprouts’ brand bagged salads in 2010. According to Neil Cullen, produce buyer, it was simply a matter of building upon the chain’s success with private label in other areas of the store. “There’s a great deal of positive experience that we’ve had in our bulk and grocery departments, which leads us to further explore opportunities in produce,” he acknowledges. According to Cullen, Sprouts “borrows” consumer research to determine which types of produce would be good candidates for private label offerings. Specifically, he says “sales and margin performance drive which items are priority to consider for private label.”

In Lakeland, FL, Publix Super Markets Inc. looks to categories with multiple national brands as those that offer more opportunities for private label, according to Maria Brous, director of media and



Large retail chains offer versions of popular products, such as fresh-cut veggie trays, under their private labels.

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“The role of private label produce is to create a positive brand image with our consumers. If consumers enjoy the quality and value of your private label commodity, they will seek that item at your store over the competition.”

— Will Wedge, Hannaford Bros. Co

community relations.

Portland, ME-based Hannaford Bros. Co. has only offered private label produce for the past five years. Nonetheless, the chain already boasts 300 private label SKUs between its Hannaford line of conventional produce and its Nature's Place line of organic produce. Its biggest growth category is packaged salad, followed by carrots, mushrooms, garlic, potatoes, onions, cut fruit, cut vegetables, celery and herbs. Will Wedge, director of produce and floral merchandising, notes Hannaford is very selective about what products it calls "Hannaford" or "Nature's Place." Such names are placed on high household penetration SKUs that have consistent year-round quality. Only when an item passes the company's "decision tree" is it converted to private label.

The chain chose to name its entire line of organics Nature's Place in order to make it easier for consumers to identify. Wedge contends the key to a successful private label program is having high quality fruits and vegetables that are value-priced, but not deeply discounted. In the end, the goal is for consumers to have a great eating experience, which they will then correlate back to the Hannaford brand, not a national brand or a competitor's private label. "The role of private label produce is to create a positive brand image with our consumers," he says. "If consumers enjoy the quality and value of your private label commodity, they will seek that item at your store over the competition."

STAMP OF APPROVAL

In recent years, consumers have come to view store brands as quality-assured. Not only is private label no longer the less-than option, it's now the one they can count on to be of the highest quality. Since it's coming from their retailer of choice, it must be top-notch or it would not bear the

store's name. "It's that stamp of approval," says Mann's Koster. "It's as if the retailer is saying, 'We've checked this out. We've been the gatekeeper for you. We wouldn't bring this to you if we didn't think it was worth it.'"

From dry goods to produce, Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu Inc. insists on quality when it comes to the products it sources for its store brands. "Our goal is to have the highest quality available and to be as close to or better than the national brands," says spokesperson, Michael Siemienas.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

Ensuring quality can be a difficult proposition for a produce buyer going private label, says Mike Jones, chief financial officer for Center, CO-based Skyline Potato Co. "The consistency and



Retail giant Wal-Mart has also jumped on private label bandwagon with its Marketside brand.

“There are more opportunities for branding items that benefit from packaging, whether it’s premium items, selected sizes, or value-added processing, such as trimming, pre-cut, pre-mixed, etc. Even the packaging itself can present a branding opportunity if it adds value to the product..”

— Dane Twining, Private Label Manufacturer’s Association

quality and being able to maintain the standards for their in-house label — their private label — is probably the biggest difficulty,” he says. “They come into the program a little bit late in the cycle when it’s being packed somewhere else and acquired elsewhere.”

Produce buyers also have to get used to giving their suppliers a little more lead time since store-branded items cannot simply be taken out of inventory, as items bearing their own brand name could be. “When you place an order for the brand, you can do it 11th hour and they can put it together because they just take it out of stock, but you generally can’t do that when you are talking private label, even with an item that’s not as popular,” says Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service Inc., in Monrovia, CA. “Now you place your order at the 11th hour and they say, ‘I’m sorry. We don’t have it all.’”

Another significant challenge lies in what to do if you order too much of a particular item. Say the weather turns and everyone in your store’s immediate vicinity is snowed in for a week. Or what if your ad is not performing as well as expected? What happens to that delicious selection of store brand grapes you just ordered? It’s got your name on it, which makes it harder for a supplier to unload to one of your competitors, cautions Spezzano. “Once it’s on the road and it’s your brand, they can’t take it to the street or to one of your competitors because they won’t accept them,” he says. “Vons is not going to accept a Ralph’s brand. Schnuck’s is not going to accept a Kroger brand. It diminishes the value of the product.”

Such challenges are significant and require a strategic approach on the part of retailers if their private label programs are

going to be successful, agrees Jones. “It forces them to be much better procurers of the product to know what their needs are going to be,” he says.

Some of these challenges can be mitigated by using mostly control labels — Farmer’s Finest, for example — rather than a brand bearing the store’s name, according to Spezzano. That is the approach taken at Supervalu, where Siemienas says its private label is actually a control label available only at Supervalu stores, rather than a store-branded product.

Margin compression is also a significant issue. According to Mann’s Koster, the company encourages its customers to leave them some margins, which will allow them to continually innovate through research and development. “The more that gets stripped away, the more it hampers our ability to reinvest,” she explains. “If we lose that capability, then we are not going to be able to move the industry and the produce department forward with new varieties, new cuts, or new shelf-life technologies.”

INNOVATION REIGNS SUPREME

Indeed, it is innovation that retailers are looking for to drive the future of private label produce. According to Hannaford’s Wedge, specialty blends, along with packaging innovations, such as safety seals, COOL labeling and specialized graphics are offering the retailer more brand equity and helping distinguish its private label offerings from the national brands.

“There are more opportunities for branding items that benefit from packaging, whether it’s premium items, selected sizes, or value-added processing, such as trimming, pre-cut, pre-mixed, etc.,” says PLMA’s Twining. “Even the packaging itself can present a branding opportunity



Kroger’s brand of bagged salad holds its own next to national brands that boast large media campaigns.

if it adds value to the product, such as steam-in bags, freshness-protecting breathable packages, resealable or environmentally sustainable.”

That has certainly been Koster’s experience as Mann’s private label clients have been increasingly requesting different blends of vegetables, different size options and special dip formulas that are unique to them. “They are looking for special packaging or ingredient decks — anything that can set them apart from their competitors,” explains Koster.

Koster also reports an increased demand for innovations such as steam-in-bag technology. Likewise, St. George notes, “A retailer with a more established private label program may want more unique offerings besides a standard bagged salad,” she says. “They may look for clamshells, recloseable packaging and family-style bowls to differentiate their private brand programs from their competitors.”

In the end, it all comes down to quality. When it’s the retailers’ names that are on the line, it is incumbent upon them to ensure that they are only sourcing the highest quality product. After all, reputation is only going to take you so far — and then quality takes over. “People shop produce with their senses,” asserts Koster. “You can have Gucci on a label, but if the cauliflower doesn’t look fresh, no one is going to buy it.”

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PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS CORPORATION
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Choosing the right clamshell for your product is the first step in protecting it.

The Importance Of Clamshells: Protecting Your Produce From Field To Fork

There are a number of considerations to contemplate when choosing clamshells for your produce, and cost, protection and food safety issues are just a few of them. **CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

Packaging has revolutionized the way some types of produce are merchandised. Just look at the berry category. Try to find strawberries bundled into green plastic baskets or blueberries in gray cardboard tills and it's an appeal for nostalgia that any packer today would be hard pressed to satisfy. Instead, these small perishable fruit are almost exclusively packed in plastic clamshells. It's not just berries that have undergone this transformation, and it isn't just protection of a delicate product that is causing clamshells to spring up in supermarket produce departments across the nation.

Growing Demand

Clamshells are the future in categories like tomatoes, too, maintains Jim Weber, produce supervisor at Econo Foods, a 6-store chain based in Brillion, WI. "One of our greenhouse

growers packs their tomatoes in clamshells with a variety of size and shape configurations," he notes. "There are many benefits. Not only does the pack protect the fruit, but the visibility of the product and easy stackability allow for eye-catching displays, and it's also much easier to get the right ring on these products than bulk at the register."

Convenience is another reason why retailers choose clamshell packaging to merchandise some items. For example, Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, details, "We hand-pack fresh green beans into clamshell containers in-store. It's an item customers don't want to have to pick through one at a time. Plus, the clear pack shows off the product well."

Food safety is an additional benefit, according to David Stanton, regional marketing manager for North America at NatureWorks LLC, head-

quartered in Minnetonka, MN. "Consumers today don't want to buy something someone else has already picked through," he points out. "Clamshell packaging creates this barrier."

"As a result, clear rigid packaging continues to grow in specific fruit and vegetable categories such as berries, grapes, apples, cut fruits, tomatoes, diced onions, green peppers and lettuce," says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL. "Organic produce, in particular, is also more commonly packaged in rigid clamshells versus flexible packaging or bulk packaging. Nearly all organic lettuce in the United States is packed in clamshells, not bags."

Some of the fresh fruits and vegetables more recently packed in clamshells include Brussels sprouts, artichokes, figs and kiwi fruit. Weber says, "At Econo Foods, we offered fresh apricots in a clamshell pack for the first time last year."

“In most cases, clarity is very important so consumers can see what they are buying, but a container that allows blueberries to cool faster than some other container could be considered ‘better’ if cooling fruit is important. Leak-resistant is better for juicy products. A tamper-resistant container is better if shrinkage is a problem.”

— Herb Knutson, Inline Plastics Corp.

Use of clamshell packaging in fresh-cut produce is also on the rise. In fact, fruits and vegetables marketed in clamshells make up approximately 50 percent of overall dollar sales in the value-added segment of the produce department, according to Perishables Group Data provided on October 8, 2010, to Sambrailo Packaging, in Watsonville, CA. In addition, sales of clamshell-packed value-added produce grew by 15.65 percent per store in the last year.

Looking toward the future, Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Inline Plastics Corp., in Shelton, CT, says, “Overall demand for containers for produce is expected to grow 3.6 percent in the coming year.”

What Is A Clamshell?

Defined simply, a clamshell is a one-piece container with a top and bottom attached by a hinge. Beyond this, there is some standardization in design as well as points of differentiation that vary from one manufacturing company to another.

“In the produce industry,” says Knutson, “we see two distinct types of containers. Some, like those for in-field use on products like strawberries and blueberries, have standard rectangular sizes such as pints and quarts, and their dimensions are basically the same, so they fit in the corrugated flats used to transport the

filled containers. They are also heavily vented to allow rapid cooling of the product after it is picked in the field. For others, like containers for cut fruit, salads and leaf lettuce, there are many standard volumes, but the dimensions and shape of the containers differ from one manufacturer to another. These are usually not vented. In fact, for cut fruit, leak-resistant containers are preferred so they don’t make a mess in the supermarket displays.”

Standardization exists more on serving size than design, agrees Clear Lam’s Forowycz.

“Lettuce, for example, is packaged in clamshells at three common weights: 5- and 10-oz. and 1-pounders.”

Jim Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing for Sambrailo Packaging, explains, “Differentiation occurs based on the item and its level of maturity or stage in its product life cycle. For example, commodities newer to the value-added/rigid plastic clamshells arena generally start by using clamshells from a vendor’s catalog. Shippers’ preferences vary, which initially results in a wide array of package sizes and shapes for

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the same commodity. Packaging standardization usually doesn't come about until the consumer, retail chain and its receiving warehouse demand it. Strawberries, for example, are sold in the fairly standard clamshells sizes of one pint, one, two and four pounds. The berry category is well established and has the sales volume to warrant packaging providers, in this case thermoformers, spending big money on molds for these size clamshells."

"However," adds Forowycz, "differentiation in container designs is important to convey perceived value and to build brand equity." There are three key points that differentiate clamshell packaging. The first is performance. Properly designed clamshells protect the packaged product, minimize bruising, provide superior merchandising at store level and are consumer-friendly. Visibility is second. Forowycz points out, "Clamshells with smooth walls and domes maximize visibility and highlight the color and texture of the produce inside. Heavily ribbed containers create a very mechanical presentation that detracts from the product and minimizes perceived value." Third is environmental impact. Weight, renewable plastic or recycled content are key points of differentiation.

Building It Better

Common problems with clamshell packaging include poor visibility of the produce inside and weak vertical strength, which can cause damage to contents or difficulties in stacking. Shape can also be a drawback. Scattini contends, "Round bowls tend not to stack as well as those that are square or rectangular, and some designs don't fit well in spring-loading shelving. They look great, but aren't effective."

"Clamshells that don't open easily or don't stay closed are a customer complaint," points out says Kings' Kneeland.

Forowycz suggests how to combat this problem. "If locking features don't work well, then there is a need for, tape, shrink bands or labels," he says.

What makes a clamshell function best depends on the needs of the users, states Inline Plastic's Knutson. "In most cases, clarity is very important so consumers can see what they are buying, but a container that allows blueberries to cool faster than some other container could be considered 'better' if cooling fruit is important. Leak-resistant is better for juicy products. A tamper-resistant container is better if shrinkage is a problem."

Cost Considerations

An effective clamshell design must also be cost efficient. Grower/shippers are being

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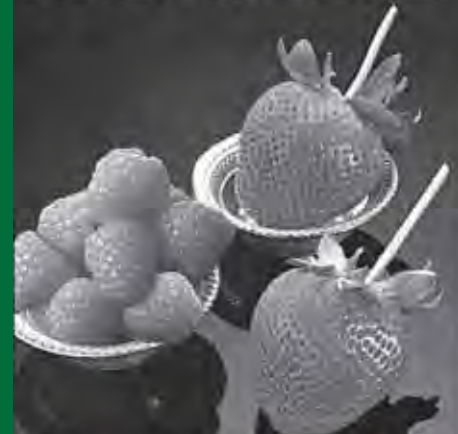
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asked by retailers to drive out costs with greater efficiencies, says NatureWorks' Stanton. "This means loading more products on a pallet by refiguring the height, width and length of a clamshell, yet at the same time, making sure the produce inside looks full and appealing."

Sambraio's Scattini describes how this can be done: "For example, the industry norm for 1-lb. strawberries is an 8-count in a 6-down tray at 18 tiers high (864 clamshells per pallet). Conversely, our standard is a 12-count in a 9-

down tray at 10 tiers high (1,080 clamshells per pallet). This is an increase of 25 percent. If it costs \$250 to ship a pallet across the country, then this represents a savings of about \$.058 per clamshell."

"Yet the cost of clamshell containers versus other types of packaging, such as bags, is significant," says Clear Lam's Forowycz. "The difference could be as much as three to four times more."

This higher price isn't a problem for some types of produce, but it can hinder the sales of others, warns Econo's Weber. "Clamshells are

“Consumers want sustainable products and it’s socially responsible for us to offer them. However, it would be helpful to us, as retailers in merchandising, if more manufacturers or grower/shippers could sticker or call out to customers that the product or packaging is better for the earth and why.”

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Super Markets

a godsend for strawberries because they help cut down on excessively high shrink,” he acknowledges. “On the other hand, the smallest size shippers want to pack grapes in is two pounds, and customers don’t like the idea of paying nearly four dollars at the register when they see grapes are \$1.99 per pound. Cherries, too. They’re already a high priced item; clamshells versus bags make that sticker price even higher and can affect sales.”

Some manufacturers are looking at ways to reduce the cost of clamshell packaging. One way is to reduce packaging by 15 to 20 percent. Stanton notes, “A container that is too flimsy isn’t popular with U.S. consumers, but lightweight clamshells are the norm in Asia. Asians prefer lower gauge packaging because they figure since it’s one use — getting the product from store to door — there’s no need to over-package it. The trick for manufacturers is to go as thin as possible and not overbuild for cost savings, yet still meet consumer performance needs.”

Go Green

Consumers desire for sustainable or ‘green’ packaging is growing. In fact, the global market for earth-friendly packaging is projected to reach \$142.42 billion by 2015, according to the report, *Sustainable (Green) Packaging: A Global Strategic Business Report*, published by San Jose, CA-based Global Industry Analysts Inc., in August.

Green is indeed a concern, recognizes Kings’ Kneeland. “Consumers want sustainable products and it’s socially responsible for

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Reader Service # 12

WHAT PRODUCE BUYERS SHOULD LOOK FOR IN CLAMSHELL PACKAGING

There are three key areas to address when purchasing clamshells or produce packaged in clamshells. These are functionality, sustainability and the ability to offer distinction and differentiation to your department.

Functionality: Jim Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing for Sambrailo Packaging, in Watsonville, CA, suggests a number of pointed questions when looking for clamshell packaging: “Will this clamshell protect the produce through the distribution channel, including harvest? Will it lengthen shelf-life of the product — or at least not actively promote breakdown/decay? Does this clamshell and tray maximize space on the pallet and therefore save money on freight? Does the lid remain closed when handled? Are the vents aligned to allow airflow? Is the clamshell clear and visually appealing?”

“If the fresh-cut produce has any purge from it, like diced tomatoes or sliced onions and peppers, then buyers should specify the use of some super-absorbent,” advises Tom Gautreaux, national sales director for Maxwell Chase Technology LLC, in Atlanta, GA.

Sustainability: The key sustainability initiatives should not be forgotten when developing clamshells for produce applications, reminds Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer for Clear Lam Packaging Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL. “These include the use of renewable plastics, recycled content and designs that could effectively lighten the packaging without effecting performance.”

Differentiation & Distinction: “One example of how a package really enhances a product is found in Ocean Mist Farm’s baby artichoke clamshell,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. “The artichokes fit perfectly; they don’t float around; and the company takes advantage of the container as a platform for marketing with recipes and other information.”

“A buyer should always ask for clamshell packaging that will create an enhanced perceived value,” asserts Forowycz. **pb**

us to offer them,” he says. “However, it would be helpful to us, as retailers in merchandising, if more manufacturers or grower/shippers could call out to customers that the product or packaging is better for the earth and why.”

This is already happening in the UK, points out Carol Zweep, manager of packaging and nutrition labeling services at Guelph Food Technology Centre, in Guelph, ON, Canada. “For example, a number of store-brand products marketed by Tesco such as potatoes,

orange juice and light bulbs, carry the Carbon Reduction Label. This label, endorsed by the Carbon Trust, lets customers know how many grams of carbon dioxide were emitted as a result of growing, manufacturing, transporting and storing a product.”

In the United States, Earthbound Farm switched to 100 percent post-consumer recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PCR PET) plastic for all its clamshell packages in 2009. To increase awareness of the environmental benefits of this packaging, the label on the

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clamshell salad containers says, “Package made from recycled bottles.”

Sustainability is a broad term that can suggest many trends. Inline Plastic’s Knutson says, “Sustainability can apply to containers that can be readily recycled, such as PET (polyethylene terephthalate); it can apply to containers that are manufactured with post-consumer recycled material; or it can apply to containers that have an overall low carbon footprint when one measures the total energy impacts from manufacturing the container.”

According to Kurt Zuhlke, president and chief financial officer of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates Inc., headquartered in Bangor, PA, “The majority of clamshells today are made from PET, the same material water and soda bottles are made from.” PET packaging, which is recyclable, is made from petroleum. There are pros and cons of using renewable materials like corn versus traditional petroleum to make clamshells.

Renewable clamshells in the United States are primarily derived from bioplastics, says Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “The first benefit of using bioplastics is the smaller carbon footprint,” he remarks. “Clamshells produced from bioplastics generate approximately 45 percent less greenhouse gases and utilize approximately half of the energy of traditional petroleum-based plastics in their manufacturing process. Another advantage is that bioplastics can be produced from plants such as corn on an annually recurring basis. Petroleum is a finite resource.”

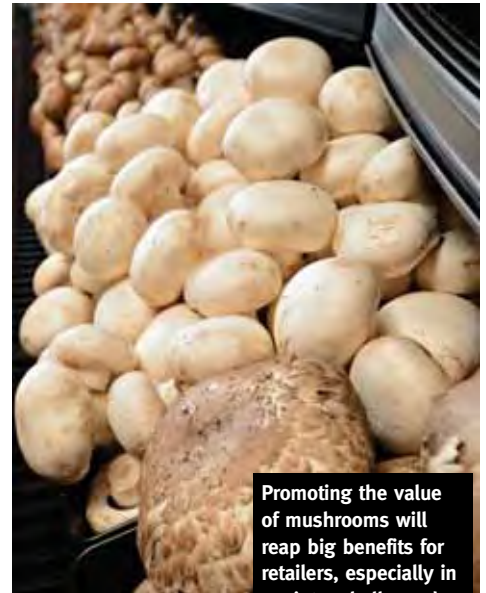
Forowycz adds, “Some of the challenges associated with renewable plastic clamshells are cost and performance,” he reveals. “Typically, renewable clamshells cost 10 to 20 percent more than petroleum-based packaging. However, this gap has recently narrowed because petroleum-based plastics, such as polyester, have increased in cost due to world market conditions. In addition, most renewable plastics need to be formulated with other ingredients to enhance their performance characteristics.”

Bioplastics have less heat tolerance, acknowledges NatureWork’s Stanton. “This is really only a problem in the warehousing of the packaging, as once filled with fresh produce, the packaging is kept cold. Over a million pounds of our plant-based resins have been made into produce packaging. We’ve even tested the product in Wal-Mart and had no problem. However, we did tell the supply chain staff ahead of time about the need to store the packaging at less than 105°F. Awareness and education are important.”

pb



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF GIORGIO FOODS INC.
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL



Promoting the value of mushrooms will reap big benefits for retailers, especially in a winter-challenged produce department.

Make Mushrooms Into Your Recipe For Success

A nutritious addition to any meal and one that is climbing the produce department ladder, mushrooms are a best bet for retailers this winter and the whole year through. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

As the first snowflakes flitter to the ground and winter coats and boots come out of storage, consumers begin to long for those dishes that warm both body and soul. The aroma of freshly baked pies and holiday cookies fill homes and stomachs, and crock pots that have been laying dormant throughout the spring and summer spring to life, bursting forth with stews, soups and other comfort foods. Increasingly, a peek into those pots will reveal mushrooms nestled in among the meat, noodles and vegetables. But mushroom usage isn't limited to slow-cookers. Mushroom soup is also popular in the winter, as are stuffed mushrooms, according to Bill Litvin, vice president of sales and national account manager at Temple, PA-based Giorgio Foods Inc. Whether made with breading, crab, sausage, sautéed vegetables or cheese, stuffed mushrooms make a great appetizer or hors d'oeuvre for holiday entertaining. Such trends spur sales of particular types of mushrooms.

"During the holidays, there's a strong pull

toward large stuffing-size mushrooms, and people often serve marinated button mushrooms on vegetable trays and things of that nature," says Paul Frederic, senior vice president of sales and marketing at To-Jo Mushrooms Inc., headquartered in Avondale, PA. "Of course, it wouldn't be Thanksgiving without stuffing and mushroom gravy as well."

While mushrooms are available year-round, certain types lend themselves to winter dishes. Cremini mushrooms, for example, have a denser tissue and a heartier flavor, according to Elizabeth O'Neil, chair of Highline Produce Ltd., located in Leamington, ON, Canada. That makes them a suitable choice for soups and stews. White mushrooms, Baby Bellas and Shiitake mushrooms are all used more in the winter as well. "Mushrooms are an ideal winter food," says O'Neil. "They have a hearty, earthy flavor that is so well suited for soups, stews, pastas and risottos — all of our warm, winter comfort foods."

Sales of white mushrooms also enjoy a post-holiday bounce when New Year's resolu-

tions kick in. "After the holidays, people are concerned about losing weight," points out Frederic. "They are apt to be eating more salads, and often those salads are topped with fresh sliced white mushrooms."

The distinctive taste and texture of mushrooms is known as *umami* — the fifth taste after salty, sweet, sour, and bitter — which brings out the craveability of meals, according to the San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Council. Also referred to as savoriness, *umami* is Japanese for "good flavor" or "good taste." Most often described as a savory, brothy, rich or meaty taste sensation, *umami* is sensed by special receptor cells present on the tongue. This unique attribute makes mushrooms the ultimate winter choice, according to Mike Stephan, director of sales at Monterey Mushrooms Inc., headquartered in Watstonville, CA. "It's something special; it's of the earth," he says. "It's great for mental health on dark, cold days. It's great for nutritional needs. It's great for making ordinary things special. It's just the perfect time."

“We are on fire right now. Our industry has been experiencing unprecedented demand that has been sustained for the last 16 to 18 months. We are at two to three times what our typical historical average sales increases are, and it’s all consumer-demand driven.”

— Mike Stephan, Monterey Mushrooms Inc.

Growing Pains

The winter holiday season has historically been the mushroom industry’s busiest time, and this year is no exception. Mushroom demand is at an all-time high, with retail shipments up 10 percent over just two years ago, according to Fred Recchiuti, general manager at Avondale, PA-based Basciani Mushroom Farms. He credits the foodservice segment for driving much of that growth, citing a 12 percent increase in mushroom penetration on menus. He points to the fact that mushrooms have been featured on burgers at virtually all the top burger chains, including McDonald’s, Burger King, Carl’s Jr. and White Castle.

According to the Mushroom Council, this fundamental shift in consumption began in

May 2008, and has been maintained throughout the economic downturn. As consumers are cooking more at home, they are increasingly incorporating mushrooms into their meal occasions. Not surprisingly, the Food Network craze is helping drive the popularity of mushrooms, as celebrity chefs openly express their love for the savory wonders. Appearing at the 2008 Produce Marketing Association’s Foodservice Conference & Exposition in Monterey, CA, Tom Colicchio, co-founder of the Gramercy Tavern in New York City and head judge of the Bravo reality series “Top Chef,” was asked what ingredients he would like to have with him if he were stranded on a desert island. Without missing a beat, he responded “mushrooms.”

Such high profile adoration for mushrooms has driven them to become the 15th largest sales category in produce, right behind avocados, in terms of sales dollars, according to Chicago IL-based Information Resources Inc. (IRI). That equates to roughly two percent of all produce sales in traditional grocery stores. Mushrooms certainly are doing their part in delivering profits to the retailer. While the average price for a produce item is \$1.42 per pound, mushrooms’ average price per pound is approximately \$4, according to the Mushroom Council. “We are on fire right now,” acknowledges Stephan. “Our industry has been experiencing unprecedented demand that has been sustained for the last 16 to 18 months. We are at two to three times what our typical historical average sales increases are, and it’s all consume-demand driven.”

That doesn’t mean it’s been all smooth sailing. Meeting the increased demand for mushrooms in both foodservice and retail has proven problematic for the industry, says Recchiuti. While that may seem like an enviable challenge, it’s never good to have out-of-stocks, he points out, even if it does mean your product is in demand. “We are an industry in growing pains,” he admits. “Demand is up, but

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“As we enter the winter months, most of us in North America don’t get enough sunlight to produce natural vitamin D within our bodies. Mushrooms, being a great source of vitamin D, can provide additional value there.”

— Greg McLain, Kitchen Pride Mushrooms

trying to keep the supply up to the demand is a big challenge.” To help meet that demand, Basciani just purchased a mushroom farm in Louisiana. However, Recchiuti fears regulatory issues related to expanding production facilities for mushrooms will keep the company from being able to ramp up to meet increased demand in the near-term.

Then there are concerns about the weather, too. With winter being the prime time for mushroom sales and consumption, suppliers and retailers are often faced with difficult travel conditions that prevent mushrooms from reaching their destination when they are needed and while they are still fresh and delicious. Last year was particularly treacherous, especially in the Northeast. That’s most problematic when you consider that 60 percent of the nation’s mushroom supply comes out of Pennsylvania. At the same time, transporting mushrooms during the colder months virtually eliminates concerns about maintaining the cold chain, points out Frederic.

Winter Wellness

As much of the country struggles to stay warm, wellness becomes a key focus for consumers and retailers alike. In recent years, heightened concerns and growing awareness among the general population about widespread deficiencies in vitamin D, the so-called “sunshine vitamin,” has driven people to seek out vitamin D-rich foods. This is particularly evident in the Northern hemisphere where sun exposure is far from optimum, especially during the winter months.

The Mushroom Council is quick to point out that mushrooms are the only fruit or vegetable with naturally occurring vitamin D. Some mushroom producers have taken things a step further, producing vitamin-enhanced mushrooms by exposing them to sunlight or UV light, thus boosting the amount of vitamin D. “As we enter the winter months, most of us in North America don’t get enough sunlight to produce natural vitamin D within our bodies,” says Greg McLain, president of Kitchen Pride Mushrooms, based in Gonzales, TX, and current chair of the Mushroom Council. “Mushrooms, being a great source of vitamin

D, can provide additional value there.”

The vitamin has been said to bear a host of health benefits — regulating blood pressure,

boosting immunity, enhancing bone health and reducing inflammation. It may also aid in the treatment of diabetes, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. Vitamin D is also widely believed to help enhance mental well-being. That makes vitamin D-rich mushrooms an ideal choice for wintertime dining when lack of sunlight may lead to or worsen mood disorders, such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). “It means a lot when the package says, ‘high in vitamin D,’” acknowledges Neil Cullen, produce buyer for the Phoenix, AZ-based

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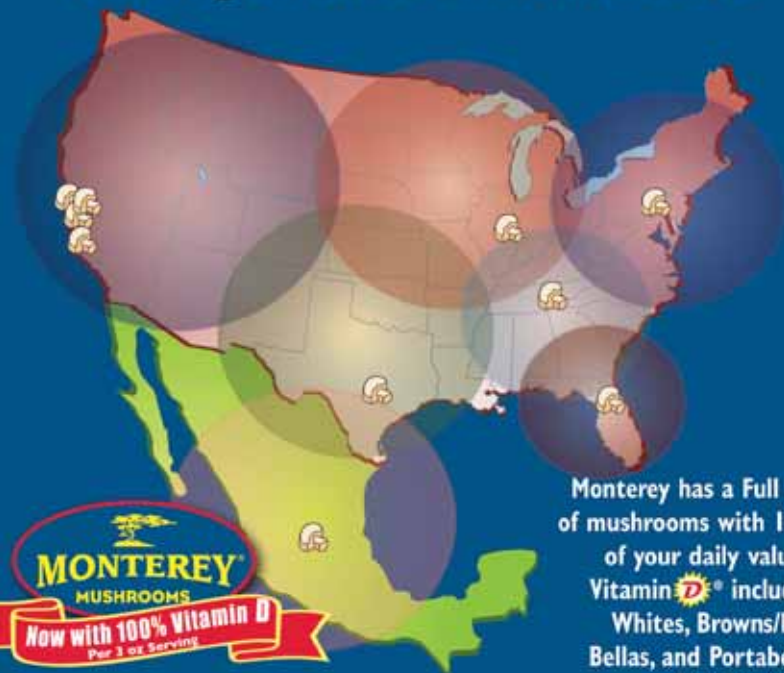


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Sprouts Farmers Market LLC. "It helps when that's part of the packaging that comes from the shipper."

Oakshire Mushroom Farm Inc., in Kennett Square, PA, which markets Dole mushrooms, has been working on packaging specifically designed to take advantage of the health claims related to vitamin D, according to Gary Schroeder, president. While he declines to divulge details, Schroeder says the new packaging will hit store shelves sometime this winter. "There's a drumbeat that's going to come with vitamin D that's only going to get louder," he says. "This is a huge opportunity that we need to get out in front of and communicate to consumers."

But the health benefits of mushrooms don't end there. Mushrooms are low in calories, fat-and cholesterol-free, and very low in sodium. Within the produce aisle, they are a leading source of the antioxidants selenium and ergothioneine, which help strengthen the immune system, a key selling point during cold and flu season. The Mushroom Council advises retailers to focus their efforts on promoting mushrooms as the super-food of the produce department by incorporating messages about mushrooms' many nutritional benefits in store marketing materials. Specifically, retailers would be well served to promote the health attributes of mushrooms through signage, ads, circulars and in-store magazines. They can also avail themselves of the Mushroom Council's new brochure, *Make Room for Mushrooms: Nature's Hidden Treasure: Simple Ways to Enjoy This Produce Powerhouse*.

Companies like Giorgio make such signage available, although Litvin recognizes some retailers worry about cluttering the produce department with too much signage. Sprouts does not use POP to promote mushrooms, although it does routinely promote them on ad. "It's via the sales we do on them that spurs movement and interest more than anything else," says Cullen.

Flexible Fungi

While mushroom sales naturally surge during the winter, retailers shouldn't just sit back and let consumers come to them, advises Kevin Donovan, national sales manager at Phillips Mushroom Farms LP, in Kennett Square, PA. Granted, those that do choose a more laid-back approach to mushroom marketing will still see increased sales. However, they will not be enjoying the kinds of robust sales they could be achieving simply by exerting a little extra effort. "Some people just leave them alone and the demand is there anyway, so they do well,

but I don't think everyone is taking full advantage of what the mushroom category offers in terms of profits," asserts Donovan. "The ones who aggressively promote are reaping even bigger benefits."

Because many other produce items are out of season during the winter, there is "less clutter" in the department, making it the ideal time to turn consumers on to these tasty morsels, maintains Highline's O'Neil. In particular, she recommends retailers reach out to people who typically eat mushrooms during the warmer months and educate them about mushrooms' versatility in winter dishes.

Mushrooms have the unique ability to fit into any day part, points out Monterey's Stephan. From breakfast and lunch to appetizers and snacks to dinner, mushrooms can easily be incorporated into whatever dish is being cooked. Likewise, they play a key role in many different kinds of ethnic cuisine. "Mushrooms wear many hats," he asserts. "If it's Italian night, they can be Italian. If it's Asian night, they can be Asian. If it's tacos and fajitas, they can be Mexican."

Retailers can promote the versatility of mushrooms by providing recipe cards or books featuring mushroom dishes in their store magazine. Those consumers who are concerned about packing on the holiday pounds might be interested to learn that mushrooms can serve as a hearty and fulfilling meat replacement in almost any recipe, says McLain of Kitchen Pride.

"The retailers that really excel in our category are the ones that tend to market the mushrooms — not necessarily on the price or the feature — but on the benefit of the mushrooms or on the usage occasion," explains Stephan. "Our consumers — if you give them just one more idea, dicing up mushrooms and blending them into the family meatloaf recipe, for example — are likely to take you up on it."

Cross-merchandising can also play a key role in giving consumers ideas of ways they can incorporate mushrooms into their wintertime dishes. Oakshire cross merchandises mushrooms with Dole Salads, often staging promotions in which a consumer gets a free 8-oz. container of mushrooms when they buy two bagged salads.

Eden Prairie, MN-based SUPERVALU Inc. markets mushrooms throughout the year, often engaging in cross-merchandising with steaks, roasts and other complementary items in the meat department, according to Michael Siemienas, spokesperson.

While Supervalu and Oakshire report suc-

cess from such initiatives, Sprouts' Cullen contends cross-merchandising efforts involving mushrooms are often easier said than done. He points to mushrooms' perishability as making it prohibitively difficult to engage in many otherwise promising cross-merchandising opportunities. "To sell mushrooms out of refrigeration is a tough proposition," he says. "We don't have the kind of floor space in our stores to be able to say, 'bring in a refrigeration unit to put mushrooms over by the meat department.'"

Whatever approach retailers take to merchandising mushrooms, To-Jo's Frederic advises them to focus on variety and quality. Specifically, they need to make sure they have adequate supplies of different varieties of mushrooms that are rotated appropriately and promptly removed from the shelves when of substandard quality or out-of-code. "Quality product moves the product out the store," he says. "People are apt to pick up beautiful, clean, fresh mushrooms a lot more quickly than they would otherwise." **pb**

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Mexico boasts more than 24,000 acres of protected agriculture, which is especially popular for tomatoes, cucumbers and bell peppers.

Mexican Industry Continues To Expand And Develop

Mexican producers are not resting on their success, but continuing to add new products and growing regions to the benefit of retailers and their consumers. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

In 2009, Mexico exported more than 13 billion pounds of produce to the United States, an increase of just over 17 percent from the year before, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics. Mexico has long been recognized as an important supplier for winter produce. “During the winter months, Mexico accounts for a high percentage of our supply,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for the Parsippany, NJ-based, 25-unit chain, Kings Super Markets. “You’ve got everything from eggplants to squash to berries to avocados.”

“Mexican produce offers a significant number of advantages including freshness and availability,” states Walter Ram, director of food safety for The Giumarra Companies, based in Rio Rico, AZ. “The abundance of fresh produce from Mexico has been an important part of the industry for more than a century. These steady supplies not only benefit the consumer, but also enable retailers to schedule their purchasing programs throughout the winter months.”

With increasing variety and technology, as

well as expanding production regions, Mexico is now shipping products year-round. “With new varieties and growing methods, each year Mexico fills in more and more gaps in the production cycle,” explains Lance Jungmeyer, president of Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “Growers and distributors are pouring their resources into infrastructure to make Mexico even more attractive this season and into the future.”

“Mexico is a key supplier for our department,” acknowledges Dick Rissman, produce manager with Dahl’s Food Markets, an upscale independent chain with 12 stores, headquartered in Des Moines, IA. “We fit the Mexico-sourced product into our seamless year round supply of products.”

“Retailers know the seamless season ensures they always have fresh produce for their customers,” adds Veronica Kraushaar, president of Viva Global Marketing LLC, in Nogales, AZ. “It used to be a winter deal with Mexico, but now it has become a natural, year-round sourcing cycle.”

What’s New?

The Bajío area near Mexico City is becoming a new and important export region for Mexico for temperate vegetables. “We are going to see more vegetables like lettuce and broccoli from the temperate climates around Mexico City, which we call the Bajío area,” reports Kraushaar. “Typically this has not been a major export region to the United States, but the growers are becoming larger, more sophisticated savvy exporters.”

Mexico has also stepped up exports of specialty and value-added products. “There is great potential with Mexican products, such as guava, which is not as well known by the U.S. mainstream, yet already in strong demand among ethnic consumers,” says Roberto Lopez, president of Frucasa Inc., a company focused on the production, selection and commercialization of fresh Mexican guava, in Ciudad Calvillo, Aguascalientes, Mexico.

“Mexico is a growing source of specialties like cactus leaf (*nopales*), kohlrabi and other exotics with lower volume, but high demand



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“Because it costs so much to get Mexican produce to the border, shippers send only top-of-the-line, export-grade produce. We’ve had retailers comment that the consistent quality is the reason they are devoting more shelf-space to Mexican fruits and vegetables.”

— Lance Jungmeyer,

Fresh Produce Association of the Americas

in ethnic markets,” agrees Kraushaar.

Cocanmex in Mexico City, which farms over 500 hectares of mangos, is now offering fresh coconut water in an easy-open coconut. “Fresh coconut water is a big fad right now in the United States,” acknowledges Roger Gay, CEO of Cocanmex.

Cocanmex also exports a value-added corn product. “Our *Elotes de la Esquina* (Corn on the Corner) is extremely popular within Mexico,” reports Gay. “Served on street corners, this boiled ear of corn is eaten on a stick with mayonnaise, cheese and chili powder added. We have packaged the idea, making a sanitized and convenient version. Our product is now sold at all the Costcos in Mexico.”

In November of 2008, the United States began allowing importation of irradiated guava from Mexico. To date, Mexico has exported 8,000 tons to the United States and has about 2,000 hectares certified for the guava export program. “Guava presents tremendous opportunity from both a nutrition and taste perspective,” states Lopez. “The variety of production, steady supply and consistent quality make this a very successful program for any retailer.”

Retailers can also look for new packaging options. “We are creating new packs and trying new varieties of products,” reports Brent Harrison, president of Al Harrison Co. Distributors, headquartered in Nogales, AZ. “We’re using grafting methods for watermelon plants, which results in firmer flesh and better yields. For hard-shell squash, we offer a bin with a variety of squash separated by a divider.

INCREASING GREENHOUSE PRODUCTION

Mexico has become a significant supplier of high quality greenhouse produce and now boasts more than 24,000 acres of protected production. “Growers of Mexico’s protected horticulture employ some of the most advanced technologies and production practices available to provide safe, high quality and sustainable products to the marketplace,” says Eric Viramontes, CEO of the Greenhouse Growers Association of Mexico and general manager of Mexico’s National Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) in Culiacán, Sinaloa.

Retailers and consumers alike have responded with excitement to the availability of Mexico’s greenhouse products. “Greenhouse products are definitely growing,” states Kings’ Kneeland. “I think the golden cherry tomatoes will be very popular this year.”

“There is a big move to hot house items

in Mexico, primarily with products like tomatoes, green and colored bell peppers and cucumbers,” reports Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. “U.S. customers should see these items in plentiful supplies from December through the end of April.”

“This year, we expect to handle more Mexican greenhouse product because of the climate,” notes Dick Rissman, produce manager with Dahl’s Food Markets, an upscale independent chain with 12 stores, headquartered in Des Moines, IA.

Mexican producers are enthusiastic about their ability to continue to offer ample supply. “Right now, the volume of product from protected ag we’re able to offer is very exciting,” says Viramontes. “We have a whole line of vegetables available coming from dedicated third and fourth generation growers.” **pb**

The retailer can use the bin for merchandising and save valuable shelf space.”

“Everyone is familiar with a wrapped European cucumber,” states Ben Reilly, Midwest business development manager for The Giumarra Companies. “This year, we will be offering a wrapped slicer cucumber that has demonstrated a much longer shelf life. This packaging turns it into a scanable item without using a sticker prone to falling off and adds safety advantages of wrapped product. We are also very excited to release a freestanding, sealable bag of green beans featuring a grab handle. A small label allows the clean, fresh appearance of the bag to deliver an unobstructed view of the product.”

Diversify Your Promotions

Retailers have a wide variety of promotional tools supplied by commodity boards, grower associations and individual companies. “The watermelon industry is fortunate to have the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) to aid the retailer,” says Harrison of Al Harrison Co. “The NWPB works with retailers to promote our product and showcase our health benefits.”

The association of guava producers and packers offers promotional support as well. “Basically, our support combines aspects of POS materials, demos and advertising,” says Frucasa’s Lopez. “These materials help consumers make purchasing decisions through education on nutritional and taste value.”

One of the most visible and successful com-

modity promotions in recent years has been the Avocados from Mexico promotion, organized by APEAM, which has a wealth of tools planned for 2011 to help retailers promote and profit from their products. “Our sales building integrated promotional programs include advertising, online marketing, public relations and social media components,” reports Emiliano Escobedo, the Los Angeles, CA-based marketing director for APEAM, the Mexican avocado association located in Michoacán, México. “We have a wide assortment of POS materials available to retailers year-round so they can display and profit by generating impulse sales in-store.”

“When we do an Avocados from Mexico promotion, people respond,” says Kings’ Kneeland. “The high quality POS materials they offer help us really connect with our customers.”

Additionally, Avocados from Mexico offers a training program for retailers featuring the S.M.A.R.T. (Storing Merchandising Arranging Ripening Training) Kit to train produce managers about the latest in Best Practices for handling and merchandising avocados. Escobedo details, “The invaluable hands-on training includes a DVD in Spanish and English on handling and merchandising, backroom posters in Spanish and English, a brochure, and even an opportunity for produce managers to earn a S.M.A.R.T. certificate.”

Avocados from Mexico built the category with a variety of marketing programs including television and radio advertising, national print ads, online advertising and social media

campaigns. “We plan to launch two exciting new social media promotions on Facebook,” continues Escobedo. “Consumers can visit the Avocados from Mexico Facebook page to enter the *What Makes Your Guac Rock?* Sweepstakes [through February 7, 2011] for a chance to win air travel, free groceries and free avocados. They can also take the *What’s Your Guac Star Style?* Quiz to find out what Guac Star personality they rock.”

Ciruli Brothers works with customers to develop effective promotion programs educating consumers and fostering sales at the store level. “Our programs are tailor-made depending on our customers’ requirements and the type of product involved,” explains Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. “For instance, sales of less mainstream commodities, such as mangos, eggplants, or other specialty items can be enhanced with promotional tools like recipe labels and inserts, POS signage with product photos, cutting diagrams and ripening guides.”

Giumarra’s abundant lines including prepackaged product that can easily be incorporated customized promotion. Reilly states, “We encourage use of our marketing support and grower stories of community development



PHOTO COURTESY OF COCANMEX

Cocanmex exports a value-added corn product, which includes all the components for *Elotes de la Esquina*, or “Corn on the Corner,” a popular treat in Mexico.

as a valuable tool for promotions.”

Sharing The Story

With increasing consumer interest in local growing, sustainability and fair trade, retailers can benefit from telling some very compelling

stories of the Mexican industry. “We are seeing interest in POP promoting the grower or products and offering personalized information to draw shoppers in,” states Viva’s Kraushaar. “Shoppers today are increasingly looking to see whether the supplier is sustainable and follows

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WHAT BENEFITS DOES A MISSION OFFER?

With good preparation and follow-up, missions can be great door openers and participants benefit in many ways including:

- *Obtain contracts as a direct outcome of the mission*
- *Find personal contacts for future follow-up*
- *Sign partnerships and cooperative agreements for further business development*
- *Get hands on and up-to-date market information and research*
- *Assess overseas opportunities, culture, infrastructure and potential demand*
- *Initiate new vendor relationships*
- *Learn about the culture, customs, business and operating environments*

Positive effects of missions include higher sales revenues, lower procurement costs and better sourcing, education, cultural/international business savvy, preparedness, professional development, visibility/goodwill and perspective. Additionally, mission participants develop close friendships among themselves and a useful, professional network.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL MISSION LIKE?

Missions typically last from five to eight days, and consist of a constructive program including briefings, one-on-one business meetings, growing area tours, packing houses visits, official receptions and dinners, cultural events and some sightseeing. The briefings and one-on-one meetings are tailored and prearranged to match individual delegate's business interests. Any mission can be tailored to accommodate the need of individual participants.

There are several types of Missions.

1. Customized Mission: This is when a particular buyer or company is interested in specific products or suppliers. They can request custom organization of a trip designed just for their specific needs.
2. Mission Linked to Tradeshow: SAGARPA organized missions designed for those interested in attending a specific Mexican trade show. A good example is the ANTAD show, held in Guadalajara in March. We assist buyers with their arrangements to participate in the show, as well



as organizing outside meetings and trips with suppliers, supermarkets and other points of interest. Visits to production areas of other states can be combined with the trip. Other shows that have traditionally linked missions with them include Expo Sinaloa, Agro Baja and Expo Agroalimentaria.

3. Supplier Visits: SAGARPA puts together specialized group trips to visit specific production areas and commodities of interest, as well as other useful venues like packing facilities or processing plants. Itineraries are planned according to the group's wishes and interests.

WHAT SUPPORT DOES A MISSION GIVE?

Participants cite the greatest support benefit from a trade mission as that of logistics and itinerary planning. Through SAGARPA organized missions, many buyers are able to meet with suppliers that may be difficult to contact due to language barriers, time and/or lack of knowledge about the regions. Missions provide an easy and effective way for buyers to make visits specific to their interests and needs. The expertise of SAGARPA's personnel also allow for visits to areas, suppliers or points of interest that may be new or not well known outside of Mexico. A SAGARPA staff person accompanies the mission at all times and is helpful in providing additional information as well as translation assistance. Mission participants can also receive reimbursement for the hotel and travel costs.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN THE PAST?

SAGARPA has organized close to 20 missions in the last five years. Throughout these missions, buyers have learned about Mexican Agriculture, Mexican methods and technologies of production, and Mexican practices put in place to assure the quality and safety of products. Past participants have included companies such as COSTCO, Kroger, Albertson, Safeway, Supervalu, Hy-Vee, Minyards, Pathmark, Fiesta, Rhee Bros Inc, Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG), Hardie's, Gigante USA, Save A Lot, Leevers, Unified Western Grocers, Bogopa, Bueler's Food Stores and Kehe Food Distributors, as well as many others.

HOW DO I JOIN A MISSION?

SAGARPA normally begins organizing missions starting in early January. Interested parties can request a mission at anytime, although missions associated with specific tradeshow require more advance planning. For more information, contact Hector Cortes at Mexico's Agricultural Office in Washington DC at (202) 728-1727 or hcortes.sagarpausa@verizon.net.

MISSIONS LINKED TO SHOWS

Buyers may want to look into a trade mission connected with any of the following valuable shows.

Show	Location	Date
ANTAD (grocery industry show).	Guadalajara	MAR 9-11 2011
ExpoRestaurantes (foodservice)	Mexico City	JUN 30 – JUL 1 2011
Abastur	Mexico City	AUG 30 – SEP 1 2011
ExpoOrganicos (Organic products)	Mexico City	SEP 1-3 2011
Gourmet Show	Mexico City	SEP 1-3 2011
Alimentaria Guanajuato	Guanajuato	NOV

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact the Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico:

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fair trade and/or social responsibility guidelines in their operations.”

“All of our Mexican commodities offer an opportunity to promote an exceptional story about the growers who farm the product,” says Giumarra’s Reilly. “The benefit created is a bond between the consumer and the grower, which builds confidence in the product and where it was grown.”

“There are a lot of stories to tell,” adds Eric Viramontes, CEO of the Greenhouse Growers Association of Mexico and general manager of

Mexico’s National Association of Protected Horticulture (AMHPAC) in Culiacán, Sinaloa. “We can talk about what protected ag has done not only for crops and technology, but also for the environment and communities. At the retail level, they can emphasize these points. It’s a story consumers want to hear.”

In 2009, APEAM began a reforestation program including municipalities certified to export avocados to the United States. “The program’s objective is to maintain environmental sustainability for their avocado

production,” says Escobedo. “To date, the program has already exceeded the goal set for the first year. We have planted more than 150,000 pine trees of various species according to the characteristics of the land where they are planted. Since this program benefits growers, packers and the society of Mexico at large, activities were carried out in different forms, including reforestation in compact areas, the establishment of perimeter fences, access roads and areas surrounding the orchards with the objective of protecting the orchards from the wind, capturing water and retaining moisture in the soil.”

AMHPAC is equally committed to its sustainability aspects. Viramontes explains, “We’re trying to set a bar in our industry and create a system encompassing food safety, security and sustainable issues. We focus on our core values of productivity and responsibility, security and organization. These incorporate the importance of sustainability, environment and community.”

Many of Giumarra’s growers have a long history of sustainable practices and community development. Ram describes, “One example is the Podesta family, a partner of Giumarra for nearly four decades, who were the first agricultural company in Mexico to receive certification from the Mexican government for their environmental protection efforts. Another example is the Llano family, which hosts a pilot project originally funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation and the Mexican government to study, educate and help migrant farm workers. The project is now run in conjunction with *Centro de Investigacion en Alimentacion y Desarrollo* (CIAD) and includes medical care, dental care, a daycare center and more.”

Retailers can easily utilize POS and packaging materials already promoting these stories. “Our retail-ready packaging has a link to our Web sites providing consumers with even more information,” says Ciruli’s Aguilar. “We have seen success in reaching the end consumer directly, particularly in the case of our Champagne mango site. People call or email us to submit recipes, to ask for more information about our growing and handling practices, or even just to thank us for such a delicious fruit.”

Crops grown by new program, Eleven Rivers Growers, will debut in January 2011, offering retailers another option in the increasing supplier portfolio. The Eleven Rivers Growers program focuses on a Certified: Fresh & Reliable standard. “Our growers meet the strictest standards of safety, reliability, best business practices and unmatched certifica-

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MEXICAN PRODUCE SHOWCASE

“Savvy retailers realize Mexican growers are sophisticated. Retailers should educate themselves about the seasonality and regionality of the crops to help ensure availability and customer satisfaction.”

— Veronica Krushaar, Viva Global Marketing Inc.

tion,” explains Fernando Mariscal, brand representative for Eleven Rivers, in Mexico City, Mexico. “One of the most important benefits of Eleven Rivers is our standard of social and ecological responsibility. We maintain labor, social and ecological responsibility throughout the entire process, ensuring care and attention to produce quality. These practices extend from the soil to packaging for our produce and from education to healthcare for our workers.”

Bottom Line

Retailers will find reward in continuing to promote high quality Mexican items. FPAA’s Jungmeyer explains, “Because it costs so much to get Mexican produce to the border, shippers send only top-of-the-line, export-grade produce. We’ve had retailers comment that the consistent quality is the reason they are devoting more shelf-space to Mexican fruits and vegetables.”

“It all goes back to taste, quality and presentation,” says Kings’ Kneeland. “If the quality is there you can present it better, and if the taste is there, the customers will come back the second time.”

Buyers who continue to educate themselves on what’s happening in Mexico will come out ahead. “Savvy retailers realize Mexican growers are sophisticated,” says Viva’s Kraushaar. “Retailers should educate themselves about the seasonality and regionality of the crops to help ensure availability and customer satisfaction.”

Working closely and communicating directly with supplier and distributors will benefit any retailer. “Align yourself with growers

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Reader Service # 26

TOP LEVEL SUPPORT FOR MEXICAN AGRICULTURE

At PMA's Fresh Summit, Produce Business sat down with some of SAGARPA's (Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture) officials directly involved in the development and promotion of Mexico's agriculture, and specifically produce, to discuss Mexico's evolution in the produce trade. Our conversation included three employees of SAGARPA: Manuel E. Martinez de Leo, ASERCA Chief Director; Gabriel Padilla Maya, General Coordinator for Trade Promotion; and Carlos Vazquez Ochoa, Minister for Agricultural Affairs.

PB: Mexico is really coming-of-age as a produce supplier. The country has always been a producer but it really seems like you're stepping up efforts on every level. What's changing?

Padilla: Mexico's agro-exports to the world are valued at around \$17 billion, with about \$5 billion in fruits and vegetables alone. About 6 percent of this goes to the U.S. market. Mexico has become one of the most important exporters due, in great part, to our advances in production technology, certification and logistics.

Martinez: Mexico has had great success in technical areas in the past 10 years with respect to vegetable production. Our extension of the seasonality has helped expand the business. Before, production and availability were very seasonal, but today our business rivals the best exporting countries in the world. Particularly in fruit and vegetable production, our favorable production climates have enabled us to achieve consistency in quality and yields. We have also excelled in the area of food safety and quality. And, we have states like Sonora, which is close to becoming "free areas" with respect to phytosanitary issues.

Vazquez: We are fortunate because we have the soil, sun, climate and water that allow us to produce excellent crops. In recent years, we've seen a change in mentality from that of just a farmer looking at what he can grow to a more market-oriented producer. It's no longer only about

what we can grow; it's about what the market wants and needs.

PB: Mexico is very strong in conventionally produced crops and also excels in greenhouse production. Are organics on the horizon for export?

Martinez: We're diligently working in the area of organics and we're certifying a good deal of organic products for marketing within Mexico. There is a strong potential with products that are less susceptible to disease like citrus, for example. We see this as a great export area for the future.

Padilla: Mexico's government is on top of this issue. In 2010, we published a federal law on organic production and completed the first national council on organics. These are the first steps in launching a full-scale organic program. We're also increasing participation of organic products in our exporter promotion. For example, this year we're participating in two organic-oriented shows, National Products Expo West and the National Products Expo East.

PB: What about the issues of fair trade and sustainability?

Vazquez: Sustainability is not new to Mexico or Mexican agriculture. Our producers have long understood the importance of preserving and sustaining their natural resources. Mexico has been a leader in generating change to favor the environment. We are creating our own techniques to achieve environmental advances and sustainability in all sectors. It's an important subject for us. We all need to continue working hand-in-hand — organizations, governments and producers must cooperate in order to make the future of our agricultural communities even more prosperous.

Padilla: When we see the "Buy Local" movement in the U.S., we can relate to it because many of our growers are small local farmers working within their community to have a successful business, serve their customers and improve their livelihood. Our promotion programs

demonstrate this. When you see who participates in our trade show booths, it tells you who our focus is on — the farmer. This is in-line with our commitment to cultivate these producers and their communities.

Martinez: Our commitment is also evidenced in formal ways, like our law of Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development. Before the term sustainability was coined, Mexico was already helping our rural communities develop and prosper and a large part of that is through agricultural exports.

PB: So if U.S. buyers want to see first-hand what is going on in Mexico, how can you help them?

Martinez: We welcome all kinds of buyers to visit Mexico to see first-hand our amazing producers and their communities. We've had great visits by supermarkets, distributors and wholesalers to areas like Sinaloa and Sonora. They've come back not only with a great education, but also having formed some lasting relationships.

Vazquez: Our government has programs and systems in place to ensure that whoever wants to visit can maximize their trip in the most efficient way possible. We provide all the support they need including arranging all the logistics, translation and transportation, as well as setting up the actual producer visits. We're also pleased to arrange many of these visits in conjunction with associations like the Food Marketing Institute, National Restaurant Association, Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh.

Padilla: One of the most valuable services we offer is arranging very specific itineraries based on the specific wishes of what the buyer wants to see. It's so important for them to be able to count on us for the complete itinerary and logistical support because it results in the most effective visit for them. We can ensure they're going to the best production zones and meeting the optimal growers for what they specifically are interested in. **pb**

that understand your business, and when you do that you'll be successful," suggests Kneeland. "Then have open communication with them."

"Communication with suppliers is important so retailers can best plan promotions and ensure availability," agrees Dahl's Rissman.

Suppliers look to increased interaction with their buyers. "As an organization, I'd like to increase communication and help buyers develop better relationships with our growers," says AMHPAC's Viramontes. "We're hoping buyers take advantage of our newly established

Arizona office to communicate more frequently with us."

"It's a matter of working with our retail customers and finding ways to build synergy with them using the promotion tools we have developed," advises Aguilar. **pb**



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF GREENE RIVER MARKETING INC.
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF WG ROE



Above: Noble Worldwide educates its Pummelo consumers with bright blue labels that share selection, preparation and nutritional information. Left: The Sugar Belle, which is in its second season, is a Mandarin hybrid.

Seven Strategies To Sell More Specialty Citrus

Customer education, eye-catching displays and smart promotions help push specialty citrus through the winter months. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

The 80-20 rule, or Pareto Principle, certainly applies to citrus. That is, the majority of sales come from a minority of items. More specifically, Navel and Valencia oranges, red and white grapefruit, lemons and limes made up 73.45 percent of citrus category dollar sales in 2009, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm. Yet, times are a changing. Over the past five years, this contribution figure has dropped 7.1 percent, representing a shift in sales to specialty varieties driven by consumer demand for that “something different.”

Merchandising specialty citrus effectively takes a concerted game plan. Jim Weber, produce supervisor at Econo Foods, a 6-store chain based in Brillion, WI, says, “A blood orange or Satsuma Mandarin isn’t something you can just put on the shelf and hope shoppers will find it. You’ve got to position it front-and-center in the display, cut and sample it with customers, tell them what’s special about it, and put it on ad to take some of the risk out

of a first-time purchase. Do this and they’ll be back for more.”

1. Know What Is Specialty Citrus

There’s not a one-size-fits-all definition of specialty citrus. David Mixon, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Seald-Sweet International, in Vero Beach, FL, notes, “For us, specialty means anything outside the core, and the core is oranges and grapefruit.”

“Examples of specialty citrus include Clementines or Mandarins, Meyer or seedless lemons, and certain varieties of oranges such as Cara Cara Navels or Blood Oranges,” lists Scott Owens, vice president of sales and marketing for Paramount Citrus Association, in Delano, CA.

Julie DeWolf, director of retail marketing for Sunkist Growers Inc., in Van Nuys, CA, adds, “Specialty varieties exhibit unique characteristics that set them apart from the main varieties, such as the berry-tinged flavor of a Blood orange or the extra-high concentrations of Vitamin C and A found in a Cara Cara Navel.”

Beyond this, the definition of specialty citrus includes even scarcer varieties such as Australian Finger limes, Variegated Calamondin and Buddha’s Hand Citron, reports Lance Walheim, vice president of variety development for California Citrus Specialties Inc., in Springville, CA. “It’s all about the volume being grown, the availability and how recently a variety was introduced,” he reasons.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, CA, says, “At store level, you’ll probably find most specialty citrus varieties in a metropolitan area, but not at every store. Retailers will choose what they carry based on demographics and consumer demand, as well as what will give them a point of distinction and differentiation.”

2. Strategize Your Offerings

The number of citrus specialties available peaks from November to May. Retailers take advantage of this bounty by offering customers an ample selection. Paul Kneeland, vice presi-

“It’s a nice category idea to keep all the citrus together, but it would create a mass of orange and you’d lose the distinction of individual varieties. Cross-merchandising citrus next to other fruit really makes the citrus displays pop.”

— Jim Weber, *Econo Foods*

dent of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, says, “We carry the more mainstream specialties such as Clementines, Honeybell Tangelos and Satsuma Mandarins, as well as unique products such as Buddha’s Hand, Calamondin and Kaffir limes.”

“Clementines, and the crop that follows them, W. Murcott mandarins, are the top-selling specialty items today,” reports Sunkist’s DeWolf. “Millions of boxes of these products flow through retailer shelves due to these varieties’ sweet taste and easy-peel skin. Plantings have greatly increased in the past five years, and as a result, Mandarins are now widely available from December through May.”

Luke Sears, president of L.G.S. Specialty Sales Ltd., in the Bronx, NY, says, “What’s new is year-round supply of Clementines. California, Spain and Morocco are the main suppliers during the winter months and we import fruit from Chile, Peru and South Africa during the summer.”

Sales of Clementines increased 67.2 percent over the past five years, contributing 19.3 percent of category dollar sales in 2009, according to the Perishables Group.

This will be the second season that Greene River Marketing Inc., in Vero Beach, FL, will grow and market the new Sugar Belle, a Mandarin hybrid with Clementine and Honeybell or Minneola Tangelo parentage developed at the University of Florida’s Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred and licensed by the Lakeland, FL-based New Varieties Development and Management Corporation (NVDMC). Sugar Belle plantings currently cover approximately 75 to 80 acres with about 20,000 45-lb. boxes produced last year, says Peter Chaires, the NVDMC’s executive director. “Acreage will increase over the next few years.”

Dave Haller, Greene River’s vice president of North America sales, says, “We provided retailers with information about the variety, then got them samples straight from the fields, and they were so excited they brought the fruit in and trialed it with customers last season. It was very well received. This season, we have even more retailers that want to carry the fruit. Ide-

ally, we’d like to harvest the fruit in early December, but if you pick a Sugar Belle too early they have a lot of acid, so timing is critical for repeat sales and overall acceptance.”

“Page and Pixie Tangerines are Mandarin varieties catching on with consumers,” reports Melissa’s Schueller, “Page tangerines are sweet, juicy and seedless and available from mid-December to February, while Pixies are seedless, easy-to-peel and ship from January through March.”

DeWolf adds, “The late season Golden Nugget mandarin is another up-and-comer.”

One of the newest Mandarins on the market in December is the seedless Kishu, reveals California Citrus Specialties’ Walheim. “It’s sweet and small with a ‘pop-off’ rind that kids love,” he describes.

“On the orange front,” continues DeWolf, “we are finally beginning to break through to the masses with the Cara Cara Navel and gain a loyal following.”

Econo Food’s Weber agrees. “Cara Caras are definitely moving more mainstream. We get them in as soon as we can and carry them for as long as we can; they’ve become that popular. I think consumers like the pink-colored flesh,” he discloses.

Pummelos and Oro Blancos are emerging grapefruit-like specialties. The Pummelos contribution to citrus category dollar sales. While still less than 1 percent in sales, they increased by 20 percent over the past five years, according to the Perishables Group.

“Traditionally popular with Asian consumers, the biggest growth in Pummelo sales today is with the Caucasian shopper,” reveals Quentin Roe, vice president of Noble Worldwide Florida Citrus Sales, in Winter Haven, FL.

“As for more acidic citrus,” LGS’ Sears says, “Meyer lemons are gaining acceptance in food-service. There are rumors of a seedless lemon in development, but I think commercial production is still about five years away.”

3. Determine A Marketing Plan

With feedback from customers, growers and retailers need to collectively determine how specialty citrus is best marketed, contends

NVDMC’s Chaires. “Should we group 10 different hybrids that resemble one another under a specific brand name and market them over a longer window? Or, should we market a specific variety in its own right, let it stand alone, and tell its unique story — like the apple category?”

There’s certainly merit to the first approach. Just look at the success of the Cuties brand, a joint marketing venture launched in 2004 by Paramount Citrus and Sun Pacific Shippers, which encompasses two varieties of Clementines and Mercott Mandarins available from November through April. Paramount’s Owens says, “Growth has been by leaps and bounds, and it’s all been incremental sales.”

However, some industry marketers feel that specialty citrus growers should heed what’s happened in the treefruit industry, where most fruit is sold as either white- or yellow-fleshed and consumption has trended down over the years. Instead, they feel the best approach is to promote individual varieties.

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda’s Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA, agrees. “I think we’ll see more specialty citrus being promoted by variety. For example, instead of a Blood Orange, we’ll see these marketed by their varietal names like Moro, Sanguinelli and Tarocco. In addition, we’ll start to see growers saying, for example, ‘In January, I have Honey Tangerines and in February, Meiwa Kumquats.’ Retailers can, in turn, talk up what these varieties are and their flavor profile. This gets customers excited and inspired, rather than wondering why they got a good orange last week and one that isn’t as good this week.”

4. Choose Your Pack

The U.S. consumer was once unwilling to buy small pieces of citrus fruit, points out Seald Sweet’s Mixon. “But packaging changed all that,” he says. “The 5-lb. box — either wood or cardboard — really helped move products such as Clementines.”

Today, bags are starting to take over. Owens says, “The hot trend now is high-graphic bags in 2-, 3- and 5-lb. sizes. We started to see this trend two years ago. It came on last year in a big way and this year it will be a real sales driver.”

Econo Food’s Weber agrees: “Sales of 3-lb. bags have overtaken the 5-lb. box in our stores.”

Melissa’s Schueller adds, “Two-lb. bags with handles allow retailers to hang the product up over the main display or in a secondary display area when space is short.”

Some feel packaging should not obstruct the view of the fruit inside, while others feel that education and on-pack information is vital. Mixon contends. “This is why we’re see-



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Reader Service # 5

ing more poly-mesh combo packs or film wrap around mesh bags," he says.

Sunkist's DeWolf agrees. "Selling specialty citrus is all about education of the consumer, and packaging is not an exception," she asserts. "Providing a combination of interesting graphics, taste attributes, nutritional information, varietal characteristics and recipes informs consumers and excites them about the product. We are using high-graphic Giro bags in variable sizes to communicate some of these attributes on products such as Cara Cara Navels."

"Clamshell packaging has been used, to a small extent, for some of the super-specialty items that command a premium price to cover the cost of the container and labor in hand-packing," points out Paramount's Owens.

Last summer, Greene River Packing shipped its Sugar Belles in a 4-lb. clamshell. "We look at what was in the market during that six-week window and there was a 5-lb. Clementine and a 3-lb. Sunburst Tangerine," says Haller. "So we worked with our retailers to offer a 4-lb. clamshell that offered something different from a price and size standpoint. Plus, the bright orange fruit really stood out in the clear clamshell."

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5. Display With Eye Appeal

At King Super Markets, displays are all about color. "For example," says Kneeland, "we'll have a display of Honeycrisp apples and in the center a basket of Buddha's Hand citrus. It presents a contrast in both color and shape and grabs the customer's eye."

Similarly, at Econo Foods, citrus is displayed next to pears and apples as color breaks. "It's a nice category idea to keep all the citrus together," says Weber, "but it would create a mass of orange and you'd lose the distinction of individual varieties. Cross-merchandising citrus next to other fruit really makes the citrus displays pop."

Citrus takes center stage in most produce departments during the winter, acknowledges Melissa's Schueller. "Since specialty citrus usually occupies a smaller area — maybe 5 to 20 percent of the orange category, depending on the store — some produce managers will use end caps to gain additional space and really highlight these items."

Paramount's Owens reports, "More than 60 percent of specialty citrus is purchased off display, in other words, not from the primary display."

Sunkist offers retailers attractive secondary display units. "These displays have various footprints to suit retailer needs, and one to three cartons of fruit," DeWolf explains. "The main benefit is that retailers do not have to clear shelf space, and because the units come with educational header cards, they don't have to provide any additional information to convince consumers to buy."

6. Tell The Story

One-on-one is how Kings' Kneeland likes his produce staff to communicate with customers about specialty citrus. "We send out a weekly bulletin to all produce managers with special notes and directives as well as links to Web sites that tell them about an item, how to pick it, store it and use it in recipes," he explains. "In addition, we sign each item with two-fold information: a description and usages."

The produce managers are our biggest champions in the retail environment, acknowledges Sunkist's DeWolf. "Having simple POS materials up can go far in convincing consumers to purchase."

Marc Solomon, president of Fisher Capespan U.S.A. LLC, in Gloucester City, NJ, asserts, "In-store demos are an excellent way to get consumers to try new varieties. These, along with fact sheets and usage ideas or recipes, help educate new users."

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Reader Service # 2

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“We send out a weekly bulletin to all produce managers with special notes and directives as well as links to Web sites that tell them about an item, how to pick it, store it and use it in recipes. In addition, we sign each item with two-fold information: a description and usages.”

— Paul Kneeland, Kings Super Markets

cate customers about the Pummelo. It’s new star-shaped, bright blue, trademarked label affixes to this large yellow fruit and offers customers ready information on four points: selection, preparation, interior characteristics and nutritional information. Roe says, “The Pummelo, which looks like a grapefruit on steroids, has been a tough sell for a number of years. Now, with this new label, customers know what they’re buying and sales have really taken off.”

Fun facts that link to something customers are already familiar with are a good way to sell specialty citrus, advises California Citrus Specialties’ Walheim. “For example, the Yuzu is a key ingredient in Ponzu sauce and other Japan-

ese dishes. Most people know this in the juice, not the fresh form. Also, the leaves on the Kaf-fir Lime are an invaluable seasoning in many Asian recipes, including Thai coconut soup. Make this connection with customers.”

7. Promote Tirelessly

Seasonal availability and premium pricing are two challenges — and opportunities — when it comes to effectively promoting specialty citrus. “Short windows,” notes Paramount’s Owens, “offer retailers the chance to ‘wow’ customers and differentiate themselves by making a big splash over something special that’s only available for a limited time.”

Seald Sweet’s Mixon, agrees. “You can

promote either in a flyer or ad or at store level with wording such as ‘Just in — Temple Oranges’, or ‘It’s Temple Orange Time’ to create excitement.”

Specialty citrus is generally more expensive than mainstream fruit, acknowledges Melissa’s Schueller. “For example, a Blood Orange may sell for \$1.99 per pound and a regular Navel for 99-cents,” he points out. “If the consumer thinks these are the same, the obvious choice is with the lower cost item. This is where education comes in.”

Price isn’t necessarily the point of advertising specialty citrus at Kings, says Kneeland. “Sometimes, we’ll promote an item to let customers know we have it available and what makes it special.”

Price figures in some promotions at Econo Foods, admits Weber. “Once or twice a season we’ll run a specialty citrus theme ad with six or eight varieties. For example, last year, we advertised varieties such as Cara Cara Navels, Honeybell Tangelos, Blood Oranges and Pummelos all for 98-cents per pound to encourage customers to mix and match. We didn’t make anything on the Blood Oranges or Pummelos, but customers did come back to buy after the promotion. That’s what counts.” **pb**

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Stonefruit and avocados are just two of the many items grown in Chile.

Ring In The New Year With Chilean Fruit Sales

Consistent high quality fruit from the Southern Hemisphere will keep consumers happy all winter long. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

As the New Year brings resolutions for healthier lifestyles and eating habits, retailers can take advantage of the variety, quality and innovation offered in the area of Chilean fruit to address these customer concerns. “As the focus changes from the holidays to the start of a new year, it’s a great opportunity for retailers to focus on health and wellness by continuing to promote fresh fruit,” states Tristan Kieva, director of marketing and business development for Pandol Bros. Inc., based in Delano, CA. “The availability of Chilean fruit is a good way for retailers to keep up the sales momentum they’ve had with fruit programs throughout the summer and fall, especially when the quality and availability of Chilean fruit is at its best. As consumers incorporate more fruits into their diets, they often demand access to fruit on a year-round basis. Why not capitalize on that demand?”

“There is so much in the media about eating a well diversified and healthful diet,” says Mimi Dorsey, West Coast business manager for The Giumarra Companies, in Los Angeles, CA. “Chilean summer fruit brings additional

options to consumers who are looking for nutritious alternatives during the winter months.”

Chile’s wide variety of quality products and promotable volumes present a wealth of opportunity for retailers to get their customers excited about Chilean winter fruit. “Key items are grapes, apples, pears, blueberries, citrus, avocados and stone fruit, including apricots, plums, peaches, nectarines and cherries,” says Josh Leichter, grape category director and East Coast vice president of sales for The Oppenheimer Group, in Coquitlam, BC, Canada. “We represent about 30 growers located strategically throughout Chile to optimize our supply base in order to serve our customers well. We offer both air and vessel programs and a wide range of value-added packs. In the 2010-11 season, we expect to see a five to 10 percent jump in our Chilean stone fruit and grape offerings, with cherries forecast to represent the majority of the increase.”

“Chile gives us availability of high quality fruits and vegetables all year long,” says Craig Uchizono, Southern Hemisphere vice president for The Giumarra Companies. “This results in more options for the consumer, and more dollars spent in the produce department.”

The industry expects significant increases in some varieties of fruit this year. “Weather conditions have been favorable for the production of most fruit,” reports Manuel Alcaino, founder, owner and president of Decofrut, a company based in Santiago, Chile that offers fresh fruit quality certification services for export to destination markets. “Cherry exports are projected to increase by around 80 percent over the previous season, accounting for nearly 11 to 12 million cases. Since these increased volumes are significant, proper scheduling of shipping should be the main area of concern for supplying the market.”

In With The New

While Chile is an experienced supplier, they continue to press ahead with new varieties and products. “Pomegranates are an exciting item we’ll be marketing from Chile for the first time this year,” says Leichter. “It’s a great opportunity to extend the season of this healthful, in-demand item. Retailers should also look out for specialty and varietal grapes and stone fruit.”

“Pomegranates and baby kiwi were approved last spring for entry to the United



States, and the feedback we have received has been extremely positive," reports Uchizono. "Chilean citrus is also relatively new, and we have been very impressed with its quality."

"Pandol is one of few importers handling Chilean pomegranates available in April and May," adds Kieva. "We began the program last season, but at the tail end and without much volume. This coming season we will have good volume from the start."

Production in Chile lends itself to variety

development as well as organic production. "Chile seems to have the newer, more improved varieties," notes David Posner, president and CEO of Awe Sum Organics Inc., located in Santa Cruz, CA. "Given Chile's quality production and the popularity of blueberries, this is an exciting organic item for winter. In general, the blueberry category just keeps growing in demand, with a lot of information out about the health benefits of eating blueberries. They are sweet and ready to eat out of hand or added to a variety of popular foods... and children love them, too."

Posner continues, "Organic cherries from Chile are always tasty, and people enjoy the novelty of having cherries in the wintertime because we normally only see them in the late spring and early summer. While virtually all markets that carry organic fruit want a steady supply year-round, most markets that carry organic cherries consider them a seasonal item."

Retailers would like to see more organic and sustainable items from Chile. Matt Landi, produce director for the six-store, Santa Cruz, CA-based chain, New Leaf Community Markets, says, "Our customers are concerned about the carbon footprint and sustainability issues. It would be great if the Chileans focus on those

issues. We'd have great demand for organic grapes coming out of Chile in the winter. Grapes are a staple item and organic customers would like to have organic grapes. This is a huge opportunity that is not being taken advantage right now."

Quality Assured

Chile has long had a reputation for providing top quality products. "The Chileans do an excellent job with the quality of their product," recognizes Koby Peterson, produce manager for Ed's IGA Supermarket, an independent store in Snowflake, AZ. "Product from Chile is always very good."

"Chilean fruit growers are among the most sophisticated in the world," states Mark Greenberg, senior vice president and chief operating officer for Fisher Capespan Canada Inc. Distribution, in Montreal, QC, Canada. "Producers and exporters in Chile are servicing the most discriminating retail customers in the world, including North America and Europe. Most Chilean packing facilities and exporters are accredited by various private organizations in order to ensure farms are using sound agricultural practices and that the produce is packed in clean sanitary environments. It costs an

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“Chile is top of the industry when it comes to grading and quality control. They are under great pressure to satisfy all demands from our government. Our Chilean growers go above and beyond what is asked of them because they know that quality and condition sell...”

— Brad Cantwell, Dole Deciduous

exporter a lot of money to pack and ship fruit to far away markets. If the product arrives and does not meet the retailers' quality standards, it is the grower who bears the cost.”

Tom Tjerandsen, North American managing director for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) in Sonoma, CA, adds, “Given the substantial expense of shipping fruit north, it's in the best interest of exporters to be certain the fruit is of the highest quality. They want to ensure it arrives in saleable condition.”

Chilean exports must meet criteria from various overseers including the Chilean industry and the U.S. government. Tjerandsen explains, “The U.S. Department of Agriculture has U.S. inspectors on-site in Chile. Shippers also know that U.S. receivers are very focused on ensuring only top quality fruit is received from Chile.”

“Chile is on top of the industry when it comes to grading and quality control,” adds Brad Cantwell, vice president of North America for Philadelphia, PA-based Dole Deciduous. “They are under great pressure to satisfy all demands from our government. Our Chilean growers go above and beyond what is asked of them because they know that quality and condition sell, but anything less does not.”

Most shippers and receivers implement their own QC controls as well. “Oppenheimer diligently applies quality control disciplines throughout the supply chain for all of our items,” asserts Leichter. “We have agronomists in the various Chilean growing regions, advising growers about the grading expectations of our customers and monitoring the protocols. Multiple inspections take place in Chile and stateside before delivery.”

“Chile's standards for grading and quality

“For berries, the industry is increasing its focus on promotable larger packs to provide value for the consumer, attract more high-volume blueberry shoppers into the department and increase retail sales volumes.”

— Bruce Turner, Giumarra VBM International Berry LLC

control have to be high in order to meet the most stringent standards in markets worldwide,” states Giumarra’s Uchizono. “Retailers can be assured that the product from Chile meets or exceeds what they are receiving from domestic suppliers.”

Packaging Developments

The Chilean industry is also making strides in developing new packaging and presentation to further move product. “We have seen an increased demand for special packaging for fruit coming out of Chile,” reports Pandol’s Kieva. “Many retailers are looking to keep their offerings consistent as they transition through the various growing seasons. We are doing more program business on clamshell packaging and have expanded our capabilities to deliver this and other special packs to our customers on both coasts in the United States.”

“Packaging has been a key to the success of many stores,” says Cantwell. “Club stores using larger clamshell packages along with some traditional retailers using 2- and even 1-lb. clamshells have triggered new business.”

Retailers may see evolving package options for berries and cherries. “During the peak volume of our organic blueberry program, we’ll be shipping in 12 6-oz. clamshells as well as offering a pack of 12 pints by special order for promotions,” reports Awe Sum Organics’ Posner. “We only offer the pints during the period with peak volumes, which is early to mid-January to the end of February.”

Bruce Turner, blueberry category manager and director of operations for Giumarra VBM International Berry LLC, in Wenatchee, WA, states, “For berries, the industry is increasing its focus on promotable larger packs to provide value for the consumer, attract more high-volume blueberry shoppers into the department and increase retail sales volumes. The peak time period to promote pints and larger packs will be from early January through the end of February, when the crop is peaking at optimum flavor and quality.”

“Depending on the product, there is a greater added-value in some presentations,” says Decofrut’s Alcaino. “In the case of blueberries, the trend of heavier individual formats

has proven quite effective for consumers, as it generates significant increase in sales. There are some important developments in the case of cherries, mainly marketing in bagged formats or 1-lb. clamshells.”

“We’re thinking about experimenting with the packaging of our organic cherries this year,” reports Posner. “Traditionally, they are packed in zipper bags of random weight and have to be weighed at the register. We’re looking at packing them in clamshells with a fixed weight and a barcode, which would provide a guaranteed organic ring at the register and a little more protection for the fruit.”

Create Communication

Good communication with suppliers is the foundation of a successful Chilean fruit promotion. “Produce changes very quickly,” says Jim Pandol, president of Pandol Associates Marketing Inc., in Delano, CA. “The faster retailers can adapt to the situation the better. There are factors beyond the control of the growers affecting the supply. Better communications through the supply chain, in both directions, lead to better decisions.”

“A good example is what happened last year with the earthquake and the resulting insecurity felt by some retailers in relation to the supply of fruit,” explains Decofrut’s Alcaino. “Buyers must have a clear idea of the products they are going to promote and know which products are suitable for promotion. Hence the importance of having more globalized information on what is happening.”

CFFA’s Tjerandsen stresses the importance of having a reciprocal information flow. “Information is a two way street,” he says. “We provide tools and materials we believe will help retailers, but they’re on the firing line and have a much better idea of exactly what can help. It’s invaluable when we receive feedback from retailers and we can work with them.”

“It isn’t what is being exchanged, but that it is,” adds Pandol Bros.’ Kieva. “It’s so important for there to be an open line of communication between the retailer and their supplier partners. Especially when successfully executing a Chilean season, everyone must be informed on what retailer expectations are and what is being



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done on the supply side to meet/exceed them. Whether the information is about crop condition, availability, or timing, it needs to be a coordinated effort between all contact points to ensure its success.”

Constructive Tools

Fortunately, retailers have a variety of constructive tools available to help them access the information they need. Pandol suggests, “The internet is the most powerful information tool our industry has had since the telephone. If

both ends of the supply chain were using it to pass information about markets and supply, and actually acting upon it, we would have a more efficient distribution system and consumers would ultimately be better served.”

The CFFA also provides many tools to help fill information gaps, including a retail department training aid. “We know retailers have a difficult time retaining produce managers at the store level and it’s a constant challenge to retrain them,” explains Tjerandsen. “We have just finished a comprehensive training video covering

“Information is a two way street. We provide tools and materials we believe will help retailers, but they’re on the firing line and have a much better idea of exactly what can help. It’s invaluable when we receive feedback from retailers and we can work with them.”

— Tom Tjerandsen, Chilean Fresh Fruit Association

two principal topics: one on care and handling and another on merchandising ideas. It’s on the Chilean Fresh Fruit Web site and can be downloaded or ordered as a DVD.”

Chile also boasts several well-respected sources of information on shipping and marketing. In 2009, the Association of Chilean Fruit Exporters (ASOEX) and the Federation of Chilean Producers (Fedefruta) initiated a tool called SIMFRUIT (Fruit Market Intelligence System). “This Web site presents a wide variety of information related to the fresh fruit industry,” says Alcaino. “Market reports, fruit sales prices, crop reports, export estimates, official Chilean fresh fruit exports figures and news releases are just part of the options to which the Chilean and international companies can subscribe and access at the system.”

One online news site, FreshFruitPortal.com, covers countries supplying the Northern Hemisphere’s counter season, and is free of charge. Gustavo Yentzen, owner and president of Yentzen Consulting in Santiago, Chile, the company behind the site, explains, “The site offers a mix of original news reporting, comparative crop and market reports, and summaries of reports in local newspapers, all written specifically for fruit professionals.”

This site is the sister site of PortalFruticola.com, which has covered the industry for three years in Spanish. “We sensed a need for information in English,” continues Yentzen. “A steady portion of our traffic to PortalFruticola.com was coming from the United States and Europe, so we decided to expand our offer.”

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Reader Service # 13

Wholesalers Viewed As Convenient Alternative For Foodservice Buyers

Traditional produce wholesalers and terminal market wholesalers provide services to foodservice buyers that keep them coming back for more. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



Terminal markets offer hard-to-find products, as well as good buys on the everyday staples.

When fine dining establishments decide where to buy their produce, it is not always based solely on cost. It is also usually not mainly about delivery, credit or other conveniences offered by some wholesalers. When the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association (NRA), the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), headquartered in Newark, DE, and the McLean, VA-based International Foodservice Distributors Association (IFDA) commissioned a detailed survey of restaurant industry produce usage in 2009, the answer came back loud and clear that for fine dining restaurants, freshness, flavor and taste trump all other factors in deciding where to buy produce. The finer restaurants were less interested than family or casual dining establishments, on the other hand, in price or the ability to get specific produce items any time of the year.

“Restaurants can buy anywhere they want, but they usually use a foodservice supplier for that,” says Maurice Trudel, owner of Maurice

Trudel Brokerage Co., based in Everett, MA. “In the wholesale market you have numerous vendors and they start opening at two, three or four o’clock in the morning, and the restaurants close late at night. You would have to get up early and go to each vendor to make your purchase,” Trudel says.

The foodservice suppliers provide the convenience of delivery, and of one-stop shopping for a wide range of items. But there are almost as many ways to mix and match the many produce sources as there are restaurants. “It depends on the size of the restaurant, and we have restaurants of all sizes in Philadelphia,” explains John Vena, owner of John Vena Inc., headquartered in Philadelphia, PA. “Some are small and go to produce stores or supermarkets. Some use both a produce distributor for their produce and a full-service distributor for the other items they need.”

Only a handful of restaurants take the time to come to the terminal produce market in person, and when they do, it is rarely to take advantage of the lowest wholesale prices.

Get Up Close And Personal With Your Produce

Vena sees a handful of chefs from fine dining establishments who personally walk the Philadelphia Produce Market to get the closest possible look, smell and taste of the produce. “We have chefs who come in once a week, or two to three times a month, to take a look and see what’s new,” Vena shares. “I’ve seen chefs who would close down the restaurant and then come in at two in the morning and pick up something for the next day. There are also chefs who come by just to explore, and they don’t know what they’re going to find until they’ve found it.”

The terminal market does have the lowest wholesale produce prices, and that is attractive, too. “Price is a part of why you would come to the terminal market,” Vena admits. “You are using your own labor, fuel and vehicle, so you can save on the mark up there. While price might be part of why chefs go to the terminal market, it is not nearly the biggest part. “The largest advantage is that when you come to the

“We have chefs who come in once a week, or two to three times a month, to take a look and see what’s new. I’ve seen chefs who would close down the restaurant and then come in at two in the morning and pick up something for the next day. There are also chefs who come by just to explore, and they don’t know what they’re going to find until they’ve found it.”

— John Vena, John Vena Inc.

terminal market, any customer can see, smell and even taste the produce,” he adds.

The same phenomena can be seen at terminal markets all the way on the other side of the country from Philadelphia. “Mom-and-Pop restaurants sometimes walk the market and do their shopping. They only have one restaurant and they’re really connected to the food they serve,” says Emily Fragoso, marketing manager at Coast Produce Co., in Los Angeles, CA.

The chefs who come to the terminal market in the wee hours of the morning usually have a very personal connection with their produce. “In this market, you sometimes see chefs walking around,” acknowledges Paul Manfre, general manager of sales and procurement at Top Katz Brokers LLC, located in the Bronx, NY. “They want to pick out their own stuff. The best buyer in the world is the person who’s going to actually use the produce.”

Another way to be intimately familiar with the produce is to buy it from local farmers. “If buying local is important to them, they could do business with local farmers if it’s in season,” Manfre adds.

The NRA survey revealed that more than 60 percent of fine dining establishments do indeed buy from local growers, and those that do so buy from an average of six local growers. This makes fine dining restaurants more than three times as likely to buy from local growers as casual dining restaurants. Moreover, fully 90 percent of the fine dining restaurant owners would like to have contact with growers and would also like their cooking staff to have that contact.

Many restaurants are tailoring their menus to use produce that is locally grown, and therefore, in season. “There’s been a trend in fine dining establishments to have a more seasonal menu, and it fits to have arrangements with local growers,” explains John Doulergis, who owned a restaurant in Pennsylvania for more than 20 years before becoming vice president of operations at the Philadelphia-based Pennsylvania Restaurant Association (PRA).

Another reason so many fine dining restaurants go to their local farmers is that nearly 80 percent of them, according to the survey, like to serve produce items you just can’t find at the supermarket. This is also an incentive for some restaurants to personally visit the terminal market. “The majority of restaurants don’t shop at terminal markets, but some high-end restaurants looking for something unique might go there,” Doulergis says.

“There are a handful of rugged individuals who come down to the terminal market, but it takes time — and years of experience — to learn how to buy at the terminal market,” contends Matthew D’Arrigo, vice president of D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., in the Bronx, NY. “Most restaurants leave it to the purveyors.”

Typically, restaurants get their produce through national foodservice companies such

as Cisco, US Foodservice or Fresh Point, or through one of the regional food service companies in their area. A major reason to go this route is the convenience of having the produce delivered. Coast Produce’s Fragoso agrees, “Most restaurants go through food service distributors who make deliveries.”

Delivering The Goods

The terminal market is a great place to get the closest possible look at the produce, as well as the lowest wholesale price. But then comes the problem of getting this fine food back to the restaurant. “The porters here will bring it to their truck, but nobody’s going to deliver 10 packages from the market,” says Manfre of Top Katz.

The wholesalers at the terminal market do not find it worthwhile to deliver to individual restaurants. “We sell to both restaurants and foodservice companies, but we don’t make any deliveries to restaurants,” asserts Vena of John Vena. “Many of our customers come in and pick up their own product, but direct sales to restaurants aren’t a great part of our business. There are 26 other vendors located in the facility we’re in, and that’s our competition.”

In addition to the national foodservice companies, there are many local purveyors in every major city who will buy produce at the terminal market and deliver it to individual restaurants. “In New York, there are quite a few options,” says D’Arrigo. “There is an active and successful restaurant supply segment. There are at least 100 small purveyors from one truck





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to 150 trucks, and they are all after the independent restaurant business. Any restaurant has more than a dozen options for getting their produce," he continues. "They probably think they're saving money by doing the purveyor's job, but I don't think they are because they're not as good as the purveyors."

Just the cost of picking up the produce and driving it back to the restaurant is usually not worth it. "If a small guy wants to buy 15 packages a day and the distributor makes \$4 a package, that's \$60," calculates Manfre. "There's a \$10 toll each way from Long Island to the Hunt's Point Market; then there's your gas, your truck and your time. The cost is more than \$60. If a guy is going to get 300 packages, that might be a different story. We sell to the larger foodservice companies, and even some of those larger companies have taken their own trucks off their short orders."

One Size Does Not Fit All

For restaurant orders, a major consideration is the order size orders required by produce suppliers. "As a restaurant operator, an important criteria is the unit size," says PRA's Doulergis. "The particular brand matters, too, for something like tomatoes."

"There are a handful of rugged individuals who come down to the terminal market, but it takes time — and years of experience — to learn how to buy at the terminal market. Most restaurants leave it to the purveyors."

— Matthew D'Arrigo, D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc.

The large size of the lots at the terminal markets encourages restaurants to go through local or national foodservice companies. "Most of these restaurants don't buy in large lots," Trudel of Trudel Brokerage says. "Ninety percent of them go through foodservice companies. I sell to foodservice companies, but not directly to restaurants."

Only a handful of items can be purchased in quantities that make sense for relatively small restaurants. "We say we have no minimum purchases, but the produce comes in case sizes," Vena of John Vena points out. "We do repack some items like garlic or ginger, which come in 30- to 40-lb. boxes, down to 5 pound boxes."

This is where the foodservice purveyors are able to step in and deliver produce in the

right quantity. "We don't have a stated minimum," reveals Marcus Agresta, sales and marketing director at Piazza Produce Inc., in Indianapolis, IN. "We try to look at each situation individually."

It's The Extras That Count

Piazza Produce makes deliveries to restaurants and also offers a line of processed fresh fruits and vegetables. "We have a full-line of fresh produce and herbs; and we have a full line of processed fruits and vegetables as well," Agresta says.

Most foodservice purveyors also offer credit, especially to their long-term regular restaurant customers. "We give them a credit application," states Agresta. "If they sign a personal guarantee, we give them credit right

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away. If they don't sign, we check their credit references." At Piazza, 28 days is the longest credit limit.

Kegel's Produce, in Lancaster, PA, offers varying amounts of credit for 15, 30 or 45 days, or even two months. "It depends on the size of

the order, and on our past history with the customer," says Josh Baker, administrative assistant to the vice president at Kegel's.

Kegel's also puts out a regular newsletter to let customers know what is available and what is coming, and to explain sudden changes in produce prices. The company can also make custom fresh-cut products to order. "We have a line of about 200 fresh-cut products, and with two chefs on staff we have the capability to do custom fresh-cuts," Baker says.

Convenience has been taken to the level that it is no longer necessary to pick up the phone to place a produce order. "Online ordering is popular with the customers," adds Baker. "You'll have a customer call and place an order, or go online and place an order. It is pulled by customer service and sent out the following day on a delivery truck. We go as low as \$100 deliveries."

Another major issue facing restaurants is availability that shifts with the season. "A lot of your choices are based on what is available, because it is seasonal," reminds Doulgeris of the PRA. "In the winter months you don't have as much variety. For example, with the mesclun lettuce mixes companies, are trying to change their varieties with the season."

Some produce distributors specialize in filling those gaps. "The value-added that we bring is logistics," asserts Grant Hunt, president of Grant J. Hunt Co., in Oakland, CA. "We can access produce from many states in volumes less than a truckload, and we can do it every day. We like to think price is not the final answer. We bring the ability to get many varieties of produce within a category from many areas,"

Grant Hunt Co. provides this service to foodservice firms, who in turn pass on the hard-to-find produce to restaurants. "We sell to foodservice companies and bid for their business," Hunts explains. "We deliver to their distribution centers, but not to individual restaurants. We deal with the largest food distributors in the country, and with regional food distributors, too."

The need for convenience has spawned an entire sector that provides indispensable produce acquisition and delivery services to most restaurants. "Nobody has time to do anything anymore," says Trudel of Trudel Brokerage. "Does anyone have time to go to a butcher shop for their meat, a produce store for their fruits and vegetables, and other stores for the rest of their shopping? You send your order in and get it delivered to your door." **pb**

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Top Tips For Warming Up Tropical Fruit Sales

Enticing displays and consumer education can move tropical produce off shelves and into shopping carts. **BY PAULA HENDRICKSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIEDA'S INC.

When bananas are included in a tropical display, they are usually varieties other than the staple Cavendish.

By definition, tropical produce is grown in tropical climates, yet few consumers perceive the common Cavendish banana as tropical. “Bananas do fall under the tropical category, but they’ve become a mainstay item like apples, tomatoes, potatoes or onions,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales at Vision Import Group LLC, based in River Edge, NJ.

“The biggest drivers in the tropical category are obviously bananas, pineapples and mangos,” reports Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Los Alamitos, CA-based Frieda’s Inc. “After that, the sales are so miniscule in comparison that they are not practical to measure. Most retailers offer them to enhance their image to consumers, not because they are significant sellers.”

Buoyed by reports declaring it to be a “tropical super fruit,” interest in papaya is soaring. Coconut, plantains, key limes, avocados, passion fruit, guava and star fruit can be found in many larger supermarkets, while exotic tropicals such as rambutan, carambola, dragon fruit, lychees and longans are appearing in a growing number of produce departments

around the country, leaving some retailers wondering whether it’s best to give tropicals their own corner of the produce department or sprinkle them throughout the department.

“When we offer bananas in a tropical motif, it’s the different varieties, not so much the Cavendish variety,” details Ed Osowski, director of produce for Martin’s Supermarkets, a 20-store chain headquartered in South Bend, IN. “We do more with baby bananas, red bananas and even plantains.” The chain doesn’t necessarily focus on tropical promotions. “We run tropicals all the time — some have become almost staple items for us. We’ll go out of the ordinary and do something with dragon fruit to try to change things up a bit, but we make sure we tell the story so people know what they’re buying and will have some uses to go with it.”

Grouping tropicals together — often adjacent to ordinary bananas — is a common practice. “It’s effective because you’re catering to a certain client within your customer base [those familiar with tropical produce],” Cohen offers. “They want to go to one spot and find it all. Other people are less familiar; maybe they were watching the Food Network, saw a recipe

they really liked and are searching for ingredients. If they have to go all around the store, they might miss it. So having everything in one central location seems like the way to go.”

“Although emerging tropical products benefit from being grouped together, retailers should look for ways to integrate more tropical produce into their general aisles,” advises Mary Ostlund, director of marketing at Homestead, FL-based Brooks Tropicals LLC.

Doria Potts-Blonder, sales and marketing director of New Limeco LLC, in Princeton, FL, thinks some tropicals might benefit from not being lumped under one banner. “More tropicals are becoming mainstream, staple items and don’t need to all be grouped together,” she says. “Avocados do well with tomatoes, as well as with limes. By putting some of these tropical items in with staples, it gets them in the line of sight for some people who might not look in the tropical fruit section, and it gives them an idea for using a tropical item in place of an every day staple to give a tropical twist on an old favorite.”

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“We have opportunities to create interesting marketing and merchandising displays by something as simple as taking a papaya, hollowing out the seed cavity and merchandising the cut papaya with strawberries, blackberries or blueberries.

— Charlie Eagle, Southern Specialties Inc.

suppliers agree that the key to selling more tropical fruit lies in education.

Finding ways to introduce customers to the bounty of tropical fruits is crucial. “If you go to a shop and see dragon fruit or mangosteen or rambutan, are you going to buy it?” asks Homero De Barros, owner and president of HLB Tropical Food USA Inc., located in Pompano Beach, FL. “No. Why are you not going to buy it? Because you don’t know how to eat it, you don’t know what the fruit tastes like.” Introducing consumers to tropical fruit and educating them about it can be expensive, but it can also be simple, as shown through our experts’ eight tips:

1. Know Your Customers

“It sounds over simplistic, but you need to figure out exactly who your customer base is,” says Mike Potts, vice president of sales for Turbana Corp., headquartered in Coral Gables, FL. Don’t assume all Hispanics eat plantains. Don’t refuse to stock items just because you’re unfamiliar with them. “Every retailer doesn’t have to carry every item, but you need to determine what your customers are going to need, then service them.”

2. Catch Their Eye

“Our philosophy at Redner’s is to make huge, massive displays when you walk into our stores,” shares Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner’s Markets Inc., a 39-unit chain based in West Lawn, PA. “You might have a huge display of mangos and maybe tie in pineapple with it, or just have the one item. It’s the same strategy used to promote specials on any produce items.”

Likewise, Martin’s Osowski sees an advantage over other retailers who view displays as extra expenses. “We’re kind of counter-culture on it,” he says. “We find tropicals to be an excellent drawing card, and we use it as one of our signatures. We can drive tremendous volume just by promoting it and telling a story. You can convince a lot of people to decide to spend a little extra. If you eliminate bananas, a piece of tropical fruit is normally more expensive than

an apple or an orange. The consumer with discretionary income is saying, ‘Boy, I’d really like to try that, but I’m not spending \$4 or \$5 if I don’t know what it tastes like or how to use it.’”

“We have opportunities to create interesting marketing and merchandising displays by something as simple as taking a papaya, hollowing out the seed cavity and merchandising the cut papaya with strawberries, blackberries or blueberries,” says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties Inc., headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL. If that’s too much work, just slice a papaya open. “I don’t think anything has more impact than looking at a large papaya, sliced in half with its beautiful orange flesh and contrasting black seeds.”

“Fresh-cut fruit salads become striking with a tropical addition or two,” Brooks’ Ostlund says. “A fresh-chopped Caribbean Red Papaya and blueberry fruit salad is hard to pass up.”

3. Give Them A Taste

Sampling may be expensive, but it’s effective. “We love the idea of letting consumers taste the products,” Eagle says. “There’s no substitute for experiencing the flavors of the fruit.”

“Sampling helps bring in customers who maybe wouldn’t try the item if they had to pur-

chase it first,” says New Limeco’s Potts-Blonder.

“Demo-ing produce is always helpful when you’re dealing with fruits or vegetables lots of people haven’t tried before,” acknowledges Redner’s Stiles. “With something like a mango or a papaya, they taste great and you can definitely get people to buy it if you can get them to try it.”

To help reduce sampling costs, consider cross-merchandising tropical fruits with other grocery items. According to Turbana’s Potts, “Say to a retailer, ‘Hey, do you want to do a promotion? Let’s piggyback it with something else.’” Perhaps that means pairing baby bananas and ice cream, coconut with baking products, or serving up fresh mango salsa with tortilla chips.

4. Offer Recipes And Serving Suggestions

“First you have to convince consumers a product is going to eat well, then you have to tell them how to use it,” Martin’s Osowski asserts. That’s why Martin’s Supermarkets positions laminated cards with serving suggestions and recipes in its produce departments. “It could be recipes or something as simple as telling people how to cut a mango — some people might not know there’s a huge pit in the middle.”

“Because these items are lesser known, an educational component must be present at the point of sale,” explains Frieda’s Caplan. “Most often, this is a small sign with a few bullet points describing the fruit and its usage.”

“For this category to grow, there really needs to be more education not just about eating them out of hand, but cooking applications, too,” contends Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s / World Vari-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA’S/WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE

Exotic tropicals, such as rambutans, lychees, dragonfruit, longans and carambola, are popping up in a growing number of produce departments across the country.

“Avocados do well with tomatoes, as well as with limes. By putting some tropical items in with staples, it gets them in the line of sight for some people who might not look in the tropical fruit section, and it gives them an idea for using a tropical item in place of an everyday staple to give a tropical twist on an old favorite.”

— *Doria Potts-Blonder, New Limeco LLC*

ety Produce in Los Angeles, CA. “Maybe it’s adding a tropical flair to a traditional recipe. Education and recipes for these fruits are going to drive the category.”

“Offering a recipe with all the items in the recipe grouped in the same area works very well,” acknowledges Potts-Blonder says. This gives the consumer an idea on what to do with an item. Displays with recipes and handling instructions are key, plus having produce department employees well educated on the items helps a lot.”

5. Educate Store Associates

“You’ve got to educate your store personnel first because they’ve got to get the message to the customer,” Redner’s Stiles says. Using avocados as an example, he says, if your employees don’t know the various stages of ripeness, customers will be disappointed when they go home and discover the avocados they just bought aren’t ripe enough to make guacamole. “That’s just going to turn the customer off and they won’t come back.”

“If I had a supermarket I would invest in a produce specialist,” HLB’s De Barros says. “Having someone who knows about the fruit, how to prepare it, and has recipes and serving ideas on hand is invaluable. If you don’t give that information, people will say, ‘I don’t know how to use this, I’ll just buy an apple.’” De Barros understands a dedicated specialist is a

major expense, but has worked with retailers in Europe who found specialists improved customer satisfaction and increased sales more than enough to cover the specialist’s wages.

“Maybe on the supply side we need to help educate the retailers,” Cohen of Vision Import says. “Provide POS materials, recipes, whatever it may be.”

De Barros points to papaya spots as one example of why retail receivers need to know the difference between good fruit and bad fruit. He’s seen papaya, which develops spots during certain months, rejected by retailers who wanted “clean” fruit. “Instead of rejecting those fruits, retailers should be looking for fruits with those spots, since they have 20 percent more vitamin C,” he says. To that end, HLB Tropical places “leopard papaya” stickers on the fruit informing retailers and consumers of the additional health benefits.

6. Tout Nutrition

“Retailers shouldn’t hesitate to showcase the nutritional benefits of these products, especially papayas, which have health benefits that go beyond most fruits,” maintains Eagle of Southern Specialties. “They contain papayin, which is a digestive.”

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Reader Service # 11



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIEDA'S INC.

De Barros recalls speaking with an overweight woman with high cholesterol who said she never ate fruit. He explained how papayas have 80 percent more vitamin C than oranges, aid digestion and may also help lower cholesterol. "She picked up a whole box of papayas and said, 'I'm going to start eating fruit.'"

7. Motivate Handlers And Shoppers

Get consumers and retailers involved by holding contests. "Have a contest for individual stores to make the biggest or prettiest display," Cohen suggests. "Get a commodity board — like the Hass Avocado Board or the Mango Board — to promote it and offer a prize. Or maybe have a recipe contest for customers." Customers will buy the produce to create their recipes, and the winning recipe will later inspire more customers to try it, too. "Engage customers and the people at store level and you help everybody."

8. Fight the Winter Blues

"Don't forget, when it's winter in the United States, it's summer in the tropics, so you can get fruit that tastes great and is good quality even when there might be snow covering the ground," Eagle says.

"Winter makes tropicals great fun," Brooks' Ostlund says. "Who wouldn't be enticed to eat more produce with a display that brings the sun and fun of the tropics into a location that's in the doldrums of winter? It doesn't take much more than a cardboard palm tree and sparkled blue paper that reminds you of the ocean. Add a lawn chair, a big sun hat and a ukulele and your customer can take it from there."

"Passion fruit is a perfect fruit to promote for Valentines Day," Frieda's Caplan adds. "The New Zealand-grown fruit is in season, and it even has a romantic name." Whatever the promotion, retailers need to make sure there is sufficient supply. **pb**



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Reader Service # 14

Secrets To Making Bulk Lettuce A Big Winner

Bulk lettuce continues to be a large draw in produce, as consumers focus on staying healthy in 2011. **BY JON VANZILE**



While iceberg lettuce remains the most popular variety, Romaine is on a steady rise.

The key word with bulk lettuce is “bounty.” In recent years, the market for value-added and chopped lettuce has grown exponentially — often at the expense of new growth in the bulk or naked lettuce market. But experts say there are signs of slowing in the value-added category as consumers rediscover the simplicity and value behind head and bulk lettuce. It’s fresher and less expensive, and it calls to mind farmer’s stands laden with newly picked produce. So the goal with a bulk lettuce program is to remind consumers of these advantages, as well as spur ideas and impulse buys that will increase sales of products beyond the lettuce display.

But perhaps the most important ingredient to any bulk lettuce program is the display itself. As a leafy green, lettuce is more sensitive and prone to damage than most produce, and consumers are more sensitive to flaws and blemishes on their lettuce products. So the single most important element of any lettuce display is simple: keep it fresh, green and beautiful. “Bulk lettuce is a foundation item,” asserts Katy Blowers, project manager for Church Brothers LLC, in Salinas, CA. “It is a staple item in most homes and used in many different ways, depending on the consumer. It’s a core item for main dishes, sides, salads, appetizers and garnishes.”

The Lettuce Display

The heart of any bulk lettuce program is the display, as opposed to pricing or promotions. Consumers who buy bulk lettuce aren’t usually price-sensitive. After all, more expensive value-added products have rapidly eaten market share as consumers have shown a preference for convenience over price. Moreover, the most common lettuces are not expensive commodities. Instead of responding to price, lettuce consumers respond to a more subtle, farm-stand emotional appeal. “Consumers are more attracted to purchase one of those items when the display is bountiful,” contends Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound Farm, headquartered in San Juan Bautista, CA. “You know what they say: Stack it high and let it fly.”

This means using as many colors and textures of lettuce as possible. For years, iceberg lettuce has been the biggest seller, but Romaine is now increasing in market share, and according to Church Brothers, is running “about even” in total national sales — although iceberg lettuce is still by far the largest seller at the foodservice level. “Although iceberg remains the most common lettuce variety, consumer tastes are changing and Romaine is now on a steady rise and runs fairly consistent with iceberg,” reports Vince Ballesteros, director of

sales at Church Brothers. “Both Romaine lettuce and Romaine hearts have increased and are on an uphill swing.”

The lettuce display, however, need not rely on iceberg and Romaine alone. Other leaf lettuces include green and red leaf, Bibb and Boston, and endive and escarole. All of these are available as whole head products, either naked or wrapped, and should be merchandised together in one large display. Salinas, CA-based Tanimura & Antle, which grows and ships artisan lettuces, also reports increased interest in some of the lesser known lettuces, including endive and escarole, while Cabaluna notes higher-end consumers are showing interest in heirloom and artisan lettuces.

The problem, however, with these varieties is their poor shelf-life and generally delicate nature. “Heading” lettuces, such as Romaine, have a much longer shelf-life than the loose-leaf varieties such as green leaf or red leaf. The loose-leaf lettuces are much more sensitive to moisture levels and can easily wilt or rot in just a few days. “You’ve got to have people refreshing the display constantly,” Cabaluna cautions. “Especially with leaf lettuce, it’s all about vibrancy and freshness and being well stocked.”

Cabaluna suggests merchandising bulk lettuces next to the value-added lettuce products,

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Lettuce: The Healthful Snack

With First Lady Michelle Obama pushing hard to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables through her Let's Move! Campaign, now is the perfect time to highlight the health benefits of lettuce through in-store marketing. Lettuce is a low-calorie food with no fat and negligible carbohydrates. It also boasts high levels of vitamin A, as well as vitamin K, folate, vitamin C and other minerals.

"With the obesity epidemic in our nation, it's important to make healthy eating a priority in our lives," says Katy Blowers, project manager at Church Brothers LLC, based in Salinas, CA. "You can promote salads as filling and satisfying meals, not just as side dishes, and start introducing these foods to our children early on and in a positive light."

Recipe cards in the lettuce section are a great way to suggest additional salad ideas. Expand the salad universe by adding nuts, figs and cheeses to salads to create a healthful meal that will draw products from several areas of the store.

Tanimura & Antle is taking this concept one step further with the Get in Shape packaging promotion, which begins this month. The campaign incorporates a quick-read (QR) code into the packaging, which is compatible with a QR code-reading app for smart phones. When consumers scan the QR code, they'll get access to three recipes for healthful and simple meals, plus a shopping list for all the items they need to make it. Once again, this will increase sales of non-lettuce products, as well as offer consumers a nutritious meal option.

pb

with the display being dominated by Romaine and iceberg, both of which are commonly sold bagged or wrapped. A smaller, but highly visible, display of leaf lettuces can be incorporated into the larger display to attract attention.

Romaine Two Ways

A big display of leafy Romaine is sure to bring consumers to the section, but the heart of the display will likely lay elsewhere.

Over the past few years, Earthbound has noticed that consumers are trending away from full Romaine heads and instead are gravitating toward bagged hearts of Romaine. Hearts of Romaine reduces waste because consumers only get the leaves they're most interested in, and it enhances shelf-life because the product lasts longer than open lettuce. In fact, says Cabaluna, bagged hearts of Romaine are partly responsible for pushing Romaine bulk sales in general as consumers realize that the whole lettuce lasts longer than bagged chopped salads, which "aren't selling as well. Hearts of Romaine continues to sell like crazy," she adds. "It's fresh and protected."

The Salad Display

While the lettuces should be merchandised together, you can potentially increase sales by offering a "salad display," according to Earthbound's Cabaluna. Few shoppers or cooks use lettuce alone — it's almost always chopped into a salad.

"Romaine hearts are the perfect vehicle

for cross-promotional coupons," points out Steve Church, director of operations at Church Brothers. "Salad bars in stores are a great way to introduce lettuce as a meal in an easy and convenient way. With the huge push toward healthy eating, salad bars are a perfect resource to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables."

Savvy merchandisers combine the lettuce display with popular salad items, even including merchandise from other departments to spark ideas. This might include deli meats and cheeses, nuts, dried fruits, salad dressings and other vegetables that are commonly used to make salads.

"Have a little sample out and a recipe,"

suggests Cabaluna. "Bring cheeses into the department, along with other items that make a great salad."

It's also a good idea to merchandise lettuce according to its health benefits. In terms of overall health benefits, lettuce is actually less nutrient-dense than many other vegetables since it is mostly water. Nevertheless, leafy greens like lettuce do have valuable dietary fiber, and darker green lettuces such as Romaine have a substantial percentage of the daily recommendation of vitamin K and vitamin A, and negligible calories.

"I would promote lettuce based on its health benefits, especially around this time of year when people are making New Year's resolutions," says Mitch Ardantz, managing partner at Bonipak Produce Co., in Santa Maria, CA. "We're talking about leafy greens, so we're talking about salads and health."

Handling Tips

One of the biggest issues with lettuce is spoilage. Head lettuces are somewhat more resilient than leaf lettuces, but all lettuce is relatively quick to spoil compared to other produce like onions and peppers. Lettuce should be kept refrigerated at all times, according to Earthbound's Cabaluna. Leaf lettuce and head lettuce both respond well to misting, which will crisp the leaves, but they should not remain wet for too long.

"For optimum quality and freshness, bulk lettuce should be kept on the shelf at a consistent temperature of 34 to 36 degrees," details Church Brothers' Ballesteros. "It should be displayed in a high traffic area with frequent rotation."

Leaf blackening and rotting is a major turn-off and will push customers away from the section.



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“For optimum quality and freshness, bulk lettuce should be kept on the shelf at a consistent temperature of 34 to 36 degrees. It should be displayed in a high traffic area with frequent rotation.”

— Vince Ballesteros, Church Brothers LLC

“It is important — no matter what — that it is refrigerated,” asserts Cabaluna. “If it’s not, it is going to lose that vitality and freshness.”

To keep the display fresh, remove all brown, wilted or rotted lettuce as soon as you see it. Rot tends to spread quickly through lettuce, so any product that is in contact with rotted lettuce will begin to rot itself.

Lettuce should also not be stored in proximity to produce that contains ethylene gas, such as melons. Ethylene stimulates browning on leaves and reduces shelf-life of all lettuces.

Head lettuces are easier to store and have a longer shelf-life than the leaf lettuces, including red, green and Bibb lettuce. These fragile lettuces might only store for a few days before they begin to spoil, which explains why they have become popular in bagged products, where they last longer. When in doubt, think of lettuce like a leafy herb — its shelf-life and product handling requirements are similar.

New Lettuce Products

Although so much attention has shifted to value-added products, there are still plenty of interesting new products in the bulk lettuce category. Tanimura & Antle is leading the way with a new artisan clamshell pack of heritage lettuces. The pack contains a mix of six whole leaf varieties, including Romaine, green and red leaf, and spring mix. “This one pack gives the consumer an exceptional variety of color, flavor and texture,” says Diana McClean, marketing project manager for Tanimura & Antle. “The clamshell packaging protects the lettuce and preserves its shelf-life, which translates into value for the shopper.” McClean recommends merchandising the Tanimura & Antle clamshells with romaine hearts and packaged salads, as opposed to mixed into the display of naked lettuce.

Church Brothers has gone a different direction: the company recently introduced the Teen Green Sandwich Leaves line of products. These lettuces are designed specifically to fit a sandwich or burger bun, and they can also be used as a substitute for bread wraps in low-calorie sandwiches. The product, which is said to have a 16-day shelf-life, is usable directly from the bag and comes triple-washed and ready to eat. “This item clearly shows us that eating healthy can still be quick and convenient,” notes Ballesteros.

Church Brothers also recently unveiled a new variety of arugula called wasabi arugula. Ballesteros says the novel lettuce is great for meals and side dishes and would make an excellent in-store sample. **pb**

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Reader Service # 27



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Reader Service # 32

Peanuts Make A Bold Statement

New flavors and substantiated health claims make peanuts a winner. **BY JUANITA GAGLIO**

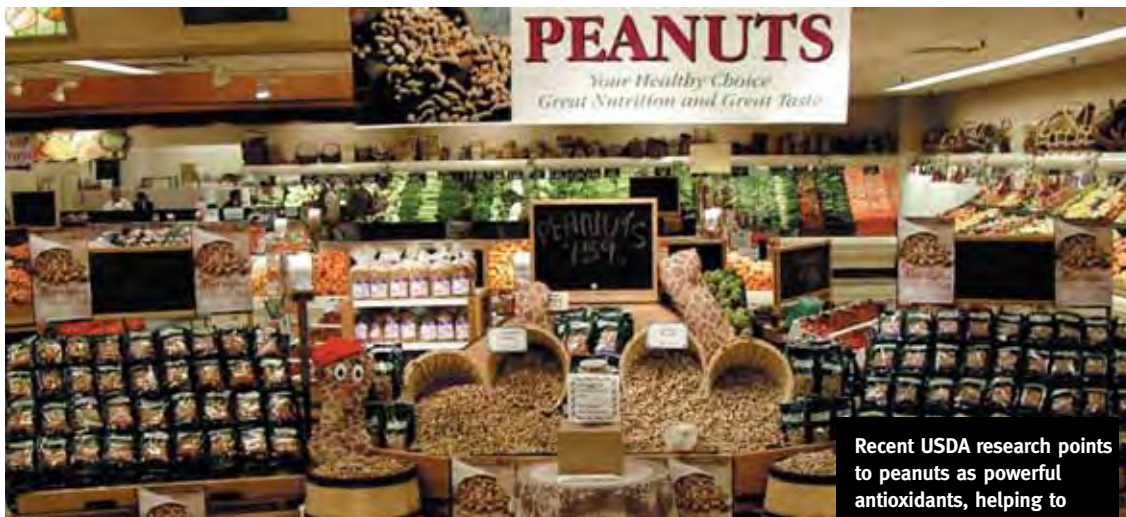


PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA-CAROLINAS PEANUT PROMOTIONS

Recent USDA research points to peanuts as powerful antioxidants, helping to reduce the risk of heart disease when eaten in small amounts.

Peanuts are not just summertime snacks for the ball game. Their long shelf-life of several months, resulting in less shrink and requiring no special handling, makes them a popular and growing commodity with retailers. Recently released health studies will also boost the bottom line as an incremental impulse sale. Consumers like the price paired with the taste and nutritional value.

According to the Nashville, TN-based Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions, the organization representing peanuts from Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, in-shell peanuts have been a profitable item for produce departments, delivering as much as a 40 percent profit margin. Retailers merchandise in-shell peanuts in both bulk and packaged form. Packaged products comprise 90 percent of retail sales for West Coast retailers, with the Midwest boasting an even distribution between bulk and packaged product. Consumers are familiar with the traditional: raw, roasted and flavored-in shell peanuts, but the popularity of various flavors and salted vs. non-salted varies according to the consumer geographic profile.

Retailers should not underestimate the power of the mighty peanut. A number of local and trade organizations are giving consider-

able support to educating consumers on the health benefits and retailers on how to capture year-round sales through peanut displays using supporting POS materials.

Nutritious And Delicious

Retailers are not the only ones who benefit from substantial profits both in the produce departments and store. According to health and nutrition research conducted by the Peanut Institute, located in Albany, GA, a handful of peanuts eaten five or more times per week can cut the risk of heart disease in half. Mortality rates from all causes are reduced more than 40 percent with consumption five times a week. Peanuts provide complex nutrition benefits to many diets that improve health. Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions provides a merchandising kit touting the health benefits: an excellent source of protein and fiber, high levels of folic acid and vitamin E and no cholesterol.

Research conducted by the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Raleigh, NC, found that peanuts have a significant amount of resveratrol in both the kernel and skin. The same presence of Resveratrol in red wine has been associated with reducing cardiovascular disease. This new USDA research appears to corroborate studies that show nuts may reduce

the risk of health disease by more than half when eaten frequently in small amounts. Pat Kearney, R.D., nutritionist at the Peanut Institute, discusses the importance of the peanut: "Peanuts have the highest rate of arginine, an amino acid, than any other commodity. Arginine aids in promoting healthy cardiovascular health by opening up the blood vessels. We can classify the peanut as a super-food."

Dennis Slattery, president of Slattery's Peanuts in Spring Hill, FL, believes that bags are the best sellers, "A mix of 24- and 32-oz. bags on a 4-ft. section is the optimum merchandising set." Retailers can build on the "World's Greatest Snack" by allocating a 4-by-6 foot vertical set with two shelves and health signage placed at point-of-sale, he adds.

Peanuts And Sporting Events Make The Perfect Pair

Peanuts are synonymous with many promotions revolving around major sporting events and their teams. Hampton Farms, based in Severn, NC, markets 12-oz. bags of fresh-roasted peanuts, salted and unsalted, under 24 different major league baseball teams' logos. This creates excitement for consumers who can purchase a bag with their favorite team's logo. "January is one of the best months for peanut sales, and cross-promoting peanuts with bever-



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PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA-CAROLINAS PEANUT PROMOTIONS

Eye-catching displays help sell peanuts, as they are often an impulse-buy.

“January is one of the best months for peanut sales, and cross-promoting peanuts with beverages for Super Bowl is always a big success.”

— Tom Nolan, Hampton Farms

ages for Super Bowl is always a big success,” states Tom Nolan, vice president of sales. Local sports events also offer a marketing opportunity by displaying with local high school jersey sales.

Market Basket, a 62-unit chain headquartered in Tewksbury, MA, promotes in-shell peanuts, both salted and unsalted, at least eight to 10 times a year. Unsalted peanuts outsell salted by 4:1. Director of produce, Mike Maguire, is enthusiastic about the licensed baseball team bags stating, “Besides our regular three SKUs, a 12-oz. bag, 3- and 5-lb. bags, we carry an extra SKU during baseball season with the Major League Baseball’s licensed bag.”

Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions provides banners, posters and price cards for football season with the message, “Peanuts are perfect for tailgating, munching at the game or in front of the T.V. Peanuts are a winner!” Terry Williams, national sales manager of Sachs Peanuts, headquartered in Clarkton, NC, recommends a combination of best pricing and offers, “Anything below \$1, with the key price point at \$.99 works well, combined with offering of 10 for \$10 or 5 for \$5,” she contends.

Peanuts score during Super Bowl with big displays of pallet quantities on the floor. During this timeframe, it is not unusual to see five pallet end-cap displays. Consumers view peanuts as part of the “Super Bowl” party mix. Bob Sutter, CEO of Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions, reveals the details of the annual national retail contest, “Traditionally, January and February were slow months for peanut sales, but for the past 15 years, our organization

promoted a national peanut display contest involving all retailers. It was a huge success with at least 300 to 400 participating retailers.”

Different Flavors For Different Folks

According to IRI data, Hampton Farms is the No. 1 brand of in-shell peanuts in the country, and beginning in January, 2011, the company will be offering two new flavors: Hickory and Smoked. Cajun Hot Nuts, Chili Limon flavored peanuts and BBQ cocktail peanuts are also popular items.

Sachs Peanuts is the only company to offer re-sealable bags and a co-branded product with the Tabasco sauce brand, Sachs Hot and Spicy Peanuts with Tabasco. Innovation, co-branding with flavored products and cross-promoting with complementary items is the key to growing the peanut category, according to Williams of Sachs Peanuts.

Creative Peanut Merchandising

Peanuts are an impulse item. Increasing sales is contingent on reminding consumers to include them in their shopping purchase. Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions recommends capturing consumers’ attention by building creative displays and distinguishing the product with an unusual shape to break the monotony, keeping the message simple and giving the consumer easy access for them to “grab and go.”

Promote peanuts throughout the year by using various themes such as sports, picnics or Fourth of July. Props used to hold the products

are effective in creating excitement. March is National Peanut Month and National Nutrition month, and thus a perfect time to build large displays emphasizing the health benefits of peanuts. Advertise the significance of eating a handful of peanuts five times a week.

Another bright idea is to cross-promote peanut displays with beverages, as they are frequently consumed with them. Retailers can also increase sales by offering a “buy two, get one free” purchase.

Bulk vs. Packaged Peanuts

Traditionally, consumers purchased peanuts in bulk. In recent years there has been a migration to displays of in-shell packaged peanuts. Ben Fueston, retail regional sales manager with Hampton Farms, explains, “While many retailers carry both bulk and packaged in-shell peanuts, we have seen a considerable increase in retailers beginning to stock more packaged goods.” Despite studies that show consumers tend to purchase more with bulk displays, peanut allergies and safety issues have been at the forefront of a shift to packaged product, with convenience and easier rotation coming in a close second. Another interesting fact, according to Betsy Owens, executive director of Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions, is that women purchase more bulk peanuts for Father’s Day as a gift for the men in their lives as men consume more in-shell peanuts than women.

As supermarket chains continue to consolidate and look for incremental profit, peanuts should be a serious contender. Consumers are looking for easy and nutritious products to purchase. Remember this: According to the Peanut Institute, in the United States, peanuts and peanut butter are the most popular nut choice and comprise 67 percent of all nut consumption. **pb**

TRANSITIONS



**BOTANICAL INTERESTS INC.,
BROOMFIELD, CO**

Brian Bate has been named national sales manager. He has more than 30 years of experience in the lawn and garden industry. His enthusiasm, fresh perspective and vast network of contacts make him a valuable asset to the 16 year-old seed company.

RSN 338



CALIFORNIA CUT FLOWER COMMISSION, SANTA BARBARA, CA

Chad Nelson of Eufloria Flowers, Nipomo, CA, was elected Chairman of the Commission for 2011. Nelson has served as a District 2 Commissioner for the past nine years, as chairman of the Commission's promotion committee for the past four years and a member of the Executive Committee for the past three.

RSN 339

NEW PRODUCTS



ROSES & CHOCOLATES

Fantasy Farms LLC, Miami, FL, and Colombia, South America, introduces its patented Multi-sleeve for floral bouquets. The Multisleeve for Valentine's Day launches the Roses & Chocolate marketing campaign. Consumers buy the sleeved bouquet featuring six roses and receive a free 3-oz. heart-shaped box of chocolates in the pocket of the sleeve. An easy-to-assemble POP display box is available for retailers.

RSN 340



TANDEM SLEEVES

Temkin International, Payson, UT, introduces Tandem Sleeves — the value-added look of insert sheets without the additional labor. Featuring pre-applied die-cut inserts available in a variety of materials and prints, Tandem Sleeves are made in the USA to ensure quality and fast turnaround.

RSN 341

ANNOUNCEMENTS



TPIE IN FORT LAUDERDALE

Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association, Orlando, FL, will host the 2010 Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE) January 19-21 at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL. TPIE is the trade event offering the latest trends in foliage, florals and tropicals on the show floor and in educational seminars.

RSN 342



WORLD FLORAL EXPO WILL CONVENE MARCH 8-11

HPP Worldwide, Amsterdam, Netherlands, announces the 2011 World Floral Expo will be held March 8-11 at the Doubletree Miami Mart/Hotel & MACC Exhibition Center, in Miami, FL. The event is promoted as the International Floriculture Trade Fair for the U.S. flower buyer.

RSN 343



CCFC 2011 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The California Cut Flower Commission, Santa Barbara, CA, elected the following Commissioners to serve as officers on the Commission's Executive Committee in 2011: Chair: Chad Nelson, Eufloria Flowers, Nipomo; First Vice Chair: Lane DeVries, The Sun Valley Group, Arcata; Second Vice Chair: Mike A. Mellano, Mellano & Co., Oceanside; Secretary: Diana Roy, Resendiz Brothers Protea, Fallbrook; and Treasurer: June Van Wingerden, Ocean Breeze Intl., Carpinteria. The Commission also approved appointments to fill vacancies on the Commission's Board. Those appointments included Jennifer Everett of California Floral Greens to serve as District 2 Commissioner; Ivor Van Wingerden of Ocean Breeze International to serve as a District 3 Alternate Commissioner; and Dave Kitayama of the Kitayama Brothers to serve as a District 2 Alternate Commissioner.

RSN 344

Tantalize Them With Tropicals

Year-round appeal of tropical plants creates colorful sales opportunities for retailers looking to boost floral profits. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



Tropical plants are gaining in popularity as customers become educated on how to care for them.

Tropical plants are a hot offering any time of the year in virtually any place in the country. Even in the dead of winter in upstate New York, tropical plants are an alluring addition to the floral department. “Tropical Plants are very attractive,” says Jon Strom, vice president for floral and lifestyle merchandising at Price Chopper Supermarkets, based in Schenectady, NY. “We find they are particularly popular when people are moving into college dorms, but they sell all year long. Bromeliads are popular all year, too. They give you great color and they are low maintenance.”

New hybrids of orchids, bromeliads and other tropical plants are poised to hit the market. “Tropicals continue to be in demand, and 2011 will see new varieties of bromeliads (specifically Guzmania, Neoreglia, Vriesea and Tillandsia), orchids, colorful Cordylines, Colocasias and Kalanchoes,” reports Jennifer Nelis, director of public relations and marketing with the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA), located in Orlando, FL. “Cloned orchids are giving growers more control over their color palettes, thus providing buyers with more control for their orders.”

New Tropicals Widen The Field

The latest word in color is reminiscent of

earth and harvest tones from the farm. “Returning to farm-inspired colors, look for tea-stained and earthy soil tones and oaks to serve as a backdrop to the vibrant colors of tried-and-true harvest veggies,” details Nelis. “Green is still the new black, and white is still in, but will become milkier with creamy yellows. Partner plants with metallic-sheened containers to match bloom colors. Look for stunning new varieties of bromeliads and improved varieties of long-time favorites. Also a must-have for the more affluent households in 2011 is vertical gardens,” she continues.

Some growers have come up with ideas tailored to fit recession-sized budgets. “We are trying to work with the economy and work with the retailers,” notes Marcella Lucio, director of marketing for Silver Vase, headquartered in Homestead, FL. “Teacup orchids are more economical and retail at only \$9.99, while regular orchids are \$15.99 to \$20.99. You’re talking about something below \$10.” These smaller sized orchids open up entirely new possibilities when it comes to merchandising displays. “We’re going to be able to do more combinations with our bromeliads,” adds Lucio. “Maybe you put a teacup orchid by the side.”

In keeping with the smaller-is-better theme, dwarf bougainvilleas provide an intriguing al-

ternative. “Dwarf bougainvilleas seem to be very popular right now,” maintains Kellie Pilicer, marketing director at Bougainvillea Growers International, located in Boynton Beach, FL. “The dwarf plants top off at three or four feet and they are slow-growing as well.” These smaller, slower growing varieties also make for easier maintenance, both at the retail store and at home. Bougainvilleas need to be trimmed after every flush, which means every four to six weeks, and the dwarf varieties make for lower maintenance, according to Pilicer.

Moving out West, a hot new tropical from Bay City Flower Company, in Half Moon Bay, CA., is Stephanotis, a slow-growing climbing woody evergreen that thrives in areas where the temperature does not drop below 59°F. Outdoor Stephanotis should be grown in humus-rich, moist (but well-drained) soil in full sun. Indoors, it should be kept in a high light area and fertilized every three weeks in the growing season, and watered sparingly in the winter dormant months. Consumers become enamored with the vining plant once they take in the enchanting fragrance of the delicate white blossoms.

David Fell, president of Hilo, HI-based Hawaiian Sunshine Nursery Inc., believes Kalanchoe thyrsiflora ‘Fantastic’ will be one of the hot tropicals for 2011. This is a succulent perennial with a compact form and beautiful

“We find it helps to have signage pointing out that green plants are good for you. They take carbon dioxide out of the air; this is particularly beneficial for older buildings.”

— Jon Strom, Price Chopper

variegation. Dramatic red edging intermixed with golden highlights begin at the leaf tip and continue over the silvery-green, rounded leaves. Fantastic is an easy-to-grow, robust, drought-tolerant plant that can grow up to 24 inches tall and 24 inches wide. It is a clumping fast-grower, popular in rock gardens, perennial container gardens and patios, and it enjoys full sun and slightly dry conditions

If you have enough time, patience and water, you can build a spectacular display around large ferns such as Boston Compacta, Boston Maassii or California Boston. “Our ferns are big — they cascade four, five or six feet,” says Marv Erikson, partner in Razbuton Ferns, in Winter Garden, FL. “They suck a lot of water; they need a constant water source. If you have a setting by a waterfall they work beautifully.”

The options are almost limitless and tropicals are finding a place even where they are not usually staples. “Though tropical mixed bouquets are not a staple item for many of our customers, we have seen success in driving such bouquets for occasional ads,” says Scott Hill, vice president of sales and marketing at The USA Bouquet Company, in Miami, FL. Tropical bouquets are not friendly to the traditional methods of distribution as the cold temperature damages many of the tropical varieties. “Tying tropical bouquets into a summer or Hawaiian theme and cross-merchandising pineapples, bananas and other tropical fruits has proven very successful. At the PMA show, we showed a line of bouquets that included smoothie and tropical salad recipes, which is another way of cross-merchandising and bundling sales potential,” Hill adds.

Flaunt Them To Move Them

Tropicals are almost always an impulse buy, which means a well conceived merchandising program makes all the difference. “Right now we’re using both Bonsai and Lucky Bamboo for holiday displays,” says Eve Johnson, owner of Eve’s Garden Inc., in Land O’ Lakes, FL. “Some stores put Bonsai by the cash register and as

people are standing in line, they remember they need a gift for somebody.” Both bamboo and Bonsai are hearty, which helps both in care at the retail level and in providing a hedge against shrink. “The advantage of Lucky Bamboo is it grows anywhere,” adds Johnson.

Many tropical varieties, however, need to be moved quickly because the supermarket does not provide the optimum environment. “The key tip on the 10-inch tropicals is to have them in a high traffic area so you can move them quickly,” recommends Vicky Kleinschmidt, head of floral merchandising at Coborn’s Inc., based in St. Cloud, MN. “Signage helps, too.”

Kleinschmidt contends the 10-inch size usually provides the biggest bang for your tropical buck in supermarket floral departments. “You can merchandise 6-, 8-, 10- or 12-inch plants, but most of the time in markets you merchandise 10-inch plants,” she says. “They take up the same amount of space because you can’t stack on top of the smaller ones anyway; and shipping is not much more for the 10-inch plants than the 6-inch plants.”

Full-service floral departments can add to the ring total by offering upgrades and selling attractive containers for the plants. “Tropical foliage always has the opportunity to provide additional service and sales by the retailer,” reminds Fell of Hawaiian Sunshine Nursery. “Our plants come in a grower pot and the addition of a nice container by the retailer produces a more elegant look. They also get to sell the potting soil and the service of repotting.”

A prominent display with an abundance of tropical plants will have even greater impact if there is also signage pointing out that there is more to the plants than meets the eye. “We find it helps to have signage pointing out that green plants are good for you,” Strom of Price Chopper reveals. “They take carbon dioxide out of the air; this is particularly beneficial for older buildings.”

The idea that tropicals and other green plants serve a purpose inside buildings — in addition to being attractive — is gaining steam. “It’s great to see sustainability equated

to mainstream thinking,” Nelis of FNGLA says. “For 2011, longevity and sustainability is definitely a hot trend. In the floral arena, this means more living arrangements: plants with a purpose such as kitchen herbs and easy-to-maintain items such as cacti and succulents.”

You can go a step farther and actively promote the benefits of live plants as part of going green. “For retailers interested in communicating the benefits of live plants to their clientele, FNGLA offers up to 50 free copies of a consumer piece called *Think Green, Live Green* that can be downloaded from our Web site.”

Make Time To Take Care

Care at the retail level is a key to tropical sales, and information to the consumer about at-home care is a key to repeat sales. Some varieties usually do best with relatively little care. “When you get orchids at the retail level or at home, leave them alone,” asserts Lucio of Silver Vase. “The plant goes into stress if you manipulate it too much. People make the mistake of watering them too much; they only need to be watered once a week.”

Other tropical plants, however, should not even be tried unless you are prepared for a high level of care. “The true Boston doesn’t look as good as the large ferns, but they are easier to maintain,” admits Erikson of Razbuton. “But once you get the large ferns outside underneath a shade tree where the sprinkler waters them, they work great.”

Many other varieties, however, suffer when watered too much. “Bougainvilleas tend to get over-watered. Wait for the first sign of wilting to water as they are drought-tolerant,” advises Bougainvillea Growers’ Pilicer. She also advises keeping them away from the automatic sprinklers. “Bougainvilleas need to be in full sun. Once they get to the retail center, they end up under a canopy and that doesn’t work,” she adds. A south-facing location works best for this sun-loving plant.

Because the tropicals have such varied needs, count on your supplier to provide plant care information. “We have a care tag with each plant and I believe that there are plans to produce care sheets by our distributor,” says Fell of Hawaii Sunshine Nursery.

It is also important to keep the varied needs of plants in mind when deciding where to display them. “Different plants require different care, so it’s important if you’re grouping plants to consider this element prior to arranging your containers. Many growers can assist you with details on which plants can be successfully grouped to maximize the container’s lifespan,” FNGLA’s Nelis says. **pb**

HITS AND MISSES



The most recent PMA Fresh Summit Convention was loaded with new packaging ideas, products and uses for fresh fruit and vegetables, which, in total, offered many opportunities to attract consumer interest. Walking the exhibition floor, the number of new, tasty items for consumption appeared to be greater than ever.

However, the question that came to mind was how do consumers become attracted to those changes that are other than packaging type or design? One new product that stood out was courtesy of Herb Thyme Farms, which claims to be the largest U.S. grower, packer and shipper of fresh culinary herbs. At the show, they were offering samples and recipes of new ways to add flavor to ordinary foods. But how will consumers and retailers be introduced to new ways of enjoying a tried-and-true grilled cheese sandwich? Will innovative uses of social media play a role? Or perhaps will a tie-in with a company supplying the cheese or an alternative product be utilized?

On the other hand, I had the opportunity to sample some excellent new raspberry varieties. Seeing no information on the package label, my question to the shipper representative was how would the consumer recognize these are new and improved? The reply was that when consumers buy a package and like the product, they would purchase more. But how are consumers going to know that initially and/or be assured the next purchase is going to be similar in flavor? Second to the word “free,” words like “new” or “improved” are used to garner consumer attention. In order to expand a market, customers’ interest initially has to be stimulated. How else is demand expected to grow?

Recently, a large regional chain advertised 80-count Washington Gala apples for several weeks under the banner “Peak of the Season” at a retail of 99-cents a pound. I couldn’t resist, and found them to be as fine an eating apple as one could hope for. About a week later, a much larger chain featured a slightly smaller hundred-count Gala at 5-for-\$1. The size was almost perfect for my interest and once again, I was unable to resist the seemingly bargain-priced apple. However, the first, next and following were a far cry from those previously purchased. Although the flavor was somewhat similar with a reasonable amount of juice, the texture could be described as mealy. At less than half the price, there became no question where my future purchases would be made.

Who was responsible for this comparison? Was it the buyer looking for a reduced cost; the shipper attempting to provide only a below-average product to satisfy the commitment; or the consumer believing a price approximately half of previous features would provide an anticipated value?

Perhaps the answer to this triple miss can be found in Bryan Silbermann’s comments from his address at the Fresh Summit concerning the state of the industry. A major point was the need to improve eating quality, particularly for fruit. A major concern is the majority of consumers eat too few servings of fresh fruit for a healthy diet. As a result, demand barely balances supply determined at the respective price levels unless supply is suddenly limited due to unexpected growing conditions.

As Silbermann explained, instead of transactions based on price, the emphasis must focus toward satisfaction and value. The words sound good, but for many in the distribution channel, this means a gigantic shift in mindset. For too long, too many production efforts have centered on tonnage produced, regardless of edibility the consumer may receive. Now the RosBREED genome research project shows promise of increasing the rate for finding varieties acceptable to the desires of both producers and consumers.

Likewise, many retail buyers’ first comment was, “Tell me the promotional price.” The perception has been to be able to feature at no higher than “x,” rather than what will be the best eating value to increase repeat purchases even in a low-price focused economy.

Fortunately, there are operators who have successfully taken the opposite approach. Granted, a few operate in relatively affluent demographic areas, but one also finds scattered regional operators throughout the country not far behind in providing the consumer the overall product satisfaction required to increase the share of produce consumption. Communicating the message is being enhanced by focused consumer contact made possible by the addition and expansion of social media.

The importance of telling this value story in such a way as to inspire the consumer to purchase without strict reliance on bargain hunting cannot be over-emphasized, with the marketing relatively inexpensive to implement. The real challenge is the risk of having the correct product to stand behind the message. Then the hits will outweigh the misses as more consumers recognize increased produce purchases will be offset by the reduction of medical costs.

pb

For too long, too many production efforts have centered on tonnage produce, regardless of edibility the consumers may receive.

By Dave Diver

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

VIEWING FRESH SUMMIT FROM A CHILD'S EYE



For many years, our industry has focused on marketing to the youngest generation of consumers. We've invested in research and promotion to reach this budding market, and we are expending great energy in being part of the solution to the child

nutrition debate.

Having two of these highly sought-after consumers in my own home, a three-year and six-year-old, I thought it would be interesting to see their reaction to the industry during PMA's recent Fresh Summit in Orlando. Would they be as excited as I am about the industry? Would they react positively to the products we all feel are perfect for kids? Or, would they be thoroughly disinterested and focused on getting to Disney World?

I was delighted to see their enthusiastic response as we walked through the entrance. They were very excited to see their favorite fruits — watermelon and bananas — but also curious to explore other products. Though their exposure was brief, a few basic patterns developed, which perhaps will be useful to all of us as we consider this youngest segment in the future. Some of this is not new, but it's good confirmation of what we already suspect.

First, my kids reminded me that they are highly discriminating consumers — perhaps the highest. They expect the products to be absolutely flavorful. They're not fooled by marketing or promotion, or even by someone encouraging them, "Try it, it's sweet." It all comes down to taste with them. Surprisingly, what passed my taste test at the show did not pass theirs. As we continue to emphasize produce to kids, we must also continue to ensure we're giving them a truly flavorful product. They aren't too keen on second chances, so we've got to make sure we get it right the first bite!

Secondly, my kids' reaction made me think of how important personal experience is to them. While ads and educational materials are helpful, kids are hands-on consumers. There is no substitute for giving them the chance to sample or interact with a representative or charac-



ter. By doing this, we are validating their person-hood and making a direct link to them.

On that same note, while they love the Nickelodeon and Disney characters, they were just as excited to interact with Ayco's Mini Me watermelon, climb aboard Allen Lund's monster truck, and watch the National Watermelon Board's carver. It's not about fame, but rather about making a connection on a level that interests them.

Finally, I was surprised that of all the offerings in the show, my kids went most for the natural, raw version of the products. While they love chocolate as much as anyone, they repeatedly wanted to sample

the basic presentations of the items. They didn't need a lot of gimmicks or sauces. This industry is fortunate to have products that appeal to our kids in their natural state.

I'm elated to think that produce is forever linked in my kids' minds with this exciting trip to Orlando. Upon returning, my first-grader's class report about his trip actually covered more about his experience at the produce show than Disney. Unfortunately for me, I don't know if my kids will ever let me attend another Fresh Summit alone again. It is a refreshing and encouraging sign that what we do does indeed matter to them.

pb

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By Jodean Robbins

Jodean Robbins Duarte is a regular contributing editor for PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine and an international marketing consultant for the produce industry.

GLOBALGAP 2011-2015: MAINSTREAMING FOOD SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY



well as the environmental and social requirements called for by many different markets.

After a period of intensive standard updating and consultation, GlobalGAP is ready to address the challenges ahead. Food Safety and Sustainability are set to be the sector's major issues for the coming decade. Our annual News Conference, held on February 10, 2011 at the Fruit Logistica Trade Show in Berlin, Germany, provides the opportunity to learn how the organization has adapted its approaches to meet the sector's challenges in a fast-changing world where natural resource usage, such as water, will be a major factor in meeting an increasing global consumer demand for high quality produce.

Most Widely Consulted, Innovative And Science-Based Ever: GlobalGAP Version 4

The changes have been made after an intensive review period and wide consultation on five continents. The revised standard, which uses HACCP principles emphasizing current Best Practices in food safety-related points, will help producers comply by creating a toolkit to carry out risk assessments, thereby developing the necessary food safety plans.

Various topics (water, manure, soil, adjacent land use, etc.) are covered with GAP and this toolkit will help producers to identify the elements and practices that may pose a risk to food safety.

An Integrated Pest Management Toolkit has also been developed, with plenty of examples to cover the three principles (Observation and Monitoring, Prevention and Intervention). IPM is central to a more sustainable method of production and also helps ensure Maximum Residue levels are not exceeded.

GlobalGAP's innovative stakeholder approach means that the tried-and-tested produce standard is truly fit for global produce production and trade. The new version has been refined through nearly 10 years of practical experience and actually consists of fewer control points than the previous version, and with many auditors having been trained before the standard implementation date.

Retailers and producers from around the globe have joined forces to develop GlobalGAP, now the world's largest harmonized on-farm certification standard, in an initiative to improve consumer confidence in the food they buy. For more than 100,000 farms in over 100 countries, this non-profit, industry-owned program has been the preferred choice to demonstrate compliance with food safety, as

The newly established GlobalGAP office in the United States cooperates with the United Fresh Produce Association to adapt GlobalGAP Version 4 so that it meets both national and retail and foodservice demands and the new regulations.

Tour 2011: Around The World To Share, Learn And Network

The successful formula for the Tour 2009 has been expanded to target eight cities around the world for the GlobalGAP Tour 2011: New Delhi, New Mexico, Cape Town, Sao Paulo, Cairo, Warsaw, Atlanta and Bangkok. Organizing partners from most of the event locations will be present at the News Conference to explain their main tour features. All events will provide training opportunities, a newly organized "Open Consultation Meeting" with no admission fees on the Pre-conference day and plenty of time to network between the informative and interactive sessions on the main day. The topics will center on local implementation issues, progress in national adaptation of Version 4 and regional requirements to better respond to different markets. Registration and application for sponsorships are open at www.tour2011.org.

GlobalGAP in the USA

The U.S. Congress has passed the Food Safety Modernization Act, which will lead to increased requirements not only for U.S. producers, but also for those exporting to the large U.S. market. The newly established GlobalGAP office in the United States cooperates with the United Fresh Produce Association to adapt GlobalGAP Version 4 so that it meets both national retail and foodservice demands and the new regulations. This will contribute to national and international harmonization. Dr. David Gombas, senior vice president of food safety and technology at United Fresh, will explain the North American approach of United's National GAPs Harmonization Initiative and how that can be aligned to GlobalGAP.

GlobalGAP For Emerging Markets

Achieving GlobalGAP Certification in one step may be difficult in markets where certification to Good Agricultural Practice is emerging. Marek Marzec, president of Poland's EWA-BIS Group, will present his firsthand experience, introducing a tailored sub-set of GlobalGAP requirements in Poland, particular for local and national markets as a stepping stone to full GlobalGAP Certification. Retailers and processors are supporting this approach to begin demonstrating compliance with food safety, before moving on to environmental and social requirements called for by many other markets.

Farms not yet fully geared up to the international and holistic level of the GlobalGAP Standard can enter the process through a registration and inspection program in the GlobalGAP database conducted by the EWABIS Group called Primary Farm Assurance (PFA). Only buyers specially registered with GlobalGAP can receive access to this information, and is clearly differentiated from a full GlobalGAP certificate.

By Dr. Kristian Moeller
Managing Director, GlobalGAP, Germany

Receive supplier information fast using the Produce Business Information Showcase. Here's How:

- 1) Please go to www.ProduceBusiness.com and click on The Electronic Rapid Response Card and enter the Reader Service (RS) numbers that correspond to the ad and the information showcase.
- 2) Contact the advertiser directly via the Website, e-mail, phone or fax listed in the ad.

JANUARY 2011

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX	COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Basciani Foods, Inc.	30	22	610-268-3044	610-268-2194	Lisa Inc.	41	44	520-281-1863	520-281-2848
BelleHarvest Sales, Inc.	64	60	800-452-7753	616-794-3961	Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	38	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Big Chuy Distributors Co., Inc.	41	26	520-281-4909	520-281-4835	MIXTEC Group	20	7	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Blue Book Services	71	32	630-668-3500	630-668-0303	Monterey Mushrooms	32	28	800-333-MUSH	831-763-2300
Boncheff Greenhouses	53	55	416-233-6922	416-236-3903	Mucci Farms	53	24	866-236-5558	519-326-5917
Booth Ranches, LLC	47	3	559-626-7653	559-626-4818	New York Apple Sales, Inc.	65	47	518-477-7200	518-477-6770
Brooks Tropicals	61	30	800-327-4833	305-246-5827	New York Produce Show and Conference	13		561-994-1118	561-994-1610
Calixtro Distributing	41	25	800-359-0921	520-281-3438	Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	65	15	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	54	13	613-226-4187	613-226-2984	Nova Produce, LP	41	43	239-444-1140	239-592-9392
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	46	2	515-981-5111	515-981-4564	Pavero Cold Storage Corp.	65	62	800-435-2994	914-691-2955
CF Fresh	52	53	360-855-0566	360-855-2430	Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program	64	19	717-783-5418	717-783-4262
Champ's Mushrooms	30	17	866-Champs1	604-607-0787	Phillips Mushroom Farms	31	52	800-722-8818	610-444-4751
Chilean Fresh Fruit Assoc.	INSERT		916-927-1217	916-927-1297	Prime Time	12	61	760-399-4166	760-399-4281
Corona Marketing Co.	25	4	805-346-2114	805-346-8138	Produce for Better Health Foundation	69	20	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	57	1	800-223-8080	718-960-0544	Produce Plus	41	56	800-323-3730	815-293-3701
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	42	800-333-5454	831-754-5243	Produce Pro Software	58	10	630-395-9600	630-572-0390
dProduce Man Software	58	41	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973	producepackaging.com	26	12	800-644-8729	610-588-6245
Duda Family Farms	49	54	866-792-DUDA	561-753-6660	Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	24	34	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Eclipse Berry Farms, LLC	24	40	310-207-7879	310-207-7868	Rice Fruit Company	64	18	800-627-3359	717-677-9842
Edinburg Citrus Association	46	5	956-383-6619	956-383-2435	Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.	34	37	800-968-8833	616-887-6874
Fresh Produce & Floral Council	70	27	714-739-0177	714-739-0226	SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	38-39	29	202-728-1727	202-728-1728
Giorgio Fresh Co.	32	57	800-330-5711	610-429-3810	Sambraio Packaging	27	39	800-563-4467	831-724-1403
The Giumarra Companies	37	31	520-281-1981	520-761-3889	O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	58	6	701-657-2152	701-657-2425
Grower Alliance, LLC	63	11	520-761-1921	520-377-9189	Southeast Produce Council	51	33	813-633-5556	866-653-4479
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	65	14	717-656-2631	717-656-4526	Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	67	16	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Highline Mushrooms	33	45	519-326-8643	519-326-7222	Tropic Moon	46	5	956-383-6619	956-383-2435
Inline Plastics Corp.	23	51	800-826-5567	203-924-0370	United Fresh Produce Association	48	49	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Jem D International	35	35	519-733-3663	519-733-9970	United Fresh Produce Association	59	50	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Jem D International	53	36	519-733-3663	519-733-9970	Well-Pict Berries	24	48	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	64	21	717-597-2112	717-597-4096	West Lake Fresh	24	23	831-724-0644	831-724-0117
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	84	8	800-796-2349	718-542-2354	Kurt Zuhlke & Association	26	12	800-644-8729	610-588-6245



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QUEEN ME!



In existence since 1914, the National Watermelon Association (NWA) is one of the country's oldest agricultural associations. Starting in 1964, the NWA began electing a National Watermelon Queen in conjunction with its annual convention. Eight state watermelon associations each have a State Queen, who then competes for the national title during a three-day competition during the convention. The stages of the competition, some of which are depicted in the photos above dating back to the late 1980s, include a speech, as well as an impromptu speech portion, an interview and videotaped interview, a written portion, and an evening gown and promotion wear competition (bathing suits are no longer required).

"We are looking for a girl with good communication skills," says Eleanor Bullock, NWA promotion coordinator. "She becomes a good-

will ambassador for the industry. The winner is a paid representative of the National Watermelon Association. As the National Watermelon Queen she will travel throughout the United States and Canada promoting the watermelon industry and making guest appearances up to 150 days a year. Our 2009 Queen even had the opportunity to travel to Tokyo, Japan to promote watermelon. She is available for media appearances, in-store promotions, conventions, trade shows and functions where watermelon is featured."

One of the favorite — and most memorable — portions of many of the NWA's national events, festivals and conventions is the watermelon seed-spitting contest, where anyone can compete. According to Bullock, the record spit is 66 feet. The 97th annual NWA convention will be held in LaJolla, CA, February 23-27, 2011.



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Tastiness & Aesthetics Featured On TV Show
By Diana L. Green, Tastiness & Aesthetics
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:11:11 AM

SALINAS, CA (December 1, 2009) – Tastiness & Aesthetics' Artisan Lettuce CM was featured on the Shopping & Home with Laura Mitchell program. This edition of Shopping & Home includes a segment featuring Rick Austin who was interviewed as a host of Artisan Lettuce with the company's headquarters in Salinas, CA.

Shopping & Home focuses on fresh recipe ideas from today's most innovative chefs, combined with fresh-from-the-field, fresh-from-the-plant-to-the-plate, right to your home. The key to the entire "entertained and engaged host, Laura Mitchell, "You've loved of MTV's "Behind the Music." " says Laura. "I am "Behind the Music."

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BlackBerry System Opens Production Facility In Georgia
By Kelly Ketchum, Specialty Systems International
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:01:11 AM

BlackBerry continues to grow to meet North America's demand for top quality fresh-cut produce blends.

Prime Produce International Closes Its Doors
By Diana L. Green, Specialty Systems International
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:01:11 AM

Prime Produce International, LLC has ceased operations after six years in business.

New Mail Girl Sparks Criticism
By Brent Michael Decker, Yahoo! Finance
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:01:11 AM

New Mail normally gets the inside face of their produce a national exposure from a group, not only with every get into a house, making every woman, leading women to see that the newly made-over woman, the Mail Girl a Barbie doll in America.

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Agri Complete Plant Expansion
By Diana L. Green, Specialty Systems International
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:01:11 AM

Agri Complete is completing a \$1.5 million expansion to its current processing facilities.

Agri Food Oregon Choix To Prepare The Grand Tuffin At Festival
By Kelly Ketchum, Specialty Systems International
Posted Wednesday, December 9, 2009 at 11:01:11 AM

The 2010 Grand Tuffin Dinner features some of the most celebrated chefs in the Pacific Northwest.

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