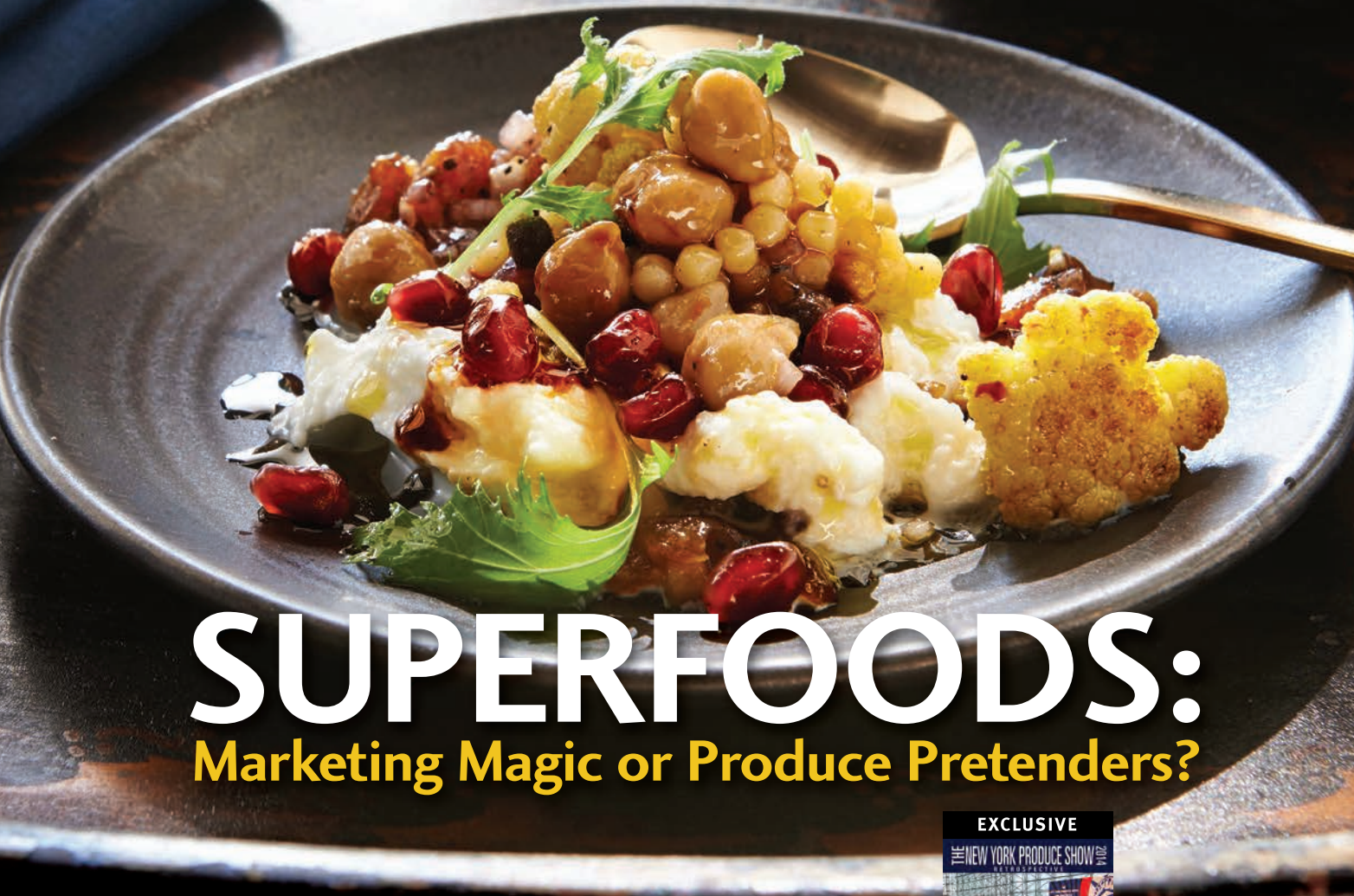


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SUPERFOODS: Marketing Magic or Produce Pretenders?



INSIDE:

THE NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW
AND CONFERENCE RETROSPECTIVE

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES *LOS ANGELES TIMES* ARTICLE ABOUT MEXICAN LABOR
MUSHROOM MARKETING • AL'S SUPERMARKETS • MEXICAN PRODUCE
CHILEAN FRUIT (PART II) • CONTROLLED ATMOSPHERE APPLES
SPECIALTY CITRUS • SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET • FLORIDA STRAWBERRIES
TROPICAL FRUIT MERCHANDISING • CHEFS CATER TO VEGETARIANS
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CORRECTION

In the November 2014 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, there was a typo regarding the temperatures for storing asparagus. Chloé Varennes, marketing manager for Redondo Beach, CA-based Gourmet Trading was quoted as saying: asparagus had to be stored at 32F to 26F. The correct temperatures are 32F to 36F. Our regrets for the error.



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THIS MONTH'S WINNER

JONATHAN RADUNS
 Owner/Merchandising Consultant
 MerchandiseFood.com
 Somerdale, NJ

Jonathan Raduns grew up on a vegetable farm in western New York. As an adult, he decided to dedicate his career in produce to helping farms and retailers improve profits.

After graduating from Rochester Institute of Technology with a degree in food marketing and distribution, he worked at Rochester, NY-based Brothers International Food Corporation (a full service direct importer, distributor and supplier of bulk packaged food

ingredients for the food and beverage industry) and participated in Wegmans' Food Markets management program.

Eventually, he started his own company, Merchandise Food LLC — a retail and merchandising consulting company aimed to help retailers improve financial results.

"We just finished a project with FreshXperts [a Lee's Summit, MO-based produce consulting firm specializing in areas of marketing expertise] and Beuhler's Fresh Foods. We worked with Beuhler's on an extensive, year-long reinvention process for their fresh produce department," says Raduns, who is also a PRODUCE BUSINESS 40 Under Forty recipient. "We coached them on growing business, improving merchandising techniques, operational concerns and shrink management.

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.

WIN A FITBIT "CHARGE"

A perfect way to start a healthy New Year, this sleek wristband is essentially a personal trainer. Track your steps, calories burned, floors climbed, active minutes and sleep by monitoring your activity. The device includes Caller ID, shows daily stats, current time and monitors sleep results on a bright OLED display. By connecting to an app on your smartphone or computer, FitBit enables you to manage your diet and exercise. The rechargeable battery lasts seven to 10 days. The large-size band adjusts to wrist measurements of 6.3 inches to 7.9 inches and is 21 millimeters wide.



QUESTIONS FOR THE JANUARY ISSUE

- 1) What brand of grapefruit is known as "The Sweetest Texas Reds"? _____
- 2) How many apple brands are shown on the CMI ad? _____
- 3) Which type of Navel orange is promoted on the Sunkist ad? _____
- 4) What is the name of the category manager who has laryngitis on the Idaho Potato ad? _____
- 5) Which company is partnering with Avocados from Mexico for a "Football Fiesta"? _____
- 6) What is the website address for Prime Time Produce? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____

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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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bonnie@centerforproducesafety.org · (530) 757-5777

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To learn more, please visit us at our new website www.centerforproducesafety.org



Immigration Executive Order Brings More Uncertainty To Produce Industry

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

On November 20, President Obama announced a series of “Executive Actions” regarding immigration. The President’s actions contain many facets, but the one that garnered the most attention has been deferred deportation for certain immigrants. At various times, the President’s executive orders were portrayed as amnesty for illegal immigrants or as immigration reform. In reality, the President has done neither. Most troubling for the fresh produce industry is the fact that these actions do nothing to provide the desperately needed long-term relief to agriculture employers who constantly must scramble to recruit and maintain a skilled, dedicated workforce. And even worse, Congress is showing little indication they will act on much-needed relief soon.

The deferred deportation portion of the president’s action works like this: an individual who has continuously resided in this country without legal authority since January 1, 2010, and/or who is the parent of someone who is a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident as of November 20, 2014, is eligible to apply for deferred deportation. Following a background check and verification of family relationship, the individual will be given documentation evidencing authority to remain and work in the U.S. for an initial period of three years.

Other criteria for qualifying for deferred action for parents of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents include:

- They are not a law enforcement priority due to terrorism or espionage or otherwise pose a danger to national security.

With this announcement, we are reminded again that our elected leaders continue to abdicate their responsibility to address one of the most critical problems facing our nation, a flawed and outdated immigration system.

- They were not apprehended while attempting to unlawfully enter the U.S. at the border or ports of entry.
- They are not convicted felons.
- They have not been convicted of significant or multiple misdemeanors.

Also, the President’s order establishes new requirements for those who can qualify for deferred action under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. These individuals must:

- Be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012.
- Arrived in the U.S. before their 16th birthday.
- Continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007.

Technically, the President’s action should have no visible impact on the current workforce. Under existing law, all employers must verify the authority of their workers to work in the United States or face penalties. This is accomplished by the I-9 Employment Verification process. Assuming the employer has dutifully complied with I-9 requirements, there should be nothing to suggest the Executive Action would apply to any current worker. Over the course of the next 180 days, the

Administration will be issuing guidelines that should clarify how these actions interface with the work authorization requirement of existing law, as well as how employers can protect themselves in various scenarios. Without that clarification, it is best for employers to resist the urge to “do something.” United Fresh will work closely with our agriculture counterparts to ensure the Administration is educated on the needs of agriculture employers, and we will share those updates with you as soon as we have them.

However, with this announcement, we are reminded again that our elected leaders continue to abdicate their responsibility to address one of the most critical problems facing our nation, a flawed and outdated immigration system. This Executive Order doesn’t address any long-term solutions, which can only be done through congressional action. The need for fundamental reform of our nation’s immigration system is abundant. Bottomline, we believe both Congress and the President need to ratchet down the rhetoric and come to the table to get this done in 2015. We at United Fresh will keep working hard to make that goal a reality.



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TRANSITION

**CHURCH BROTHERS
SALINAS, CA**

Kori Tuggle, a produce executive with more than 15 years of marketing experience, is joining Church Brothers, LLC, as vice president of marketing. Tuggle will report to chief executive, Steve Church, and work closely with the sales and new business development teams, as well as be responsible for marketing and other corporate priorities.



ANNOUNCEMENT



**NATURE FRESH FARMS LAUNCHES
MOBILE MICRO GREENHOUSE**

Nature Fresh Farms, Leamington, ON, built a mobile micro greenhouse and is the first micro greenhouse of its kind with a completely mobile unit. The project received much praise at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto and at the June 2014 United Fresh Convention. Highlighting the core 11 elements in the growing process, the greenhouse is equipped with live plants that are growing tomatoes, a complete irrigation and heating system, as well as a contained area with live bees.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**SAMBRAILO PACKAGING
PARTNERS WITH CCOF**

Sambrailo Packaging, Watsonville, CA, partners with California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). Sambrailo will donate a portion of the sales generated through the CCOF online store for Go Greener! clamshells to CCOF in support of the Future Organic Farmer Grant Fund.



TRANSITIONS

**THE ANDREW SMITH COMPANY
SALINAS, CA**

The Andrew Smith Company hires industry veteran **Dudley Brinan** as sales and outside procurement manager. In his new role, Brinan will maximize efficiency and minimize customer logistics. Trucks picking up fresh produce from Andrew Smith



Company, and its affiliate Colorful Harvest, can rely on Brinan's 20 years of experience to source, procure, and consolidate the balance of its loads.

Another addition to the Andrew Smith Company sales division is **Steven Garza**. Garza comes to the position having previously served in sales support, logistics and marketing with Andrew Smith Company affiliate Colorful Harvest.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**SWEET SCARLETTS AND
WONDERFUL HALOS ARRIVE
IN STORES NATIONWIDE**

The makers of Wonderful Pistachios, Los Angeles, CA-based POM Wonderful and Wonderful Halos launch Wonderful Sweet Scarletts Texas Red Grapefruits to produce aisles nationwide. Sweet Scarletts are grown, packed and shipped in Texas by Paramount Citrus.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**NEW LOCATION FOR NEPC
PRODUCE AND FLORAL EXPO**

New England Produce Council, Inc. announces its annual expo: NEPC BY THE SEA. This year it is scheduled for Wednesday, September 16, 2015 and Thursday September 17, 2015 at the oceanfront Chatham Bars Inn in Chatham, MA. At the new venue, the exhibit space is limited, so participants should reserve booths early.



TRANSITION

**J&J FAMILY OF FARMS
LOXAHATCHEE, FL**

As J&J Family of Farms continues to expand into the Western region of the U.S., the company recently hired **Mari Danielson**, who will serve as its Western sales manager. Danielson, who was previously the senior sales executive for Sunfed, brings a wide range of produce experience to this new position.



ANNOUNCEMENT



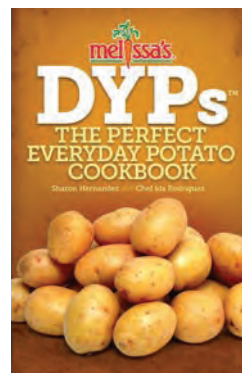
HALOS SEASON BEGINS

Mandarins from Wonderful Halos are back in season and now available in produce aisles nationwide. In season through April, Halos are a sweet, seedless and easy-to-peel family snack. Paramount Citrus, Bakersfield, CA, continues to push its marketing campaign to promote its Mandarin brand, Wonderful Halos.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**MELISSA'S RELEASES
POTATO COOKBOOK**

Melissa's Produce, Los Angeles, CA, adds another specialty cookbook to the company's series. The Baby Dutch Yellow Potato (DYP) is the perfect cooking potato, and there are 154 recipes in *DYP's The Perfect Everyday Potato Cookbook*. Recipes are grouped according to the seasons of the year, incorporating the fresh harvests of the day to enhance, support and combine with the DYP.

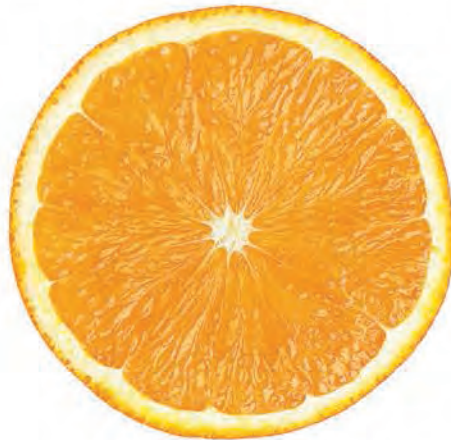




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NEW PRODUCT



EAT SMART LAUNCHES VEGETABLE KIT FOR SUPERFOOD LINE

Eat Smart is bringing something new to the salad kit category in North America. Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, launched two new Eat Smart Gourmet Vegetable Salad Kits as part of its superfood product line. All ingredients are pre-cut, pre-washed and pre-measured, so consumers just need to mix and serve.

ANNOUNCEMENT

A.J. TRUCCO REBRANDS KIWISTAR KIWIFRUIT

A.J. Trucco, Inc., Bronx, NY, announces the re-launch of its KiwiStar brand. KiwiStar has been on the



market for almost 15 years, and completed a rebranding initiative with an updated logo, new design and consumer-friendly packaging. All of the new packaging highlights three easy steps for consumers to eat kiwifruit: "Slice. Scoop. Enjoy."

ANNOUNCEMENT



BALOIAN FARMS LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

The recent launch of Fresno, CA-based Baloian's new website is another step toward its total brand positioning, which included the launch of several new products. The new website, Baloianfarms.com, showcases the depth and variety of its products, as well as showcase many of its new items in a more consumer-friendly style.

ANNOUNCEMENT

DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE WILL OPEN FRESH CUT FACILITY IN CANADA

Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, announced that its first state-of-the-art Canadian distribution center, which opened in January this year, is now being complemented by the opening of a fresh-cut facility in Oshawa, ON. The facility services the Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa metropolitan areas with fresh produce.



ANNOUNCEMENT



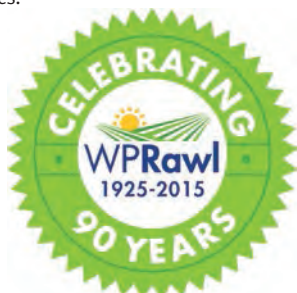
LOCUS TRAXX WORLDWIDE AND PATTERSON COMPANIES ANNOUNCE EDI INTEGRATION

Locus Traxx Worldwide, Jupiter, FL, announced a new partnership with Plant City, FL-based Patterson Companies (a third-party logistics provider of perishable and non-perishable goods). The importance of this integration is to prevent transportation problems and to monitor deliveries to thousands of Patterson Companies' customers annually. The Patterson structure provides customers with domestic, as well as international reach in both the perishable and non-perishable markets.

ANNOUNCEMENT

WP RAWL CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

WP Rawl, Pelion, SC, will celebrate its 90th year as a family-operated business in early 2015. The company plans to commemorate the anniversary by hosting a reception for the fresh produce industry at Southeast Produce Council's Southern Exposure in February. WP Rawl will also host an event for employees.



ANNOUNCEMENT



CHIPOTLE AND LOCALECOPIA INC. ANNOUNCE FLORIDA FARM WINNERS

Chipotle Mexican Grill, in partnership with Localecopia Inc. (a Palm Beach, FL-based non-profit organization supporting local, sustainable business), announced the 10 Florida farm winners of "The Chipotle Cultivate 10" award. "The Chipotle Cultivate 10" winners will receive a one-year membership to Localecopia with its many membership benefits including exposure to potential buyers, sellers, industry experts and other farmers.

ANNOUNCEMENT

"HUNGRY FOR FOOTBALL" PROMOTION PROVES TO BE GREAT SUCCESS

Avocados from Mexico (AFM), Dallas, TX, announced successful results for its "Hungry for Football" promotion. The campaign, launched on Sept. 8, 2014, brought in more than 92,000 consumer sweepstakes entries. AFM is now gearing up for "Guac Fiesta," the company's next campaign, which ends February 1, 2015.



ANNOUNCEMENT



RUBY FRESH POMEGRANATE SNACK CUPS ADDED TO SCHOOLS

Ruby Fresh, Firebaugh, CA, reported several school districts added 2-ounce pomegranate snack cups to their lunch menus this past fall. Ruby Fresh's 2-ounce pomegranate snack cups are individually sealed and the ideal size for a healthy, energy-packed snack for kids of all ages.



CLASS OF 2014
Young And Smart
Leaders On The Rise



PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Eleventh 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 March 1, 2015 (People born after March 1, 1975).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 11, 2015, and fax back to 561-994-1610 OR go to our website at producebusiness.com and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

Once nominated, the candidate will be interviewed by one of our editors, and will receive forms to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
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In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
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Nominee's Professional Achievements:

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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



Whole Foods' Reaction To Organic-Margin Squeeze Threatens Efforts To Boost Consumption

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

For many years, the organic industry provided a disproportionate share of the industry's profitability, extending from growers to retailers. It makes sense. The requirement that land being used for conventional growing cannot be certified organic without a three-year transitional period holds supply in check. As Wal-Mart learned in its various efforts to sell more organic produce, even the mighty power of its PO cannot instantly and magically summon massive increases in the production of organics.

Anyone in the business knows that growers are their own worst enemies — anxious to plant as much as they can and often undermining their own markets. This is not their fault; it is a kind of “tragedy of the commons” problem in which the individual interest trumps the communal interest. Allowing one's own animals to graze “on the commons” before someone else's eat the grass is a classic example.

There is, however, indication now that the organic market is at a tipping point, and although the category may continue to grow, it will not be disproportionately profitable in the future. Part of it is seen in the sales numbers. In its most recent survey, the Organic Trade Association found that organic sales increased 11.5 percent year-on-year. That is growth, but not Silicon Valley-style growth. One doesn't get the sense that the production is straining to meet the demand.

And some of this growth is not really representing increased demand for organics at the consumer level. Some of the growth in organics at the fresh produce level is accounted for by retailers deciding to go 100 percent organic on low-volume items such as herbs. This is not because consumers are screaming for organic items. It is because there is a certain segment of the market that wants organic and others that don't care. These are not deeply price-sensitive items as they are bought in low quantities, so if retailers can simplify their operations, avoid multiple SKUs and just sell organic, they would do so as it allows them to simultaneously access the whole market and simplify their operations.

However high-end food retailers around the country tell us that they are finding resistance to higher prices on organics, and this resistance is leading to margin compression in the category. This makes sense as well. With all food retailers looking to sell organics, from giant Wal-Mart on down, consumers have more choices and will increasingly resist paying more for parity products that they can buy elsewhere less expensively. It is a natural outgrowth of the existence of national organic standards. If the government sets the standards, then one can get the same product whether one buys organic bagged salad at Whole Foods or the “Bargain Basement.”

This, of course, is a very big problem for a retailer such as Whole Foods. It can reduce prices to be competitive, but that is a direct hit

to profitability. To maintain its pricing differential, it needs to maintain a positioning differential — thus its first national advertising campaign, which is themed around a “values matter” tagline.

The idea is simple, persuade consumers that even though other retailers may offer products that appear to be the same or similar, they are actually very different. Why? Because Whole Foods has “values” that other retailers do not have, and these values are used as a kind of filter to select what products are sold in its stores. So what seems like a parity product is not, because the back story that Whole Foods created — the way the growth of the products affects the environment, the way the labor is treated, etc. — is very different.

In produce, Whole Foods is promoting a “responsibly grown” program with an elaborate “good, better, best” matrix. Unfortunately, using terms like “responsibly grown” on proprietary programs is specifically designed to make the offerings of other retailers look “irresponsible.”

This would be unreasonable under any circumstances. Whole Foods is a comparatively small organization. It sells only a tiny percentage of the produce sold in America, Canada and the U.K., which are the markets it operates in. It doesn't make much sense to

say that its less-than-1-percent market share is the only responsibly grown produce.

The criteria is not very transparent for earning the various levels of “responsible growing.” Most of what is known is idiosyncratic and not widely recognized as “responsible” or “irresponsible.” For example, Whole Foods wants to ban certain legal pesticides, but it hasn't presented any analysis that what replaces those pesticides improves the food, the environment or anything else.

And it is not even clear there is much of a difference. Most produce at Whole Foods comes through the same supply chain that is used by the rest of the world. That is why Whole Foods was recently mentioned, for example, in the big *Los Angeles Times* series on abused Mexican laborers [further details in the *Perishable Pundit* excerpt on page 20]. The company doesn't have unique capabilities to monitor worldwide production sites.

Whole Foods is straining to find a new point of differentiation in a world in which organic is being commoditized. But in the course of doing this, if it implies that consumers should shy away from produce sold by other retailers because their produce is “irresponsibly grown,” it will hurt the health of consumers as they avoid produce altogether and buy less healthy products. A decline in produce purchasing will break the market for farmers. Values do matter, but what values are being expressed by a program that casts aspersions on perfectly honorable producers and scares consumers away from fresh produce?

With its ‘responsibly grown’ campaign, Whole Foods casts aspersions on other retailers’ produce offerings and ultimately hurts overall efforts to increase consumption.



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Email: hollee@nationalpotatocouncil.org
Website: potato-expo.com

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Website: biofach.com

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Email: bobm@nwwatermelon.com
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Working Women Consider Healthy Produce Purchases Throughout The Workweek

BY TARA L. PETERS, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, WORKPLACE IMPACT

It's no secret that grocery marketers focus much of their energy and budgets on reaching women. While some men may be doing more grocery shopping than they did in the past, female consumers remain the primary purchase decision makers for weekly household supplies. Yet with the influx of women into the workforce since the mid-1900s, the profile of the female purchaser changed significantly. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women now represent 47 percent of the American workforce. That means 68 million women leave their homes every workday and head to schools, offices, hospitals and other places of employment. Therefore, while working women still make most of the household grocery trips, their shopping patterns changed significantly.

A new study, *From Planning to Purchase: The Shopping Patterns of Working Women*, reveals the behaviors of this valuable demographic and equips produce marketers to better meet working women where they are on their unique path to purchase.

Working Women Are Concerned About Health And Wellness

One strong characteristic that influences the shopping pattern of working women is their strong focus on health and wellness. Not only are they responsible for ensuring their families eat healthy, they are in the workplace — an environment that is quickly becoming a key battleground for influencing healthy lifestyles. Since employers want healthy employees and are concerned about lowering their healthcare costs, many businesses are establishing wellness programs that encourage healthy eating. Working women are taking notice.

According to the study, 96 percent of working women regularly shop the perimeter aisles, and according to 2012 research, *Working Women Healthy Lifestyle Survey* (also conducted by Workplace Impact), fresh fruit was the leading food that working women take to work to

One strong characteristic that influences the shopping pattern of working women is their strong focus on health and wellness.

support their healthy eating habits. Added to that, the current study suggests that working women like to take their time when making their produce-buying decisions. Produce was the leading category that working women give thought to throughout the entire path to purchase, with 41 percent indicating that they make their decisions both pre-store and in-store.

This has particularly strong implications for produce marketers, indicating that their messages should target working women during the entire path to purchase.

Convenience-Oriented Shopping Patterns

While not asked directly about their preference for convenience, the data shows this is one of the greatest influences on the shopping patterns of working women, and it starts with making a shopping list. Ninety-five percent indicated that they make a shopping list so they won't forget an item;

45 percent said they do so to save time in the store. This indicates that the working woman's shopping trip is strategic and focused. The shopping list serves its purpose well by helping women navigate the store as quickly as possible, and it prevents them from needing to make a time-consuming additional trip for a forgotten item.

While some marketers continue to view grocery shopping as a task that is planned at home, the data shows otherwise. Eighty-four percent of working women said they regularly/occasionally add items to the list at work. One reason this occurs is because when it comes time to make the shopping trip, it's often between the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Forty-nine percent of respondents indicated they make multiple trips to the grocery store Monday through Friday, and 46 percent regularly do so on their way to or from work or during a lunch break. What this demonstrates is that due to the nature of their hectic lifestyles, working women have no other choice but to blend grocery shopping with their workday activities.

These insights show that the shopping patterns of working women evolved to keep pace with the increased blending of work life and home life. Marketers have an opportunity to drive growth by keeping pace with this trend, and one way to do that is to include reaching women during the workday.

For a full copy of the study, *From Planning to Purchase: The Shopping Patterns of Working Women*, please email Working Women Shopping to marketing@workplaceimpact.com.



WorkPlace Impact is a national marketing services company that has studied working consumers for more than 25 years. The company has a network of 844,000 businesses across the country and represents 57 million employees. In addition to generating research data from this network, the company helps consumer packaged goods and retail marketers reach consumers at work during the workday.

Non-Working Women Need To Be Studied Too

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

Do working women have different needs than women who do not have paid employment? It seems like that probably would be true, but the nature, extent and even the cause is not clear.

After all, women who don't have paid employment can still be very busy — there is volunteer work, children, spouses, elderly parents etc., which can all drain time. And even if the needs are different, it is not clear that it is the work in and of itself that makes them different. For example, many people who do not have paid employment may have very high-earning spouses. If so, it may be affluence that causes both spouses not to work and changes in food purchasing habits.

This study is intriguing but raises as many questions as it answers:

1) Strong focus on health and wellness: Is it true that working women have a stronger focus on health and wellness than women without paid employment? There is no comparison group in the study, so we just don't know.

2) Responsible for ensuring their families eat healthy: Once again, do women who work feel more responsible for keeping their families healthy than women who do not? There is no evidence for this.

3) Businesses are establishing wellness programs that encourage healthy eating — working women are taking notice. Do such corporate programs lead to behavioral changes? Maybe women who are not working have more time to go to the gym and get equally motivated in another way.

4) Ninety-six percent of working women regularly shop perimeter aisles.

But doesn't almost everyone shop the perimeter aisles? It is not clear that working women "over index" here.

5) Fresh fruit was the leading food that working women take to work to support their healthy eating habits.

The wording here is a little confusing. That fresh fruit would be the No. 1 snack to "support their healthy eating habits" does not surprise. But isn't this the same for women without paychecks?

6) Working women like to take their time when making their produce-buying decisions.

The idea here is that working women plan for purchase of fresh produce and evaluate the produce again in-store. This is almost certainly true but, once again, hardly seems a unique trait to working women.

7) Produce was the leading category that working women give thought to throughout the entire path to purchase, with 41 percent indicating that they make their decisions both pre-store and in-store.

This is kind of inherent in the nature of produce. One plans on buying apples, but determines the variety after seeing what is offered that day. The frustrating part of this research, though, is that despite this being an accurate description of the way working women shop, there is virtually no reason to believe — and certainly the study doesn't tell us — that women without paid employment behave differently.

8) While not asked directly about their preference for convenience, the data shows this is one of the greatest influences on the shopping patterns of working women.

The fact that a woman is not working does not mean she wants to spend her whole life in the kitchen, and many non-working women have the means to do other things, so convenience can still be important. Sure some women, both working and non-working, have loads of staff to help them, so they may not care about convenience, but what percentage could that possibly be?

9) Ninety-five percent indicated that they make a shopping list so they won't forget an item.

Yes, but do non-working women want to forget things? For this study to be particularly helpful, you need a comparative study with women who don't work for pay so we can see if they approach things differently from working women.

10) Forty-five percent said they do so to save time in the store. Once again, just

because a woman doesn't have paid employment doesn't mean she wants to hang out in the supermarket all day.

11) Some marketers continue to view grocery shopping as a task that is planned at home, but the data shows otherwise.

In fresh produce, this has never been the case. New-crop peaches just in, bananas not ripened properly, cross-merchandising promotions — all these things have always changed produce purchasing right at the store.

12) Eighty-four percent of working women said they regularly/occasionally add items to the list at work.

There are a thousand reasons — including hearing an ad on the radio or a friend mentioning a sale at the market — why a working woman would add or subtract things to the list during the day. But guess what? Non-working women do the same thing.

13) One reason this occurs is because when it comes time to make the shopping trip, it's often between the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Working women may run into a store to pick up something for their own lunch at an office, and while there, they may remember they need cans of soup or other grocery items. But, for the most part, working women aren't likely to do a lot of perishable food shopping until the work day is done. It is not clear exactly how the shopping hours of working women differ from those of non-working women.

14) Forty-nine percent of respondents indicated they make multiple trips to the grocery store Monday through Friday, and 46 percent regularly do so after work or on a lunch break.

Once again, the question is how does this differ from non-working women?

The advice WorkPlace Impact gives is fine. Produce vendors should look to influence people at a variety of times and in a variety of ways. But for research about a particular population segment to be helpful, we have to have a point of reference.



JIM PREVOR'S

PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Damaging *Los Angeles Times* Article About Mexican Labor, Though Incomplete And Unbalanced, Puts Retailers And Receivers On Notice: In A Transparent World, Retailers In America Are Now Responsible For Their Supply Chains.

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 12.15.2014

A few months ago, we started getting calls from U.S. produce executives who expected to be criticized in a report in the *Los Angeles Times*. They wanted to know how to position their companies and activities.

Well, now the four-section/photo-montage series is out, and the series is a blockbuster. There is a more than decent chance it will win a Pulitzer Prize, and everyone in the produce industry should read it and watch the videos.

It may win the Pulitzer because it is thorough and large, and shows a substantial commitment of resources, and because it fits ideologically with those who judge these sorts of things. But in the end, it is a piece that is incomplete and not very well thought out. However, the industry would be very foolish to ignore it.

The gist of the story is that many workers in the fields in Mexico are not only very poor but are forced to live in horrible situations and are treated poorly — wages withheld, food kept scarce, etc.

More specifically, there is an accusation that American companies have not intervened to ensure good treatment of workers, even though they have intervened to ensure food safety and quality for American consumers. As the piece explains:

American consumers get all the salsa, squash and melons they can eat at affordable prices. And top U.S. brands — Wal-Mart, Whole Foods Market, Subway and Safeway, among many others — profit from produce they come to depend on.

These corporations say their Mexican suppliers have committed to decent treatment and living conditions for workers.

But a Los Angeles Times investigation found that for thousands of farm laborers south of the border, the export boom is a story of exploitation and extreme hardship.

The Times found:

· Many farm laborers are essentially trapped for months at a time in rat-infested camps, often without beds and sometimes without functioning toilets or a reliable water supply.

· Some camp bosses illegally withhold wages to prevent workers from leaving during peak harvest periods.

· Laborers often go deep in debt paying inflated prices for necessities at company stores. Some are reduced to scavenging for food when their credit is cut off. It's common for laborers to head home penniless at the end of a harvest.

· Those who seek to escape their debts and miserable living conditions have to contend with guards, barbed-wire fences and sometimes threats of violence from camp supervisors.

· Major U.S. companies have done little to enforce social responsibility guidelines that call for basic worker protections such as clean housing and fair pay practices.

One issue is that the author has not managed to quantify anything. Obviously, if people are held as prisoners etc., this is horrible and unacceptable. But even assuming everything in the stories is accurate, how often this happens, what percentage of crop it represents . . . we are left not knowing if this is a regrettable anecdote

or a substantial problem.

We just recently learned that in writing the University of Virginia (UVA) rape story, which appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine, the journalist went to visit many universities before she found one with the story line she wanted.

How many camps the author heard about that would NOT confirm this dramatic story is not told. There seems to be an effort to identify horror stories, not to depict the actual standards of labor in Mexico. Sometimes the story even tells on itself:

Martinez and Santiago were among at least 100 peasants recruited in the spring of 2013 by a labor contractor for Bioparques. He touted jobs at the giant export farm: Workers would earn 100 pesos (about \$8) a day. Meals would be free, along with housing and child care.

After a 550-mile bus ride, the laborers arrived at Bioparques. Their home for the next three months was the Bioparques 4 camp, managed for the company by the labor contractor.

It was nothing like the company's main labor compound, which had a school, day care and other amenities.

This account of conditions in the camp is based on interviews with 13 laborers who lived there that spring. The *Times* interviewed some in their home villages in Huasteca and others by phone. The paper also spoke to Mexican labor inspectors and Bioparques employees and visited the camp.

But wait, why write this whole story on this particular camp and devote exactly one sentence to "the company's main labor compound, which had a school, day care and other amenities"? Would it make more sense to assess the "main" labor compound? The answer is that the author and the newspaper were looking for the Pulitzer Prize win. It is doubtful a nomination will come from a story saying that in the main compound everything is good, but there are a few outliers needing to be reformed.

The bigger issue, though, is that all Mexican labor camps are going to be lousy. Indeed all American labor camps are going to be horrid — when viewed through the prism of an upper-middle class American.

When members of the trade called us, their first instinct was to fight — to point out they were following or exceeding industry standards. We advised them to take another tack, because unless they provided a two-bedroom condo with swimming pool, nothing in any of these camps would prevent an earnest journalist from finding much that the American people will find repugnant.

Yet, a thoughtful approach reveals the complexity of the problem. This is not a new industry. The workers who travel hundreds of miles from the most impoverished corners of Mexico to pick produce are not pioneers. Virtually every one of them has a friend or relative who has already gone down this path. So they have intimate acquaintances with full knowledge of the pros and cons of working in the fields, and yet they choose to do so.

This is really the important question to study. Why do they



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choose to do so? The almost certain answer is that, difficulties and all, they believe this path offers a better alternative than any other alternatives available to them.

The author states, "a *Los Angeles Times* investigation found that for thousands of farm laborers south of the border, the export boom is a story of exploitation and extreme hardship." There is hardship without a doubt, but for the poor, life is always hard and it is odd to call "exploitation" the providing of an alternative that people view as a better alternative than any other choice they have.

After failing to address why such workers voluntarily sign up for what is supposedly such horrible work, the author claims basically that many of the workers are prisoners:

At the labor camp for Bioparques de Occidente, they and other farmworkers slept sprawled head to toe on concrete floors. Their rooms crawled with scorpions and bedbugs. Meals were skimpy, hunger a constant. Camp bosses kept people in line with threats and, when that failed, with their fists.

Escape was tempting but risky. The compound was fenced with barbed wire and patrolled by bosses on all-terrain vehicles.

When the mistreatment of workers at the camp was finally exposed, Mexican authorities made arrests, imposed fines and promised to make an example of the company. A year and a half later, however, the case of Bioparques speaks more to the impunity of Mexican agribusiness than to accountability.

Yet in the story on "company stores," the author makes the point that the workers often return the following season:

For Luis Hernandez, the night watchman at Campo Isabeles, the end of the 2014 harvest meant heightened vigilance. Whenever he saw someone leaving, he checked with the Gastelums to make sure the laborer had paid his debts, he said.

But Israel Gastelum didn't worry much about getting stuck with unpaid bills. Most laborers return for the next harvest, he said, and their jobs, and debts, would be waiting.

"If they don't pay me now," Gastelum said, "there's always next season."

There is a contradiction here. How on the one hand can the author say that people are being held prisoner, desperate to escape, and yet also say they will return voluntarily next year?

Most of the story is less about American companies than the general dysfunction of the Mexican state. Many of the activities the author finds objectionable are already against the law — such as withholding wages and child labor. Yet when an explanation for withholding workers' pay is provided by industry participants, no exploration of the matter is given. Perhaps the workers don't want their wages given while they are encamped, because they might get robbed or they might be tempted to spend the money rather than save it for their families.

Maybe a little more reporting would reveal why the wages are withheld in the first place. What happened in the past when, say, weekly or monthly payments were followed? The article is silent in this area.

The article attacks the stores that are on the work camps. The author explains that there are efforts to improve the situation:

The federal government, sensitive to the fraught history of company stores, operates its own discount outlets in some camps and sends mobile stores to others. Some agribusinesses have formed cooperatives to sell staples to laborers at low prices. But such efforts have been too limited to break the grip of the tiendas.

But there is no quantification of these efforts and, for that matter, no indication that the company stores are excessively profitable or paying excessive rents to the camp owners.

After all, these stores provide credit to penniless people and pay to locate where transportation is not necessary — to compare their prices to a discount store that doesn't give credit and is a car ride away seems unreasonable.

Perhaps the biggest issue, which the article does not explore at all, is what the consequences would be of upgrading the situation of the field hands. Suppose there was really an effort to give workers the kinds of environments that would make Americans proud of their food supply chain? The one thing that is for certain is it would raise the price of the product and, as it did so, the labor situation would change.

Other growing areas would become more competitive and would take business away from the Mexicans.

As prices rise, consumers will shift consumption to other products, which these laborers wouldn't be involved in producing.

The series begins with a video explaining that no machine exists to harvest peppers, tomatoes or eggplant. But that is not exactly true. Tomatoes for processing are mostly mechanically harvested. It is more correct to say that with labor so inexpensive, it doesn't pay to develop or utilize robotic technology to pick these items for the fresh market.

So if the cost of harvesting goes up, then mechanization at various levels will make sense. Our desire to ensure better conditions for these poor laborers could end costing them their jobs, and leaving them worse off than before.

And the journalists will lose interest, because the world is filled with very poor people; it is the opportunity to think that American consumers and retailers can fix this problem that is of interest.

So we have this extensive, high-production-value Pulitzer Prize-level material, which is really just a hit job on the industry with zero effort to quantify their charges, no effort to provide a balanced view of the situation and no level of intellectual engagement to explore the real world consequences of raising the cost of labor in a very poor country.

Yet, as we said at the beginning, the industry would be foolish to ignore this series. Part of this is a function of the capacity of some industry members to promise more than they can deliver.

Whole Foods is specifically mentioned in the article in no small part because it runs around the country pronouncing itself as a unique kind of chain in which "values matter" — though, as we pointed out in a piece titled "A Walk Through Whole Foods And Why Its 'Responsibly Grown' Campaign Is Bad For Farmers," Whole Foods actually buys from the same supply chain as everyone else. The company does not have 2,000 people in Mexico carefully monitoring daily behavior in the produce patch, which is probably what it would take to be true to this mantra.

In fact, many retailers over-promise and under-deliver. Having policies is cheap. Getting people to sign promises under threat of losing the business is easy. Actually getting change made and sustained is very expensive and difficult.

Transparency on the supply chain is increasingly going to be demanded, and this article is neither the first nor the last. The newspaper's effort in putting together graphs showing the flow of produce is a game-changer. It is telling retailers from Whole Foods to Wal-Mart that you own your supply chain and you will be held responsible for all that occurs within it.



PHOTO COURTESY OF

Al's Supermarkets

How one independent retailer took a risk to compete with evolving grocery chains and held its own as a produce destination with personalized service.

BY OSCAR KATOV

Fresh out of the Navy in 1946 at the end of World War II, Al Pontius wondered how he could dive into civilian life again. One of his most memorable experiences pre-war was working at a food market in La Porte, IN. Two friends serendipitously approached him about forming a partnership to buy a grocery store (known as Hoosier Food Mart) in Michigan City, IN. Pontius didn't hesitate selling his car to pay for his cut of the business deal. In a few months, Pontius risked it all again when he bought out his partners and became sole proprietor of Thrifty Food Mart, which was the grocery business they established.

Simultaneously, just as Pontius' store was gaining traction, large grocery chains were pushing out mom-and-pop stores in Indiana. As these stores closed, Pontius hired former owners who brought a wealth of experience, plus their own customer base. Coupled with Pontius' belief in the importance of customer service, the result was an independent retailer strong enough to compete against the growing chain stores. Pontius eventually grew his empire from one store to six stores under the Lakeshore Foods Corporation and named all of his stores Al's Supermarkets.

Although Pontius died in 2006, his son, Gil, continues the tradition as president and chief executive. Pontius' granddaughter, Alexis, is vice president of Al's Supermarkets.

Bob Bline, who is produce vice president of the six-store enterprise in Indiana — two in La Porte, two in Michigan City, one in South Haven and one in Buffalo — as well as a 41-year Lakeshore

Foods veteran, says the foundation Pontius built was “the beginning of who we are now, as the Lakeshore Foods Corporation.

“We put a lot of faith in the experience of our staff. Our produce managers — collectively in the six stores — probably have 250 years





Al's Supermarkets' produce department is very important to the success of the company. The store values its partnerships — some going back 32 years.

of experience, and that's just with six people. Our points of differentiation are: to be more connected with our local growers, to practice our operational skills at the best level, being accurate in our pricing, and to meet the needs of our customers to maintain relationships of loyalty."

Good working relationships are also evident in the retailer's dealings with the growers it showcases in Produce. The appointment of Angela Hamilton as produce specialist serving as liaison between the growers and stores' produce managers has gone a long way to streamline the process.

"Angela made many good contacts with local growers and works closely with them during each season for vegetables, fruit, sweet corn, tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers," says Bline. "We had some great bin-apple offerings this year with orchard-picked apples, and our customers really embraced that offering. We have been as much as a dollar under the market, thanks to our bin program."

When Bline was asked about meeting the

demands of customers in freshness and maintaining delivery schedules with the company's six stores, he gives credit to the services of the company's wholesaler. "We rely heavily on Title Food Service in Indianapolis. We have a 32-year relationship with them, and they cover all our needs."

"Of course there are things we do in promotion that go beyond Title's services," says Hamilton, "We do an autumn harvest week, and of course, some of this activity also corresponds with the timing of our local farmers. We're blessed to be so close to Michigan, and we consider southwest Michigan and northern Indiana as our local growing areas."

"You know it's a trust business with local farmers," says Bline. "Really, it's a handshake business with friendships that are long-standing, powerful and deep."

Bline says Produce is the major department in all six stores. "If Produce is done right, you will have a successful company. We may do only 10 percent of a store's total busi-

ness, but we generate 25 percent of the gross profit. Produce is a profitable department."

Al's Supermarkets also keeps current with its look and atmosphere for the customers' shopping enjoyment.

"We have been remodeling stores throughout the past decade," says Bline. "We had some stiff competition in 2008 when two Walmarts opened in our area, which had a profound effect on our company and the community. So we had to retool ourselves a bit. The good thing is: we're still here, we're still profitable, and we're still a good employer for 400 employees."

pb

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





SUPERFOODS:

Marketing Magic or Produce Pretenders?

Delivering big at the register despite scientists' skepticism

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

Imagine a world where visiting the produce department is as important as visiting the doctor for warding off disease. That is the appeal of a superfood, which is defined by Oxford Dictionary as “a nutrient-rich food considered to be especially beneficial for health and well-being.”

According to the late *New York Times* political columnist William Safire, the word superfood was first used in 1915 by a newspaper in Kingston, Jamaica, to describe a particular wine. It reemerged in the 1990s, with the promotion of spirulina (blue-green algae). By the early 2000s, popular books included the word superfoods in their title; stars of the day included broccoli, spinach and berries. Superfoods took a brief detour into the realm of superfruits around 2009, when exotic fruits such as acai, goji berries, and camu camu made the list of *Superfoods for Dummies* by Brent Agin, MD and Shereen Jegtvig, MS. Restaurants too incorporated superfruits, named as one of 2009's hot trends by the National Restaurant Association. By 2014, superfruits dropped to No. 63.

Superfoods today are the “big tent” of the produce department, an all-inclusive group

of berries, leafy greens, fruits and vegetables with bright colors, nutrition standard bearers such as oranges (vitamin C) and carrots (vitamin A), and nuts and seeds.

AN AGREED-UPON IDENTIFICATION IS ELUSIVE

“The term superfood is freely used but loosely defined,” says Joanie Taylor, director, consumer affairs and community relations for St. Louis-based Schnuck Markets, Inc. The family-owned company operates 98 stores and 93 in-store pharmacies in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa.

It is difficult to identify what makes some foods more super than others. Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity units (ORAC) is a measurement for antioxidants that was developed by the Bethesda, MD-based National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Aging — a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services focused on research initiatives for health and aging. It was thought foods with higher ORAC values, specifically, berries, would be the most effective at neutralizing the cell-damaging free radicals that contribute to disease. The U.S. Department of Agriculture later removed the ORAC database from its website, because antioxidant capacity does not predict effects on human health.

Recently, a Rutgers University researcher Jennifer di Noia defined “powerhouse” fruits and vegetables based on their concentration

of nutrients and created a list of 41 items. Watercress tops the list, followed by the leafy greens Chinese cabbage, chard, beet greens, spinach, and others. Kale, the superfood poster child, ranks 15th.

Supermarket rating systems yield inconsistent results. Whole Foods Market’s Aggregate Nutrient Density Index (ANDI) assigns each food a score from zero to 1,000 based on nutrient density. Leafy greens score highest, ranging from 516 for chicory to 1,000 for mustard greens, kale and watercress. Non-leafy green vegetables follow, with scores of 296 to 502. Popular superfoods like nuts (33 to 103) and fruits (71 to 207) have relatively low ANDI scores. NuVal (a rating system used in more than 30 retailers around the U.S., including Kroger and Hy-Vee) generates scores between zero and 100. Although fruits and vegetables generally score in the 90s, some foods considered to be super score lower, namely avocado (88) and nuts (average 59). Most regular produce items get three stars from Hannaford’s Guiding Stars, but garlic, onions, persimmon and dates get two.

Like the term “natural,” superfood does not have a regulated definition. “There is no scientific or regulatory definition of ‘superfoods’ in any country of which I am aware,” says Jeffrey Blumberg, Ph.D., F.A.S.N., F.A.C.N., C.N.S., director, Antioxidants Research Laboratory, Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging, Boston, MA.

The marketing of superfoods is prohibited in the European Union unless accompanied by a specific medical claim supported by credible scientific research. As such, caution reigns. The website of London-based awareness charity Cancer Research UK states “you shouldn’t rely on so-called superfoods to reduce the risk of cancer. The term superfood is really just a marketing tool, with little scientific basis.”

HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS EMBRACE SUPERFOODS

Despite a unified consensus, many health organizations eagerly promote superfoods. The Alexandria, VA-based American Diabetes Association highlights those that have a low glycemic index (less effect on blood sugar) and high content of key nutrients, such as dark leafy greens, citrus, sweet potatoes, berries, and tomatoes. The New York City-based National Kidney Foundation names apples, blueberries, kale, strawberries, spinach and sweet potatoes as kidney-friendly superfoods. The City of Hope cites its research showing certain superfoods, namely mushrooms, pomegranates, and blueberries, may have the ability to combat cancer without affecting healthy tissue.

SUPERFOODS PREVAIL IN THE INDUSTRY

In the absence of an official definition, the industry created its own.



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"We refer to nutrient-dense leafy greens and vegetables as superfoods, because they make a significant impact on our consumers' lives," notes Tristan Simpson, chief communications officer, Ready Pac Foods Inc., Irwindale, CA. "Superfoods are complex and deeply nutritious, and they make it easier for consumers to lose weight, build immunity against illness, aid in digestion, and improve joint, skin, and heart health."

"The term superfoods refers to foods that have a high concentration of vitamins and minerals, and provide other various health benefits," says Bruce Bolton, supply manager, Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN. "Quite often the identification of these particular foods is decided by regional food enthusiasts and their popularity then quickly spreads."

"We don't define it in our marketing at Melissa's Produce," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Los Angeles, CA-based Melissa's/World Variety Produce. "It's a 'marketing term' used on foods that have good to elevated nutritional profiles."

Many items not under USDA marketing orders are actively marketed as superfoods. Bil Goldfield, director of corporate communications, Dole Food Company and Dole Fresh Fruit, Westlake Village, CA, notes the term superfood describes fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, oranges, and spinach that are high in certain nutrients that can benefit health.

A growing number of products call out their superfood status on their packaging. The Eat Smart line from Apio Inc., Guadalupe, CA, displays a round medallion with the number of superfoods in the product. San Miguel Produce, Oxnard, CA, offers a SuperKALE Salad under its Cut N Clean banner. Other San Miguel products list key nutrients but don't use the word 'superfood.'

The Emeryville, CA-based SCS Global Services offers an Antioxidant Superfood Certification. "Our Live Gourmet Living Upland Cress displays the certification because it was proven by SCS to contain high quantities of the antioxidant lutein," says Vincent Choate, director of marketing, Hollandia Produce, L.P., Carpinteria, CA.

In the U.S., items covered by USDA marketing orders cannot use the word. "We can only communicate approved nutritional messages," says Ann Segerstrom, a consultant to the California Avocado Commission. "As healthful and nutritious as avocados naturally are, claims like 'super fruit' have to be substantiated in specified journals."

EMERGING SUPERFOOD TRENDS

While it is impossible to predict the next kale, these superfoods hold promise for 2015 according to experts:

Packaged Blends

"Package blends of mixed greens are trending," says Bruce Bolton, supply manager, Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN. "They offer numerous combinations and give consumers easy access to multiple varieties in a single purchase."

"We expanded into salad kits with mixtures of greens and vegetables plus unique dressing," says Garrett Nishimori of Oxnard, CA-based San Miguel Produce Inc.



"Our popular EnerCHI mix combines Bok Choi, Asian mustard greens, snow peas, spinach, and carrots."

Apio Inc., Guadalupe, CA, recently launched two new Eat Smart Gourmet Vegetable Salad Kits, a Beets & Greens Vegetable Salad Kit with six superfoods and a Roasted Yam Salad with eight super-

foods. The Dole Power Up Greens line includes combinations of baby kale or spring mix with greens. Each is promoted for its numerous vitamins and minerals. ReadyPac Bistro Bowl Chopped Salads combine nutrient-dense superfoods such as kale, broccoli, cauliflower, red and green cabbage, and black beans.



Juice Blends

The new Harvest Sensations Ready to Juice line includes four varieties of pre-washed, pre-cut vegetables and fruits, each providing two servings of fresh fruits and vegetables: Cool Carrot Craze, Kale Blast, Lemon Ginger Twist, and Spinach Splash.

Hybrid Varieties

The kale sprout is a new vegetable cross between red kale and Brussels sprouts. Sold under the brand names

Kalettes, Lollipops, and others, kale sprouts resulted from 15 years of traditional breeding and hybridization. They can be cooked like kale or eaten raw in a salad.

The Foxy Produce organic line recently introduced organic BroccoLeaf, the often-discarded leaf of the broccoli plant. Resembling collards in appearance and use, broccoli leaves are rich in calcium and vitamins C, A, and K; they also provide folate and potassium.



Look to farmers markets and niche growers for expansion of the produce rainbow. Different colors — golden or purple cauliflower, purple Brussels sprouts, ruby red artichokes — mean a wider array of potentially-beneficial phytochemicals.

Technology-Aided Breeding

Not to be confused with GMOs, technology-aided breeding creates new produce varieties with enhanced benefits. St. Louis-based Monsanto's Beneforté broccoli contains two to three times more of the plant nutrient glucoraphanin than traditional broccoli. The company's Frescada head lettuce is a cross between iceberg and a romaine, with the nutrition of romaine and the crispiness of iceberg.

Nutraleaf Burgundy Leaf Lettuce and Burgundy Romaine are being cultivated and marketed by Coastline Family Farms, Salinas, CA. The deep purple lettuces are high in antioxidants and excellent sources of vitamins A and C. They also have better shelf life than regular red lettuce.





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RETAIL PLAYS A ROLE

Superfoods are increasingly promoted at the retail level on packaging and signage — despite the absence of a superfood definition. Weis Markets, Sunbury, PA, initiated a superfoods program in 2014. “We created a list of 25 superfoods that stand out for their nutrition, and we promote them throughout the store on signs that list their key nutrients,” explains Beth Stark, R.D., L.D.N., lifestyle initiatives manager, Weis Markets Inc. “We also highlight these foods in articles in our magazine and call-outs

in circulars.”

In contrast, Schnuck’s does not promote items as superfoods, but instead responds to changing trends such as the rapid rise, fall, and leveling off of kale. “We still sell much more kale than we used to, because it no longer is just a garnish that nobody ate unless they were hungry,” observes Taylor. “Customers today expect to see it in our stores.”

Taylor sees a tremendous opportunity for produce managers to educate team members on talking to customers about foods and

health. In addition to supermarket dietitians, suppliers, trade associations and grower/shippers are valuable resources.

“Produce department personnel can help people have good experiences through simple strategies such as sampling, recipes, and in-store messaging,” says Amy Myrdal Miller, M.S., R.D.N., founder and president, Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, LLC, Sacramento, CA.

“Our produce managers are available and visible for answering customer questions,” says Meredith Mensinger R.D., L.D.N., corporate dietitian, Redner’s Markets, Reading, PA. “We also run a highly successful sampling program where shoppers can try new items and learn how they pair with other ingredients.”

SUPERFOODS ALONE MAY NOT PUSH NEEDLE

“Produce sales are as much art as science,” notes Ed McLaughlin, Ph.D., director, Food Industry Management Program, Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. “Consumers purchase fruits and vegetables based on perceived benefits that can include convenience, value-added features, recipes, fun, freshness, color, and local. Taste and price matter. By and large, nutrition does not sell; it is the back story.”

Still, consumers say they’re interested. The Mintel Group found 56 percent of soup consumers want more superfoods in their soup and 65 percent of parents want added superfoods in baby foods. Many buy produce for specific nutrients or to reduce disease risk.

Growth occurs at the intersection of nutrition, convenience, and taste, for example, in prewashed superfood baby greens. “Prewashed baby kale is perfect for the kale-curious,” says Samantha Cabaluna, vice president, marketing and communications, Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA. “It takes away the intimidation.”

The appeal of drinking nutrients continues to elevate superfoods, particularly kale, chard and other nutrient-dense greens. San Jose, CA-based Global Industry Analysts Inc. predicts the global commercial smoothie market alone will reach \$9 billion in 2015.

“We see a direct link between blender and produce sales,” observes Tim Provost, public relations director for the home-blender company, Blendtec, Orem, UT. “Our sales doubled from 2013 to 2014, and we expect the same in 2015.”

“Smoothies are convenient,” says nutrition consultant Karen Ansel, M.S., R.D.N. “People might not have the time to sauté a bunch of kale, but sneaking it into a smoothie is easy and it softens the strong flavors.”


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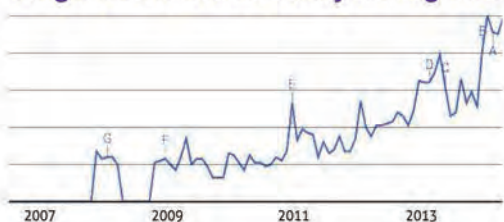
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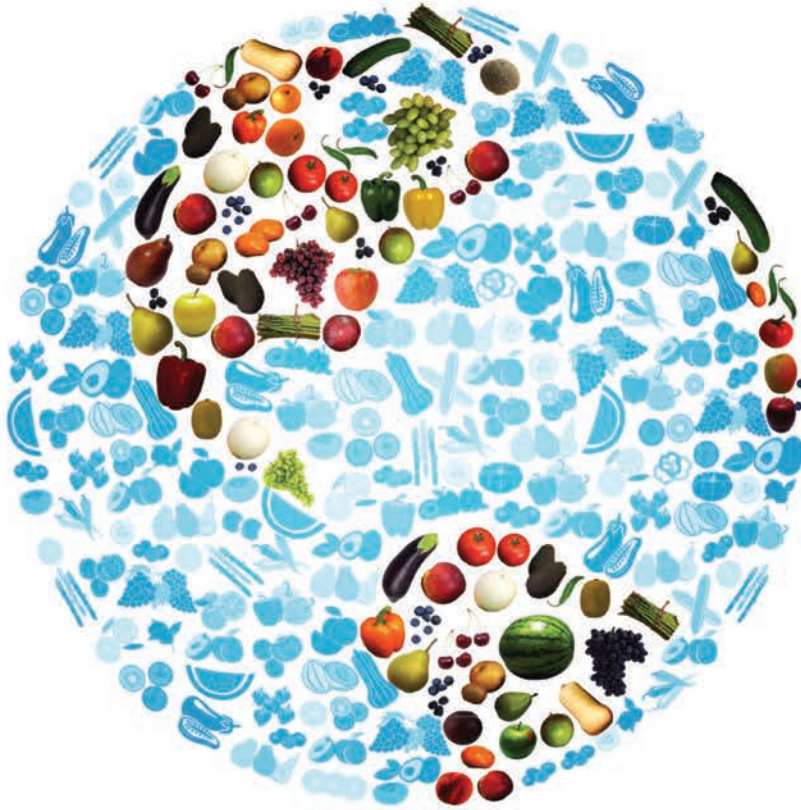
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LOOK TO RESTAURANTS FOR THE FUTURE

Restaurants often usher in food trends, so the next superfood might be gathering steam on a restaurant menu. According to Chicago, IL-based Datassential, the Top 10 fastest growing items in fine dining are exotic citrus such as Meyer lemons, blood oranges and yuzu, dried fruit, pomegranate, and root vegetables.

“Keep an eye on what’s served at smaller chains,” advises Myrdal Miller of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting. “They are more nimble and in touch with Millennials, which is the group driving kale.”

“Preparation method is highly important when dealing with superfoods such as cabbage, broccoli, and kale that contain compounds that smell and taste bad,” says Ryan Hutmacher, “The Centered Chef” and consulting chef, Weight Watchers, Chicago, IL. “Roasting and other dry-heat cooking methods allow the compounds to evaporate. When preparing a salad with kale or other greens, balance bitterness with richness from a healthy fat, and accent with sour, sweet, or both.”

“Even though we first introduced Jerusalem Artichokes to American consumers in 1965 (and renamed them Sunchokes® a couple of years later), they have been one of the top trending vegetables with chefs in the past four years,” says Karen Caplan, president and chief executive for Los Alamitos CA-based Frieda’s Inc. “They are a flavorful alternative to potatoes, parsnips, and squash, and many chefs are including them in their winter menus.

“Celery Root continues to be growing in popularity, so much so that when there are gaps in supply from U.S. growers, we are importing from Europe,” says Caplan.

TO MANY, ALL PRODUCE IS SUPER

Nutrition experts tend to roll their eyes at the term “superfoods,” noting it’s more marketing than nutrition and it needlessly pits fruits and vegetables against each other.

“Either nothing is a superfood or everything is — depending on how you define the term,” says Matt Fitzgerald, author of *Diet Cults: The Surprising Fallacy at the Core of Nutrition Fads*. “Superfoods were not discovered, they were invented. Look at potatoes: they are pretty super on balance, so why is spirulina a superfood and potato is not?”

“Some fruits and vegetables have more research behind them because of funding, so just because a fruit or vegetable isn’t supported by a mountain of studies that promote its benefits doesn’t mean it’s not incredibly healthy,” says Ansel.

“I have an issue with superfoods because consumers can’t go wrong in the produce aisle,” says Joan Salge Blake, M.S., R.D.N., Boston-based spokesperson, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. “Let’s focus on helping consumers eat more fruits and vegetables.”

Industry members too downplay the superfood designation. “The reality is all fruits and vegetables are good for you,” says Carly Scaduto, senior communications manager, vegetables, Monsanto, St. Louis, MO. “We want to help boost consumption of all produce, and everyone will benefit.”

SPOTLIGHT ON SUPER SALES AND SUPER NUTRITION

With two-year sales growth of approximately 20 percent for blueberries and spinach, 30 percent for mangos, and a whopping 90 percent for pomegranate, according to



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Chicago, IL-based FreshLook Marketing Group, the sales value of a superfood designation is hard to ignore. The following produce items stand out.

Kale continues to be one of the main superfoods in the industry, observes Bolton of Robinson Fresh. "When we began marketing and distributing fresh kale greens in 2009, the main market was for packaged cooking greens rather than salads, as it is today."

"Pre-washed, packaged baby kale and kale blends have only been out for a few years, but have seen meteoric yearly growth upward of 500 percent," says Earthbound's Cabaluna.

Smoothies also propel kale. "One quarter of Vitamix blender owners say they use kale in their smoothies," says Laura M. Pegg, account executive, Falls Communications, Cleveland, OH, an agency for marketing and corporate communications, branding, investor relations, crisis and reputation management, creative, public relations and media relations.

CATCHING A RIDE ON KALE'S COATAILS

Other leafy greens are catching a ride on kale's coattails. "The kale market is becoming

saturated, paving the way for other convenient, healthy-packaged options such as collards, mustard greens, and turnip greens," says Bolton. "Whether they are viewed as superfoods will depend on how aggressively food marketers and the media promote their benefits."

"We evolved our business from cooking greens into chard, mixed greens, Asian greens, and now salads from dark greens without lettuce or spring mix," says Garrett Nishimori, marketing manager and corporate chef, San Miguel Produce Inc., Oxnard, CA.

Watercress is enjoying new attention for its high nutrient-density and is one of a handful of items currently bearing a Superfood Antioxidant Certification.

Pomegranate has been transformed by POM Wonderful, Los Angeles, CA, from niche fruit to ubiquitous superfood. Pomegranates and their juice currently are promoted as an excellent source of antioxidants, and POM Wonderful provided more than \$35 million to support pomegranate research.

"Fresh pomegranate sales rose from 100,000 cartons in 2001 to more than 2 million cartons in 2008," says Dahlia Reinkopf,



PHOTO COURTESY OF WEIS MARKETS

senior director of marketing, POM Wonderful.

"Berries and cherries have deep, colorful hues from anthocyanins and flavonoids, antioxidants that help protect the brain's neurons from oxidation and inflammation," says *Today Show* nutritionist Joy Bauer, M.S., R.D.N. "These little gems are also packed with vitamins, minerals, and fiber."

Each type of berry has its own unique nutrient and antioxidant profile. One serving of strawberries has more vitamin C than an orange, along with potassium, the B vitamin folate and fiber. Research shows strawberry eaters have healthier blood cholesterol and lower levels of inflammation markers. An extract from blueberries appears to slow the growth and spread of a particular type of breast cancer. Compounds in raspberries are said to protect against cancer and heart disease. More than 50 studies examined the potential health benefits of tart cherries, primarily as juice, and credit them with easing arthritis and muscle pain and aiding sleep.

According to the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, U.S. per capita fresh and frozen blueberry consumption is projected to increase from 2.4 pounds in 2013 to 3 plus pounds in 2015, with 70 percent of households purchasing blueberries within a one-month period in 2013.

Cranberries are called America's Original Superfruit and are supported by more than 375 original research and review articles about their health benefits, particularly for the urinary tract. They also were studied for potential in aiding heart health, cancer prevention, and bacterial infections. Despite this, per capita consumption is stable.

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(CLOCKWISE) PHOTOS COURTESY OF U.S. HIGHBUSH BLUEBERRY COUNCIL, NATIONAL MANGO BOARD AND THE MUSHROOM COUNCIL

With two-year sales growth of approximately 20 percent for blueberries and spinach, 30 percent for mangos, and a whopping 90 percent for pomegranate, according to Chicago, IL-based FreshLook Marketing Group. Mushroom production has been climbing steadily since the 1970s, according to the *Vegetables and Pulses Yearbook 2014*, published by the USDA.

Avocado is wildly popular across the U.S. According to the Hass Avocado Board and California Avocado Commission, supply increased from about 570 million pounds in the early 1990s to projected sales of 1.8 billion pounds (3 billion avocados) in 2014. Avocados contribute nearly 20 vitamins, minerals and beneficial plant compounds, along with healthy fat. Research shows eating avocado with tomato sauce or carrots increases absorption of vitamin A. Avocado eaters have been shown to feel fuller after eating, have a more nutritious diet, weigh less, and have higher levels of “good cholesterol” than those who do not eat avocados.

Sweet potatoes deserve to be eaten year-round for their abundant carotenoids, vitamin C, fiber, and antioxidants, all in a 100-calorie medium-sized potato.

Mango, like pomegranate, transformed from specialty to everyday superfood. In addition to its antioxidants, a cup of mango provides 100 percent of the Daily Value (DV) for vitamin C, is high in vitamin A, rich in folate, provides fiber, vitamin B6, and the mineral copper.

Dates provide 16 vitamins and minerals, including fiber and more potassium by weight than bananas. Date production dropped by 25 percent between 2011 and 2013, although they appear to be more readily available than in the past.

Mushroom production has been climbing steadily since the 1970s, according to the *Vegetables and Pulses Yearbook 2014*, published by the USDA. Mary Jo Feeney, M.S., R.D., F.A.D.A., food and agriculture consultant, Los Altos, CA, says mushrooms provide potas-

sium and fiber, as well as vitamin D when exposed to UV light. “They are very low in calories and can be blended with ground meat to lower calories, saturated fat, and cholesterol.”

“Nuts were a high fat nutrition no-no,” says Maureen Ternus, M.S., R.D., executive director, International Tree Nut Council, Davis, CA. “In 2002, our petition for a heart disease health claim was supported by more than 40 studies. Today, more than 200 research abstracts cover almonds, walnuts, pistachios and others.”

Documented benefits of eating nuts include a lower risk of dying from heart disease, stroke, respiratory illness, or cancer. All nuts provide healthy fat, along with protein and several minerals, and each stands out for its individual mix of nutrients and antioxidants.

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Mexican Produce Positioned For Future Growth

Quality, consistency, availability and proximity
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BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Mexico has established a place as a revered produce trade partner with the United States, and continues to enjoy increasing exports. According to SAGAPA (the Mexican department of agriculture), from January to June 2014, the total value of agricultural exports reached more than U.S.\$11.6 billion. SAGARPA reports the principal ag exports are beer and tomatoes, followed by avocados, peppers, tequila, sugar, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, grapes, cattle, straw-

berries and cucumbers.

The country's success comes from its ability to provide consistent quality product. "Mexico brings the benefit of consistent supplies to a buyer," says Darvel Kirby, business director of produce for United Family of Supermarkets in Lubbock, TX, operating 66 stores under five unique banners — United Supermarkets, Market Street, Albertsons Market, Amigos and United Express.

"Mexico is able to provide us with crops we would otherwise need

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to transition away from," asserts Maroka Kawamura, produce director for New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA, with eight stores. "Mexico is invaluable to our organic program."

Proximity to the United States combined with high production standards afford Mexico opportunity. "It's about fresh product," says Maggie Bezart Hall, vice president of trade and promotion for Avocados from Mexico in Irving, TX. "Product can be in any market area within one to two days compared to other imports shipped in containers for 21 to 29 days. Mexico offers year-round supply and the highest food safety protocol."

No sleeping giant, Mexico is positioned to take advantage of circumstances for future growth.

"I believe Mexico is in a perfect place for the future," says Bill Vogel, president of The Vision Companies in Los Angeles. "As water issues plague our growth, we will be looking to Mexico as a source on many of our staple items. Mexico has land, water, fantastic growing seasons and the infrastructure to handle additional production. I suspect nearly a doubling of exports from Mexico during the next 15 years."

PROTECTED AGRICULTURE GROWING STRONG

Protected agriculture, incorporating greenhouses, shadehouses and other protections from the environment, continues to make headway in the market. "Mexican greenhouse products are very important," says Alfonso Cano, produce director at Northgate Markets, a 38-store chain in Anaheim, CA. "The main reason is because the vegetables grown there are a staple in many diets and recipes."

In 2012, SAGARPA reported 21,530 hectares or 53,000 acres of protected agriculture in Mexico. Estimates from AMHPAC, the Mexican protected agriculture association in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico, show at least 80 percent of the production is exported to the United States. "Protected agriculture grew at an average of 1,700 hectare per year from 2000 to 2012," reports Alfredo Diaz Belmonte, chief executive of AMHPAC.

"The rise in protected agriculture is the biggest thing to happen in the Mexican industry over the past several decades," says Alejandro Canelos, director at Apache Produce Imports in Nogales, AZ. "This will continue."

Protected agriculture in Mexico is mostly dedicated to the production of three products, though others are rising in popularity.



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"Mexico's Secretary of Agriculture estimates indicate 70 percent of the entire protected surface is used for growing tomatoes," says Diaz Belmonte. "Sixteen percent is for growing bell peppers, 10 percent for cucumbers and the remaining 4 percent is destined to growing other varieties of peppers, berries and eggplants, among others."

"The most popular greenhouse items are anything in the tomato category," says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing in Nogales, AZ. "After that is the pepper category. Cucumbers have also gone under greenhouse. Currently, 75 percent of our tomatoes are greenhouse grown. One hundred percent of cucumbers are greenhouse grown. Seventy percent of our bell peppers are green-

"It inspires confidence if we have a majority under greenhouse protection. It's more conducive for retailers to ask suppliers if it is greenhouse. Greenhouse grown should inspire confidence to go into contract."

— Jaime Chamberlain, J-C Distributing

house grown. One hundred percent of our grape tomatoes are greenhouse grown and 50 percent of our Romas are greenhouse grown."

Greenhouse benefits include lower costs and consistent quality. United's Kirby says, "Consistently having good retail and quality

product helps move greenhouse items."

"The enclosed environment allows for easier control of difficult factors in farming, such as insect development and sunburn," explains Vision's Vogel. "While production is not cheap for higher density items, including



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tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, the high potential remains. The other benefit is the

high quality produced. In most greenhouse operations, nearly 85 percent of production makes a No. 1 product.”

■ Products To Watch

According to SAGARPA, the top 10 products registering the greatest incremental growth during the first six months of 2014 were berries (raspberry, blueberry and blackberry) with a growth of 45 percent over the same period in 2013. Avocados grew 26 percent.

Avocados represent an important Mexican-sourced product. “As an industry, we had a good year in 2013 with more than 1.7 billion pounds of avocados in the market,” reports Maggie Bezar Hall, vice president of trade and promotion for Avocados from Mexico in Irving, TX. “For Avocados from Mexico (AFM), it was a great year as we continued as the market leader with more than 1.1 billion pounds — more than 65 percent of the total volume marketed in the United States. To put this in prospective, California marketed 460 million, Chile 51 million, Dominican Republic 1.9 million and Peru 47 million.”

Mexican avocado volume continues to grow. “Recently, the new plantings of Mendez variety trees producing Hass

avocados has begun to produce in volume,” says Kellen Newhouse, vice president of sourcing for WestPak Avocado Inc. in Murrieta, CA. “This new volume is arriving in July, August and September, when supplies are historically at their lowest. This has provided great quality and consistency year-round.”

“USDA will be releasing more municipalities within the state of Michoacan,” says Bezar. “This will allow for an even stronger supply of Fresh Avocados from Mexico throughout the year.”

Mexico continues to expand variety. SAGARPA reports during the second trimester of 2014, the value of Mexican vegetable exports grew to U.S.\$3.1 billion, representing 27 percent of the total value of Mexican ag exports to the United States. Tomato and pepper exports increased U.S.\$990 million and U.S.\$628 million, respectively. Cucumbers increased to U.S.\$279 million and asparagus grew to almost U.S.\$200 million.

“There is still a large amount of growth in

“While the input cost of building assets is obviously higher, once the assets are built, the cost of production in greenhouses should actually be lower on a per unit basis,” says Canelos. “This assumes building the right type of greenhouse in the right climate and growing the right product. Additionally, greater consistency of production makes producers more likely to be able to take advantage of good markets when they occur.”

Greenhouse may inspire buying confidence. “It inspires confidence if we have a majority under greenhouse protection,” says Chamberlain. “It’s more conducive for retailers to ask suppliers if it is greenhouse. Greenhouse grown should inspire confidence to go into contract.”

CAPITALIZING ON ORGANIC DEMAND

Mexico is increasingly capitalizing on the organic market’s growing demand. “The demand from customers and retailers requires organic and makes it a growing category,” states Kirby.

“We handle many organic items from Mexico,” reports New Leaf’s Kawamura. “Those of primary importance include bananas, zucchini, sweet and hot peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, beans, avocados, melons, basil, asparagus, peas, mangos, plantains and coconuts.”

the hot pepper category,” says Christopher Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers LLC in Rio Rico, AZ. “It is also worthwhile to note the first available fruit of the season is mangos, starting in February and March.”

“Winter or hard squash is becoming more popular,” says Jaime Chamberlain, president of J-C Distributing in Nogales, AZ. “Also, increasing in interest are more European and mini cucumbers—items historically considered more Canadian. These are becoming available much earlier out of Mexico.”

Part of the growth is attributed to expansion of production areas. “Nayarit is expanding to service more of the shoulder seasons of fall and late spring,” says Alejandro Canelos, director for Apache Produce Imports in Nogales, AZ. “Culiacan will continue to grow, as always.”

“There is not one state in Mexico that doesn’t export something 365 days a year,” asserts Chamberlain. “There are many opportunities in each state in Mexico — from Jalisco to Guanajuato to Chiapas.” **pb**

Kawamura adds, “In the 15 years I’ve been in the industry, I’ve seen a huge increase in variety of organic Mexican produce. The demand is there, and the timing of the California and Mexican season work well together.”

Organic production in Mexico promises better pricing as supply increases. “The large opportunity for organic production growth in Mexico will definitely bring down prices as the supply grows,” reports Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president of Organics Unlimited in San Diego, CA. “We have seen increased imports and higher organic production of berries, peppers, tomatoes and bananas due to expansion of growing areas in Mexico.”

Avocados and bananas are at the organic forefront. “Organic avocados are regularly available in good volume throughout the year,” says Kellen Newhouse, vice president of sourcing for WestPak Avocado Inc. in Murrieta, CA.

“We are continually increasing organic banana production in Mexico, converting conventional growers to organic growers,” says Velazquez. “Our bananas from Mexico ship a shorter distance, decreasing the extensive handling which can harm the quality and

“The more these consumers become aware of the programs and the good they are doing, the more they increase sales.”

— Mayra Velazquez de Leon, Organics Unlimited

also lower the product’s carbon footprint.

Organic production under protected environments is not very common but does exist. “AMHPAC does have some grower members growing and exporting organic produce grown under protected environments,” says Diaz Belmonte. “USDA’s AMS does report a growing amount of organic tomatoes and organic bell peppers imported in the United States during the past couple of years.”

Diaz Belmonte adds, “It seems highly likely organic production grown under protected environments is increasing in Mexico, however we don’t have enough data to confirm or deny it. Personal perception of some industry members indicates demand for organic produce is increasing in the United States and protected ag growers will have to adapt to the needs of that niche market.”

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Changes in the shipping options and logistics may make transit more effective. “The Nogales port of entry has recently been overhauled and expanded,” asserts Apache’s Canelos. “This will greatly improve the efficiency of crossing at this border. If Texas can achieve allowing overweight truck permits in the Free Trade Zone, as Arizona has, that will be very helpful as well.”

Christopher Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers LLC in Rio Rico, AZ, says, “With the renovation and expansion of the Mariposa port, product crossings are expedited more efficiently, meaning product is arriving faster to our warehouses, and consequently, to our customers.”

Alternative modes of transportation may also play a role. “There’s a lot of talk about going back to using rail to bring product in

“Modern consumers are more health conscious than ever before. They are worried about the content of their food, its origin, freshness, and safety.”

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from Mexico,” reports Canelos. “The root of this talk is the price of gasoline and diesel. I’m not sure how practical this is, but there is a lot of chatter.”

Climatic changes also affect the business. “From a production standpoint we’re seeing a clear change in weather patterns,” explains

Chamberlain. “It’s something we’ve been looking at for the past few years. For example, we have many more rains further into the fall season and this forces people to think differently. For example, historically you’ve had people attempting to do beans for Thanksgiving. Now, people forget it because it’s just

too difficult with the new weather patterns. It’s making a difference in how we plant and what we plant for.”

Mexico may also continue to face challenges outside the production and business arena.

“Certain U.S. industry segments threatened by product from Mexico continue to use the political arena to maintain protectionist policies,” says Canelos. “The recently raised floor price for tomatoes from Mexico is a good example. This is a non-tariff trade barrier. In fairness, Mexico has its own protectionist tendencies, and any particular product war (such as the tomato war) should be viewed as part of a larger, overall trade relationship between two neighboring countries with their own domestic political realities to consider.”

“There are still major U.S. retail chains that actively prefer U.S.-grown product,” says Canelos. “And there are Canadian chains preferring Canadian-grown product. While they might be satisfying the immediate desires of an ignorant customer base, these policies are shortsighted. Retailers that focus on the quality and consistency of the product, and not the country of origin or the means of production, will ultimately prevail.”

pb

Mexico also faces labor challenges and most recently was caught under fire by the *Los Angeles Times*. This month’s *Perishable Pundit* highlight on page 20 critiques the exposé and provides commentary.

■ Upping Sustainable Efforts

Fair Trade is another category with growing demand in the marketplace and growing availability in Mexico. “Fair Trade and sustainability are being taken seriously by the Mexican industry,” says Alejandro Canelos, director for Apache Produce Imports in Nogales, AZ.

“Sustainable agricultural practices continue to grow,” reports Christopher Ciruli, chief operating officer for Ciruli Brothers LLC in Rio Rico, AZ. “Mexico is an industry leader in water conservation; all of Ciruli Brothers’ growers use drip irrigation. Mexican growers have been farming these areas for more than 100 years and they understand that water conservation is a huge thing.”

Many products are currently certified on these types of programs. “Products include bell peppers, tomatoes, avocados, cucumbers, melons, squash and mangos,” explains Ciruli. “Part of Ciruli Brothers’ Champagne

mango crop has been certified by Rainforest Alliance for the past few years.”

Avocados and bananas are taking advantage of the positive aspects of sustainable practices.

“Fair Trade and sustainable farming programs are growing in Mexico and Fair Trade avocados are currently available,” says Maggie Bezar Hall, vice president of trade and promotion for Avocados from Mexico in Irving, TX.

“While Fair Trade certified is not growing in bananas in Mexico, sustainable farming practices are,” reports Mayra Velazquez de Leon, president of Organics Unlimited in San Diego, CA. “Demand for our GROW bananas, which offers education and health programs to the communities where the bananas are grown, continues to expand. It is a very large portion of the bananas we ship.”

Sustainability programs are an increas-

ingly important tool for marketing. “As an organic produce company, we find our consumer buyers are very concerned about social responsibility in the growing of the products they purchase,” says Velazquez. “The more these consumers become aware of the programs and the good they are doing, the more they increase sales. Use of POP materials to promote the social side of the program is invaluable.”

“It’s important retailers work with their suppliers to establish a price point that makes sense so the grower can see a return, allowing for keeping these types of programs going and growing,” suggests Ciruli.

“The industry demands these programs and companies must have them survive,” concurs Darvel Kirby, business director of produce for United Family of Supermarkets in Lubbock, TX.

pb

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PART II

Chile Maintains Its Place As a 'Go-To' Winter Produce Source

Well-established categories will yield greater impact with some specialized promotion.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Chile contributes a substantial amount of fruit volume and variety during the U.S. winter months. According to Steve Monson, senior sales representative at Robinson Fresh in Eden Prairie, MN, "Chile is one of the largest exporters of off-season produce from the Southern Hemisphere and provides an abundance of quality produce when the United States is

experiencing winter."

"If a retailer is selling blueberries, grapes or stone fruit during the winter months, chances are the fruit is from Chile," says Karen Brux, managing director of the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) North America, based in San Carlos, CA. "As the largest fruit exporter in the Southern Hemisphere, Chile exports more than 800,000 tons of

fruit to the United States annually, and more than half of that is supplied during America's winter months. Consumers expect retailers to have year-round supply of their favorite fruits, and Chile makes it possible."

Ramping up promotion will drive sales during winter and into other seasons. "Retailers in the United States should take advantage of the opportunity to promote these items to drive year-round produce sales," says Monson.

Evan Myers, executive director, South American Imports for the Oppenheimer Group, in Vancouver, B.C. agrees. "By stocking fruit from Chile, retailers can keep preferred items on the shelf all year round. Chile enables retailers to offer up certain special opportunities, like cherry ads at Christmas and the introduction of new varieties."

"I promote that Chilean products are 'new crop' at the times of the year when our products are unavailable or out of storage," says Rick Rutte, produce/floral director for North State Grocery Inc. in Cottonwood, CA, with 19 stores. "It definitely helps sales. It works especially well with apples, citrus, cherries and grapes. Advertising new crop crispness sells product."

KEY PRODUCTS

Chile has ample variety of key products for the produce department. "The principal fruit items traditionally exported during the winter are grapes, blueberries, apples, oranges, cherries, peaches, plums and nectarines," says Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing with Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL.

"Key Chilean items to advertise during winter months are blueberries, stone fruit and asparagus," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets in Reading, PA, with 44 stores. "These are key categories and you need to promote to help increase sales in the department."

"Oppy offers blueberries, grapes, apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, plums and pluots during the winter," says Myers.

According to the CFFA, cherries are available November through January, blueberries from November through March, grapes from December through May and peaches, plums and nectarines from December to April.

"Retailers should be promoting stone fruit, including peaches, nectarines and plums in February and grapes in March and April, as these are typically the peak volume times for these items," says Monson.

WHAT'S NEW?

Not content to rest on past success, Chilean exporters continue to seek out the new. "North America is the largest market for Chile and growers/exporters want to know what they can do to better serve this market," says CFFA's Brux.

"Chile seems to always be looking for opportunities wherever it presents itself," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, floral, seafood and meat for Kings Food Markets in Parsippany, NJ with 25 Kings and six Balducci's stores. "The growers are forward-thinkers. Two examples of this are avocados and Chilean citrus."

New varieties remain crucial to future success. "Researchers are currently focusing on developing new varieties of stone fruit and grapes," says Del Monte's Christou. "There is great interest in finding stone fruit varieties that are larger, higher in color with lower acidity and have a longer shelf life allotting for the two-week trip from Chile. Grape research focuses on larger size and bridging the varietal gap. This season should see three to four new grape varieties on retail shelves that the consumer will love."

"Chile developed many new kiwi varieties as the popularity of this item continues to increase," says Robinson's Monson. "Although grapes are one of the main produce items grown in Chile, and new varieties are being tested, there are not as many new grape varieties from Chile compared to new varieties from California. California grape growers experiment with new varieties to fill supply gaps while Chilean varieties enjoy a more

extended production season. If any new varieties are to be introduced from this region, growers will be searching for varieties yielding in January to start their season earlier."

Over the past few seasons, Oppenheimer has encountered good results with a new plum variety with the working name of RR1. Myers explains, "It is a late-season plum helping retailers dovetail into the California stone fruit season. Tango oranges also enjoyed success in the North American market."

Packaging provides new options for Chilean exports as well. "The trend toward presenting grapes in gusseted or pouch bags has become very commonplace in Chile, after being introduced only three years ago," says Monson. "This trend continues to increase in popularity and will likely help drive fixed weight bag sales in the United States. Many Chilean growers are now shipping bulk product to global destinations for the product to be packed specifically for its destination market."

"We enjoyed success with the pouch bags last year and are looking forward to developing this even more," reports Kneeland.

"At Del Monte, we are continuously researching and introducing new and innovative packaging for our products," says Christou. "This not only allows us to keep up with the changing consumer demands and preferences, but it also offers sustainable solutions and helps retailers reduce shrink. Clamshells and fixed weight bags, as well as grapes packed in a carry bag, are becoming more popular every year."

The Oppenheimer products that promote the "Eat Brighter!" campaign feature various





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Sesame Street characters on wraps, labels, bags and more. “Oppy is prepared to offer ‘Eat Brighter!’ Sesame Street-themed packs across various categories from Chile,” says Myers.

ATTRACT ATTENTION

Display size, placement and visibility are crucial to increasing sales. “During February, when various stone fruits are in their peak from Chile, retailers should merchandise these items in larger displays near the front of the store, as they can easily be a complement or substitute for berries,” advises Gina Garven, category insights manager at Robinson Fresh.

“POS and signage always attract attention to the product and help increase impulse sales,” says Christou. “POS and signage can be informative on product quality, introducing new varieties, highlighting seasonal products, providing nutritional information or recipes. Del Monte offers a variety of POS material showing nutritional value and benefits, as well as recipe cards that not only attract consumer attention but also educate consumers on the product.”

“I group similar items together in a high-traffic location in my departments,” says Rutte of North State.

Cross merchandising of Chilean products results in increased sales for a variety of items. “We cross merchandise not only within produce but within different departments,” explains Stiles. “For example, we’ll set blueberries back by bakery or put them next to pancake mixes — or we’ll bring pancake mix into produce.”

“Merchandise grapes with baby carrots or other healthy lunchbox items to inspire new ideas for packing children’s lunches,” suggests Garven.

Think creatively to merchandise around holidays. “One idea is to promote stone fruit during the months leading to Valentine’s Day,” says Garven. “These can be promoted as a topping or additional ingredient for a pound cake or another sweet dessert. In March and April, when the weather starts to warm up and the summer merchandise begins to roll out, retailers can promote grapes in a picnic basket promotion with complementary items such as cheese and crackers.”

Retailers should communicate the unique selling points of their Chilean deal to consumers. “For example, a large retail chain is flying in all their Chilean stone fruit to offer what they believe is the freshest, best-tasting fruit. We’re helping them develop POS communicating this,” says Brux. “Another large retail chain brings in a Muscat grape



The Chilean Fresh Fruit Association has unique retail marketing programs for each of its products and works with retailers across the United States and Canada.

variety from Chile and builds beautiful displays with information highlighting the unique taste of the Muscat grape. This brings attention to the grape category overall, and they see sales increases across all varieties.”

Communicating health and wellness is another driver. “It’s often about selling the quality and health attributes of the products,” says Stiles. “Chilean items fit well with selling health aspects.”

“Give consumers season-appropriate usage ideas and wellness messages,” agrees Brux. “For people committing to a healthier lifestyle in the New Year, we have commodity-specific health messages available. For example, the CFFA is currently working with a registered

“A VARIETY OF PROMOTIONAL TOOLS CAN HELP CONSUMERS CONNECT OR BETTER UNDERSTAND WHERE THEIR WINTER PRODUCE COMES FROM.”

— Gina Garven, Robinson Fresh

dietitian from a large retail chain in the Northeast to supply short sound bites on all of the Chilean fruits.”

COMMUNICATE IN-STORE

For many retailers, the best promotion avenue is directly with customers. “Sampling and in-store signage are our best methods of reaching our customers,” says Rutte. “Outside ads are not as effective for us.”

“Supermarkets can really take advantage of the in-store promotional tools offered by suppliers,” says Redner’s Stiles. “They do a good job of creating the message. It’s up to us to follow through and use what they have available.”

“A variety of promotional tools can help consumers connect or better understand where their winter produce comes from,” says Garven. “More consumers are looking to increase their knowledge of the produce they are purchasing and want to know when items

are in peak season. Robinson Fresh works with retailers to build and tailor programs specific to their business needs. These programs have included produce manager display contests, social media market support, as well as in-store point-of-sale materials.”

The Chilean Fresh Fruit Association has unique retail marketing programs for each of its products and works with retailers across the United States and Canada to develop in-store and online promotions. “The CFFA has numerous usage ideas and corresponding images for everything — from a cherry, wild rice and quinoa salad to cherry chocolate chip muffins to smoked salmon with blueberry compote or a festive green grape salsa for St. Patrick’s Day,” says Brux. “Consumers are familiar with summer usage ideas for items like cherries, blueberries, grapes and stone fruit, but what about during the cold winter months? We worked with one retail chain to introduce our roasted Brussels sprouts and Chilean

grapes recipe via a video sent out to its 300,000-plus customer database.”

Working with the retail and supply communities, CFFA develops targeted programs. “During the 2013-14 season, the CFFA launched a very successful trial of a promotion called the Great Grape Giveaway,” reports Brux. “Retailers loved it. A total of 298 stores from 17 retail chains across the United States participated in the promotion. I think we had such strong support because it was fun and easy to enter, and was a nice incentive for produce managers. We hope to expand on it in 2015, and hopefully double the number of stores participating.”

“The Chilean Fresh Fruit Association does a great job of supporting the full range of Chilean produce at retail, delivering a consistent message and driving sales through signage, videos and more,” says Myers.

“We work with retailers on custom POS and promotion programs for their stores,” explains Brux. “In early 2014, for example, we designed a large co-branded blueberry poster that reinforced some key blueberry health messages. The CFFA has also sponsored numerous health and wellness programs developed by specific retailers. You can’t be an effective marketer without tailoring your programs to fit customers’ needs.” **pb**

■ Go Social

Chilean products are increasingly part of social marketing. “Social media and web-based marketing are essential to reach both current and potential customers,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing with Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL. “Retailers can utilize social and digital media to help encourage participation in their in-store promotions by creating buzz, providing information and connecting to consumers anytime, anywhere. The social media experts of the Del Monte marketing department have the skills and resources to support our customer’s social media campaigns.”

“I use social media and web tools to educate our customers on varieties, ripeness and other product knowledge,” says Rick Rutte, produce/floral director for North State Grocery Inc. in Cottonwood, CA. “It is a growing influence, especially with younger consumers. Customers are more likely to buy if they have some information on the products. Recipes are especially useful in our social media.”

Social media is of huge importance to the

CFFA and has changed the way its merchandisers work with retailers. “For the past few years, we have placed a strong emphasis on giving retail marketing staff the information and images they need to reach their customers on their Facebook pages or other social media outlets,” explains Karen Brux, managing director of the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) North America, based in San Carlos, CA. “This has become a key component of our retail marketing programs and probably one of the most cost-effective means of reaching consumers with compelling information about fresh fruits from Chile.”

Outreach to retail nutrition specialists is another aspect of social media marketing. “Supermarket registered dietitians (RDs) often play a key role in retail social initiatives, and we work directly with them on nutrition-related information,” says Brux. “We have sponsored numerous PBH programs, bringing together produce organizations and supermarket RDs, and our merchandisers have developed strong relationships

with RDs throughout the country.”

Social media provides an easy way to connect consumers to growers. “Social media is meant to help engage customers,” says Michela Calabrese, director at Interruption* Fair Trade in Brooklyn, NY. “It’s a great way to tell a story. With Taste Me, Do Good we tell the story about where the product is coming from and how it is made. Behind every product is a place and a community. We use social media as a way to bring that story, and positive impact, to customers.”

“Social media is having a remarkable impact on how we experience our food and how we shop for it,” says Evan Myers, executive director, South American Imports for the Oppenheimer Group, in Vancouver, B.C. “There’s long been a curiosity about where our food comes from, but social media makes it possible for consumers to virtually ‘meet’ the grower and engage with him or her. Retailers, marketers and growers that create these kinds of opportunities solidify the relationship between the shopper and the product.” **pb**



SELL MORE SPECIALTY CITRUS



Category is growing as consumers embrace these healthy varieties.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

There's a David and Goliath story going on in the citrus category. That is, specialty citrus represents a small slice of sales compared to the big four — oranges, grapefruit, lemons and limes — which collectively contributed 64.1 percent of category dollar sales for the 52 weeks ending Sept. 27, 2014, according to data supplied by the Chicago -based Nielsen Perishables Group.

Yet, there are many varieties of citrus that are starting to take a bite out of the big four's dollars. For retailers, this is a tale with a happy ending. Offering customers both the Davids and the Goliaths in the citrus category is the best way to increase total category sales at retail. This is especially true during the months of December through May, when the availability of different kinds of specialty citrus jumps from six to 20 or more.

What exactly is specialty citrus? Some industry professionals base their definition on variety.

"When one says grapefruit, we think reds, pinks or whites. Oranges? Navels or Valencias. I define specialty citrus as varietal citrus out of the norm," says John Savidan, director of produce merchandising at Bristol Farms, a 15-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA.

"I think our customers have come to understand that besides the 'standard' varieties, we carry unique varietals throughout the year. Oro Blancos, cocktail grapefruit, Pummellos or Mello Golds in our grapefruit category, for example," says Savidan.

Others differentiate between mainstream and specialty citrus on the basis of volume.



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“Mandarins have been the fastest-growing citrus item in California for many years now and would not be classified as specialty citrus,” explains Bob DiPiazza, president of Sun Pacific, in Pasadena, CA.

Indeed, Mandarins represented the largest sub-segment of the citrus category at 33.0 percent of sales during the 52-weeks ending Sept. 27, 2014, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data, compared to 31.6 percent for oranges, 15.9 percent lemons, 10.5 percent limes and 6.1 percent grapefruit.

“It is the combination of variety (different or unique) and small percentage of the citrus category that is what creates the opportunity for the retailers,” says Darrell Genthner, director of marketing and business development for W.G. Roe & Sons, in Winter Haven, FL. “They can take a specialty item and develop it into a signature role.”

WHAT'S MOVING MAINSTREAM

“We are finding that many specialty varieties of citrus are becoming more popular in today’s ‘foodie’ culture,” explains Joan Wickham, advertising and public relations manager at Sunkist Growers, based in Valencia, CA. “As such, our growers have been expanding production of these newer varieties; and as more volume continues to become available, we are able to promote the variety to build sales.”

MAINSTREAMERS. “Cara Cara Navel oranges and Meyer lemons are gaining popularity because customers are attracted to the taste,” says Jay Schneider, produce director at Acme Markets, a 110-store chain headquartered in Malvern, PA. “These fruits have become more available now versus a few years back, and retail at prices more reasonable. Consumer demand is driving this trend.”

Cara Caras have a pink seedless flesh. They are available from December through May out of California, with more limited volumes from



Sumo Mandarins is a popular specialty citrus item at retailers such as Carson, CA-based Bristol Farms and Rochester, NY-based Wegmans.

South Africa starting in June and Australia in August.

“The Cara Cara is an excellent piece of citrus that eats uniquely different from conventional Navel oranges,” explains Dan Barboa, West Coast sales manager for Capespan North America, headquartered in Gloucester City, NJ. “Plus, it has the health benefit of containing the phytonutrient lycopene.”

Meyer lemons, thought to be a cross between a regular lemon and a Mandarin, are sweeter tasting and less acidic than lemons. They are available from October to March from California and July through September out of New Zealand.

“Meyer lemons first became popular when used in foodservice drinks,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles.

The grapefruit-looking Pummello is also picking up in demand. The Pummello is a large piece of fruit with a thick dark greenish-yellow

peel. It’s less acidic in taste than grapefruit. Availability from California runs from mid-October through mid-May and out of Florida from September to the end of December.

“Our best specialty item is Pummellos from Florida due to the dollars they generate and the eating experience they deliver to the consumer. We have planted all new trees as greening knocked our volume in half. Today, we are doubling our volume and we are projected to triple in a couple of years,” says W.G. Roe’s Genthner.

UP & COMERS. “Blood oranges, key limes, pixie tangerines, kumquats and Buddha’s Hand citrus are all specialty citrus that we carry seasonally,” explains Acme’s Schneider.

“Blood oranges would be something I’d add if I were a retailer who wanted to expand my citrus category and drive impulse sales,” recommends Karen Caplan, president of Frieda’s Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA.

Blood or Moro oranges have a maroon colored interior. They are available out of California from December through mid-April.

“In addition to key limes, Kaffir limes are seeing more demand because they’re used in Thai and Indonesian cooking. Finger limes — which some call citrus caviar because when you break them open there are several greenish-white to pink vesicles inside that pop on your tongue — have seen a big uptick in foodservice but may take longer to catch on at retail due to their difficulty to grow and high price,” explains Melissa’s Schueller.

Sumo Mandarins and pixie tangerines are the best-selling specialty citrus at Bristol



Meyer Lemons

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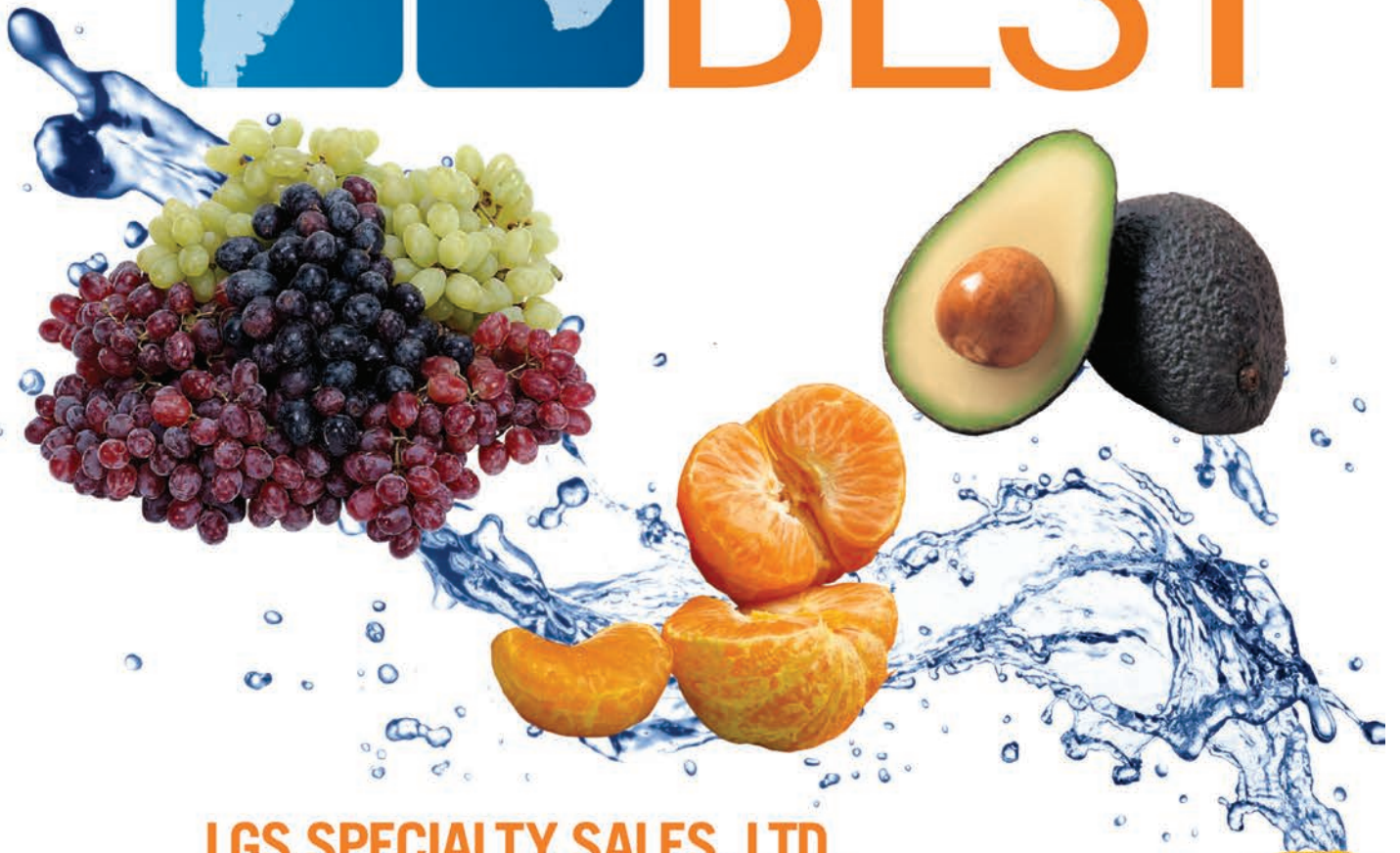


Buddha's Hand

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"These types of varieties are gaining traction and are ones that inspire our customers to keep coming back for the best eating experi-

ence year after year. For us, the Sumo's just continue to steam roll every other item and rule the citrus category when they are available," says Savidan.

Sumo Citrus is the brand name of an orange-Satsuma Mandarin mix developed in Japan and exclusively grown and marketed by Suntreat Packing & Shipping Co., in Lindsay,

■ A Trio Of Ways To Sell More

Spotlight The Specialties. "We tie in Cara Caras or other specialty items on the 'mainstream' Navel display to draw attention to them," says Acme Market's Schneider.

One of the best tactics to use when introducing something new is to display the product as a wing display, stack display (in front of produce case) or as an auxiliary display — all in the customer traffic flow so it stands out.

"Take Pummelos, for example. You can use the original cartons to build a wing display next to the grapefruit display. Now you have the opportunity for a customer to switch their purchase from grapefruit to a more premium Pummelo," explains W.G. Roe's Genthner.

Large, impactful displays in high-traffic areas, such as at the entrance, is how specialty citrus is merchandised at Bristol Farms. The chain will also run multiple displays by featuring an item in other locations within the store.

"As all retailers, we have to juggle department space. During peak season, we will feature citrus, so we force ourselves to make room. Other times, we have to really pick and choose our varieties. We taste and mix the varieties before we bring them in to ensure we've got the best ones and try and relay this message to our consumers," says Bristol Farms' Savidan.

Produce companies realize that it is very difficult to expect a retailer to create space for new and seasonal items.

"We prefer to provide a solution via display units, high-graphic stackable display trays or consumer cartons that can be placed directly on the floor in front of the main tables," explains Julie DeWolf, Sunkist Grower's director of retail marketing. "Many of our display units are the exact height of the display tables, so retailers can easily create what we call a 'waterfall' effect by extending the table space with a display that features a new or unique item. Additionally, many varieties ship in high-graphic trays that draw attention and look great stacked.

"We will also use high-graphic bins on products like the Cara Caras," says Acme's Schneider.

Play Up The Pack. A stealth way to call out specialty citrus is to make good use of packaging. Marketers have become adept at assuring their product catches the consumer's eye. Think of the success of Mandarins marketed in brightly colored boxes and bags



under the brand names Cutie and Halos.

"We're seeing a lot of pouch bags today that are conducive to communicating purchase triggers to the customer. For specialty citrus, the packaging cannot be generic looking. The bag or label should carry its own uniqueness in order to improve sales," says Capespan's Barboa.

There is a clear trend toward packaged specialty citrus, as it provides many benefits to both retailers and consumers.

"If a retailer is interested in selling in bulk, it is absolutely key for them to provide information about the item, or it will get lost in the shuffle. The benefits of packaged specialty citrus is that the packaging often provides the education consumers need to get that crucial trial on something that may not be familiar to them. Pouch bags and Giro-style mesh bags are also quite popular. Both allow great visibility so consumers can inspect the fruit inside to ensure they are getting the highest quality," explains Sunkist's DeWolf.

The UPC code on packaging can assure specialty citrus — especially that which looks like its mainstream counterpart on the outside — gets the right ring by the checker.

"Make sure packaging is visible in a display," says Kim Flores, director of marketing for Seald-Sweet International, headquartered in Vero Beach, FL. "If not, you are missing an opportunity to let the packaging work for you by calling out good messaging."

Promote The Premium. "Specialty citrus commands a premium, because it costs a premium. Price isn't as essential as having our customer taste the product. We hang our hat on

offering our customers the highest quality fruits and vegetables available within the marketplace, and it's unfortunate that many times the best-tasting items end up being the most expensive," explains Bristol Farms' Savidan.

"Supply and demand more consistently dictate price than even retailers do, so for varieties with little acreage in the ground, we usually see higher prices at retail," explains Sunkist Grower's DeWolf.

It is important to communicate to shoppers why specialty citrus is priced at a premium.

"Cara Cara Navels, for example, look just like a conventional Navel on the outside, so a consumer might wonder why they should pay a premium for this specialty item. This is where our communication efforts are so vitally important. Packaging, as well as display units, can relay the flavor profile, nutrient content and copy about what makes this variety unique. We have a number of display units and each has a space for an interchangeable header card that can give consumers this information," says Sunkist's DeWolf.

The grower/shipper community can affect pricing through promotional strategies like high-value introductory couponing, which provides a great trial incentive.

"Additionally, sampling programs help consumers understand the uniqueness of a new variety and should be employed when feasible. Once consumers know they like a certain variety, price becomes much less of a factor, so we need to do our job as marketers to get that fruit into their hands for the first time," asserts DeWolf.

pb



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CA. The fruit is orange-size, seedless, sweet, juicy and easy-to-peel.

“Our goal is six weeks of supply this season, up from four last season,” explains Al Imbimbo, vice president of sales. “We like to get supply up to a four-month window from February to May and have plantings in the ground to support this in the next five to six years.”

Newer varieties of easy-peel Mandarins are moving mainstream to fill specific market niches.

“Late season Ojai Pixie tangerines and Gold Nugget Mandarins are extending the season of this popular category into May,” says Sunkist’s Wickham.

Kumquats are now available year-round, although supplies can be shorter in the fall.

“Kumquats are a great item to add to show that you have variety in your citrus category. We’ll be introducing a new variegated kumquat in January,” says Frieda’s Caplan.

Buddha’s Hand citrus, available from late fall through early winter, is a novelty that is catching the attention of shoppers.

“Extremely unique items like Buddha’s Hand were first introduced by chefs. They are sought after for decoration, zesting or their

strong fragrance. We’ve sold more over a few weeks this fall than I’ve seen over the course of a year,” says Bristol Farms’ Savidan.

Beyond this, there are other types of citrus that are poised to continue gaining consumer acceptance. These include varietal tangelos, grapefruit and lemons.

“The Sugar Belle, which is a cross between a Honeybell Tangelo and a Clementine, started harvest in early December and finished up around the beginning of January,” explains Dave Haller, vice president of sales and marketing at Green River Marketing, Inc., in Vero Beach, FL.

“We had a final pack-out of around 2,500 boxes and distributed them nationwide, as well as sold them as gift fruit. Right now demand exceeds supply, but we have more trees in the ground and expect increasing volume over the next few years.”

Specialty grapefruit such as the Oro Blanco and Melo Gold, both crosses between a white grapefruit and Pummelo, as well as the Cocktail Grapefruit, a Mandarin-Pummelo cross, are blossoming in volume.

“The cocktail grapefruit eats and juices exceptionally well. I don’t think it compares to

anything out of Texas at the peak of its season in January,” says Capespan’s Barboa.

Instead of one, retailers can now offer shoppers a variety of lemon from which to choose.

“Seedless lemons are novel and variegated pink lemons are great for making pink lemonade,” explains Frieda’s Caplan.

Seedless lemons are available out of California from November to May.

UNDER THE RADAR. Yuzu, a hybrid of an ancient type of citrus and a sour Mandarin, is prized for its juice used in Japanese ponzu sauces. The Sudachi is a cross between a very sour type of citrus and a Mandarin. It looks like a Yuzu and is slightly smaller than a lemon. Calamondin comes from the Philippines and is a kumquat and sour Mandarin hybrid.

“These are all very niche items that will take the general public some time to appreciate,” says Melissa’s Schueller. **pb**

For a preview of what’s in development for specialty citrus, visit ProduceBusiness.com

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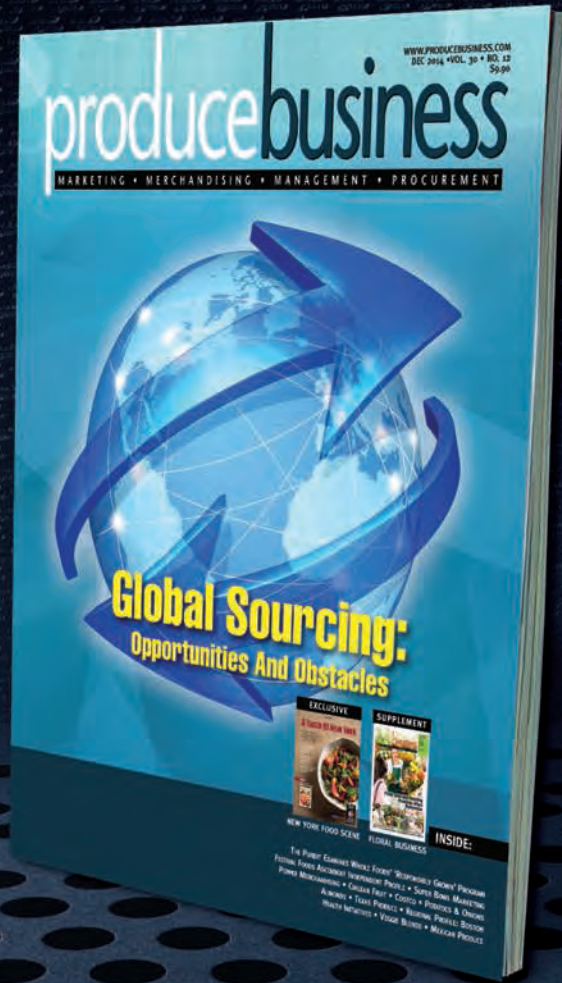
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A Packaging Shift

Product protection, merchandising appeal and sustainable qualities have led to an increased presence in produce departments.

BY LISA WHITE



When plastic clamshell packaging was developed in 1987 for Driscoll's, it revolutionized the industry.

In recent years, clamshells have become a solid choice for a variety of produce packaging, especially given the growth of fresh-cut fruit and vegetables and packaged salads.

"This type of packaging has become more

popular in the past 10 years, and we're seeing extensive growth in usage with all commodities," says Kurt Zuhkle, Jr., president and chief executive of Kurt Zuhkle & Associates, Inc., based in Easton, PA. The company provides clamshells for the majority of produce packers in the United States. "We also offer custom thermoforming for customers to meet a niche that is becoming

more common with retail chains."

Clamshells, or rigid thermoformed packaging, continue to grow and evolve in the produce industry due to their ability to protect product and enhance merchandising at the retail level.

"We are seeing a lot of growth in single serve designs, portion control packaging, multi-pack snap apart packaging and a new push for designs that will allow for enhanced mobility," says Roman Forowycz, group president and CMO of Clear Lam Packaging, Inc., headquartered in Elk Grove Village, IL. "Clamshells offer ease of use; they are simple to eat out of the package and are easy to dispose of, which are key attributes consumers want."

The patented packs are just one product in a produce packaging industry that's growing faster than produce production as a whole, according to Cleveland, OH-based The Freedonia Group, a market research firm. Demand for produce packaging, valued at \$4.8 billion in 2012, is projected to increase 3.3 percent per year to \$5.7 billion in 2017.

Although corrugated boxes will remain the leading produce packaging type through 2017



(TOP TO BOTTOM)
PHOTOS COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS

and beyond due to the low cost, light weight, protective performance, graphics capabilities and a well-established recycling infrastructure, plastic containers will experience the fastest gains among major produce packaging types through 2017 due to growth in berry production and expanding applications for clamshells, according to ReportsnReports, a Dallas-based market research firm.

CHANGING SHAPES

Packaging suppliers say there is no one-size-fits-all where clamshells are concerned.

Standard sizes available include one-half pint, 1 pint, 1 quart, 2 pounds, 3 pounds, a three-pack or a four-pack that fit into a 5-pound box for shipping to meet weight standards.

Typically, the leafy green products are available in standard retail packs that contain 5, 11 or 16 ounces of product. Cut fruit clamshells are available in either round or rectangular shapes in 8-, 16-, 24- or 32-fluid ounce sizes.

“Traditional clamshell sizes have been in rectangular and round sizes of 8-, 12-, 16-, 24- and 32-ounce sizes, but many more sizes and shapes are being developed to meet specific applications,” says Jack Tilley, market research manager at Inline Plastics Corp., based in Shelton, CT. “We work with our customers to maximize the number of containers that can fit into a box and/or a pallet.”

Today, newer clamshell shapes are being developed in response to growth in healthy grab-and-go snacking.

For example, Inline has introduced a line of tamper-resistant clamshells in snack cup sizes geared for on-the-go snacking.

One-piece hinged containers, where the lid is attached to a base, also have become more popular.

There has been increased use of smooth rectangular- and square-shaped clamshells, which provide better cubing, improved space utilization and the ability to store more inventory on department shelves.

“We also are seeing a wide variety of rigid containers with flexible lidding films instead of rigid lids,” says Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “This is a design trend from Europe that is moving into North America.”

These new films seal to RPET containers, and in some cases, can also reseal multiple times. The lidding films can create the option for controlled or modified atmosphere packaging to help extend product freshness and reduce shrink.

“By removing rigid lids, overall plastic usage could decrease, which would deliver

lower costs and a reduced impact on the environment,” says Forowycz.

In addition, smaller single-serve clamshell sizes are now being introduced.

Clear Lam recently developed a multipack snap apart packaging concept to meet growing demand from health-conscious consumers looking for convenient grab-and-go portion control packaging for cut fruits and vegetables. The individual cups can be easily separated and the design makes it easy for consumers to hold and transport.

“The multipacks can be produced from preformed cups or economically produced in line on horizontal form fill seal packaging, just like yogurt cups,” says Forowycz. “They can be made from renewable plant-based plastics to reduce the use of petroleum-based plastics and to minimize the carbon footprint.”

The new snap-apart multipacks are available in a variety of sizes, from four-packs or six-packs for retail distribution up to 12 packs for club store formats, in addition to single packs for C-store distribution. There are stan-



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standard sizes for the traditional commodity products, such as pint berry containers or 5-ounce lettuce containers.

Although clamshell sizes will vary slightly from brand to brand, most are similar in footprint.

"To maintain processing efficiencies, a product line will share a common footprint, including the width or length of the opening and shape, but have varying depths," says Forowycz. "CPG companies can add additional differentiation and recognition by

incorporating design elements into the trays, as well as use unique colors."

Typical material types used to form clamshells for the produce industry include RPET, or recycled polyethylene terephthalate, a strong, durable and recyclable material, and PLA, or polylactide, a biodegradable thermoplastic aliphatic polyester derived from renewable resources, such as corn starch.

Clamshell containers continue to be used for a wide variety of produce items in both single-serve and family sizes.



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"Certainly, we see clamshells used primarily for salads, take-out and to-go foodservice packaging," says Steve Langdon, vice president of sales at WNA, based in Covington, KY, parent company of Precision Packaging Products and ParPak. "We find the most popular shapes are rectangle and square for clamshell packaging, however, single round hydroponic containers are very popular, since these conform to product shapes, such as lettuce."

Typically, for the loose-leaf products, deep tubs with flat lids assist in the automation of the filling process.

A variety of round, square and rectangle bowls with an assortment of depths and structure designs best display the produce, as well as add to its shelf life.

Since most of the leafy green and cut fruit products are ready to eat, there has been significant development in the design of tamper evident packaging, which enhances both food safety and consumer confidence.

CLAMSHELL BENEFITS

The Santa Rosa, CA location of G&G Supermarkets, which also has a Petaluma site, typically receives more delicate products — including berries, grape tomatoes, Campari tomatoes, alfalfa sprouts and fresh herbs — in clamshell packaging.

“This packaging has its pluses and minuses,” says Ted Romero, produce manager for G&G’s Santa Rosa location. “It’s a good protector for delicate items and provides accurate ring-ups due to the UPC codes, plus it stacks well and creates attractive displays.”

Unlike plastic bags, clamshells are rigid to better protect products and can help decrease shrink due to damaged produce.

“There’s also new manufacturing methods that can create custom clamshells for items like a 9-ounce tomato or 12 ounces of broccoli,” says Zuhkle of Kurt Zuhkle & Associates. “The packaging can literally be molded to the product.”

Newer packaging technology has the high-speed ability to fill, close and label to save time and labor.

Produce departments also are experiencing the merchandising benefits of clear clamshell packaging.

“By spotlighting the quality of the packaging’s contents, it increases impulse buying at the store level,” says Inline Plastics’ Tilley.

Along with product protection and added visibility for produce, clamshells provide excellent stackability to create powerful merchandising displays.

“Also, some of the newer designs that incorporate lidding films will extend product shelf life, provide tamper evidence, reclose and enhance merchandising through printed graphics,” says Forowycz. “As a result, CPG’s and retailers can create products that target children or adult consumers and communicate more directly with their target market.”

One area that other food packaging industries are looking at is decorating the plastic to present marketing brand recognition and curb appeal.

“The use of colored lid borders is one way of achieving that effect,” says WNA’s Langdon.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Despite many benefits, clamshell packaging has had to overcome the stigma of being plastic.

The Living Earth, a Worcester, MA-based natural food store with one location, is known for its sustainability. For this reason, the store tries to avoid all excess packaging.

The only items carried in clamshells are berries, figs and packaged salads.

“We stay away from clamshells, even though they can be recyclable, because our customers don’t want them,” says Robert White, produce manager. “If we have a choice between loose Brussels sprouts or those in clamshells, we’ll choose them loose.”

Many of The Living Earth’s customers bring their own reusable grocery bags to carry home the store’s 100 percent organic produce, the only type available at the store.

“Our clientele doesn’t want any plastics and will bring clamshells back to us for recycling or to send to local farms,” says White. “I think people have the idea that anything sold in these containers is processed, and this turns them off.”

Instead, the store mainly sticks with cardboard berry containers that are compostable.

“There has been a lot of talk about biodegradable clamshells, but I haven’t seen any of the organic providers, even big ones, saying anything or offering them as far as I



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know,” says White. “It would be a good idea, since our type of customer is more into these corn-based clamshells that break down easier than regular clamshells.”

With the majority of packaging manufacturers, sustainability has been a major focus for several years now. The challenge has been to create practical or actionable initiatives that make sense. Also, cost is always a big factor in the development of new product lines.

There are a number of manufacturing methods clamshell manufacturers use to increase the sustainable qualities of these containers. For example, Inline’s PET material for its containers is produced using a process that achieves high-energy efficiencies so that the carbon footprint of the material is as low as material containing 50 percent post-consumer recycled material.

Clear Lam has focused its efforts on reducing its impact on the environment through internal systems and processes, as well as on developing products that deliver some form of sustainability benefit.

The company’s three main categories of sustainable packaging include packaging made from renewable raw materials, such as bio-plastics; packaging that incorporates some form of recycled plastic or paper; and packaging that delivers lighter weight benefits.

“This final category is not just about making packaging materials thinner, but includes changing packaging designs to those that can eliminate heavy preformed containers or those that can remove lids and PVC shrink bands,” says Clear Lam’s Forowycz. “We feel sustainability has become a normal part of doing business today, and it is no longer the exception.”

Many are noting that clamshells made of PET (polyethylene terephthalate) are becoming more popular than OPS (oriented polystyrene) due to the more sustainable formats available.

Companies continue to reduce the amount of plastic in packages by reducing the gauge/weight and looking at the types of materials and their manufacturing processes, all to reduce carbon footprint. Also, green companies such as Eco-Products are now offering a wide variety of clamshell containers made from PLA, a plant-based plastic, as well as the use of post-consumer recycled blends (PCR) of PETE.

In addition to environmentally friendly materials, produce departments also should be aware of the tamper-visible, proper secure closure, venting, ability to label and crush



Clear Lam’s PrimaPak technology produces a semi-rigid, stackable and reclosable package from a roll of film that is designed to reduce bulk and rigidity. The product can be used for a variety of cut vegetables and fruit, along with leafy greens.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) PHOTOS COURTESY OF CLEAR LAM PACKAGING AND INLINE PLASTICS

resistance features of different clamshell packaging products.

One downside to clamshells can be condensation from temperature variations, which can cause spoilage.

This can compromise shrink benefits normally seen with this type of packaging.

“Most clamshells are well ventilated, but there are times we deal with condensation issues, especially when there’s temperature control issues, such as with a truck’s refrigeration system,” says Romero at G&G.

Other industries are moving to package designs that would replace heavy, bulky, preformed rigid containers, trays, cans and jars that do not cube well.

Clear Lam’s PrimaPak technology produces a semi-rigid, stackable and reclosable package from a roll of film that is designed to reduce bulk and rigidity. The product can be used for a variety of cut vegetables and fruit, along with leafy greens.

“It significantly reduces truck shipments by removing the need to ship empty

containers to processors,” says Forowycz. “It also enhances cube throughout the supply chain and reduces cost.”

Many predict that clamshell containers will continue to be popular based on the adaptable packaging designs that can accommodate a wide variety of produce and foodservice packaging needs.

“This adds an element of single-use conveniences where one container can be used to package a variety of items and then all the package needs is a different label,” says Langdon.

It also is predicted that the market will see continued growth in single-serve designs, portion control packaging and a new push for designs that offer mobility and ease of disposal.

“Reducing plastic use and increasing package cube are the main goals,” says Forowycz. “We are already seeing a “less is more” trend with packaging fueled by the buying patterns of Millennials and Generation Xers.”

pb



MARKETING MUSHROOMS BEYOND BLENDABILITY

While the category grows browner and more exotic, trends using mushroom versatility and blendability shine this winter.

BY BOB JOHNSON



As the holiday season winds down and hearty cooking amps up, one quality about mushrooms catching the cooks' eyes is the unique ease with which they can be minced and mixed with ground meats.

"We are seeing a great interest in the blendability of mushrooms," says Kevin Donovan, national sales manager at Phillips Mushroom Farms, Kennett Square, PA. "You chop up the mushrooms, cook them and add to ground beef or turkey. It greatly reduces the fat content and makes for a juicier burger or meatloaf."

As word of their nutritional value spreads, mushrooms are growing in sales; the Brown Portabella and Baby Bella are growing faster than most, and varieties bearing colorful names.

"We're growing 25,000 pounds of specialty mushrooms a week; it might be up to 27,000 pounds by now," says Bob Engels, chef liaison for Gourmet Mushrooms, Inc, Sebastopol, CA. "Specialty mushroom is something beyond Shiitake or Portabella. We're growing seven mushrooms including Trumpet Royale, also called King Oyster, or Maitake Frondosa, which is Hen-of-the-Woods."

While the category grows browner and more exotic, trends using mushroom versatility and blendability shine this winter — making meat dishes leaner, richer in vitamin D, juicier, and possibly more economical.

NOW WE'RE COOKING

As cooks prepare to strut their stuff with warm dishes to suit the colder season, smaller mushrooms are convenient traditional ingredients.

"Using sliced Baby Bella or sliced Buttons are always popular around the holidays," says Peter Wilder, marketing director of To-Jo Mushrooms, Avondale, PA. "Casseroles with mushrooms are always a big hit."

The large social gatherings clustered near the end of the year create special opportunities for

quantities bigger than the norm.

“We’re seeing more club packs around the holidays,” says Wilder. “People are buying the 20-ounce sliced or 24-ounce whole packs to cook for larger gatherings.”

This delectable fungus that sits comfortably next to the healthiest vegetable in the produce department is a natural for dishes that combine many ingredients into a convenient meal.

“Mushrooms are also an easy addition in one-pot cooking, which is becoming more popular,” says Donovan. “For the winter, we see great mushroom interest in casseroles, or as a side dish.”

As uses for mushroom proliferate, retailers can entice customers with recipes or in-store demonstrations.

“We do offer our ‘Aprons Simple Meals’ program in store where we feature at least one meal recipe per week,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix, Jacksonville, FL. “Some recipes may include mushrooms. In addition, on Publix.com under our Aprons section, we provide more than 60 recipes which include mushrooms.”

Suppliers are heavily promoting, in particular, the benefits of blending mushrooms with meat to improve many traditional dishes.

“Mushroom blendability is the culinary technique of chopping fresh mushrooms to the consistency of meat and blending them with ground meat and cooking them together,” says Katie Preis, marketing manager for the Mushroom Council, San Jose, CA. “By blending the mushrooms with meat, you can reduce calories, fat and sodium,

but maintain taste, texture and flavor.”

This industry group includes a wealth of information on the nutritional, economic and culinary benefits of blending on its website (MushroomCouncil.org).

“Mushroom blendability is the solution to improving heavy winter dishes, making them healthier without sacrificing flavor, texture or appeal,” says Preis. “By chopping fresh mushrooms and blending them with ground meat in dishes such as chili, casseroles, lasagna and meatballs, families can continue to indulge in a hearty winter meal while keeping calories, fat and sodium low.”

With blendability, recipes and demonstrations fortify the message that mushrooms can transform familiar dishes from burgers to meatloaf and casseroles.

“Mushroom shippers and growers regularly share mushroom recipes with retailers to distribute to customers. Recipes encourage customers unfamiliar with mushrooms to try incorporating mushrooms into their meals,” says Preis. “Retailers are encouraged to serve mushroom blended samples along with mushroom blended recipes to further encourage customers to try the mushroom-blend cooking technique at home. Once a consumer tastes how seamlessly the mushrooms blend with meat, and how simple it is to chop the mushrooms into classic family recipes, it quickly becomes habit.”

Chances are very good that a supplier has something to contribute as part of this national campaign to promote blending.

“Giorgio thinks it is important to participate in supporting these promotions, as well

as continuing to educate consumers on the health benefits of mushrooms. We supply plenty of information to that effect on our website for consumers,” says Bill Litvin, senior vice president for sales and national account manager at Giorgio Foods Inc., Temple, PA. “Giorgio likes to provide ample opportunities for consumers to gain access to nutritious and delicious recipes. We provide recipes on our product packages, as well as having a QR code on our labels that link to recipes.”

The recent emergence of exotic and interesting mushrooms magnifies the importance of showing and telling customers how to use them.

“The first thing people ask when they see our mushrooms is ‘how do I use them,’” says Engels from Gourmet Mushrooms, which produces only specialty varieties. “We always include recipes in our packaging.”

BELLAS AND BEYOND

The once obscure Brown varieties have (almost overnight) claimed a major share of mushroom supermarket space.

“The big change is the popularity of the Brown mushrooms, the Baby Bellas and Portabellas,” says Paul Frederic, senior vice president sales and marketing at To-Jo Mushrooms. “They are really in demand. We’ve seen the shift over the past couple of years.”

This shift continues as the most recent statistics show healthy growth for the large Portabellas. “According to the October shipping report provided by The Mushroom Council, Portabella mushrooms posted double-





PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOURMET MUSHROOMS

Meals from top to bottom are: Grilled Nebrodini, Mushroom Pizza and Grilled Maitake.

menus. Meals include Portabella mushroom burgers, side dishes, salads and — in some cases — a substitution for meat as this type of mushroom tends to maintain its texture when appropriately cooked, sautéed or grilled,” says Publix’s Brous. “It’s also a ‘meatier’ mushroom.”

There is a seasonal difference in demand for the different Brown mushrooms, with the smaller cousin (the Baby Bella) garnering more attention during the winter cooking season.

“The Baby Bella mushroom, sliced or

whole, increased in popularity the past few years,” says Wilder from To-Jo Mushrooms. “The Portabella is popular in the summer, and the Baby Bella later in the year. The Brown mushrooms had double-digit growth. The interest in a more flavorful mushroom is strong.”

These smaller mushrooms have the largest market share during the holiday season.

“For the holidays, the Whites and Baby Bellas are in particular demand,” says Frederic.

Although the Portabella and Baby Bella



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digit growth rates for dollars and volume in the four-week period, which ended on September 7th, 2014,” says Litvin.

Portabella benefits from its versatility as a cooking mushroom. “The Portabella’s meaty texture makes it easy for consumers to cook satisfying meals as they explore more plant-based diets,” says Preis. “As the mushroom blendability cooking technique grows in popularity with consumers, Portabellas are often used to blend and extend dishes such as fajitas, stir fries, soups and burgers. As the gluten free diet trend continues, the hearty Portabella is also often used as a meal carrier, replacing the buns in a burger or pizza dough in the popular Portabella pizza.”

Restaurants and cooking shows have done much to fuel this continuing interest in the Brown mushrooms.

“Portabella mushrooms continue to gain popularity with customers for several reasons, especially with the inclusion on restaurant

have only recently gained major attention and market share, for some aficionados, they are already too mainstream.

“Portabella is absolutely not a specialty mushroom; biologically it is the same species as the White Button,” says Engels from Gourmet Mushrooms. “Specialty mushrooms are more flavorful – it’s more texture, more color, and more flavor. There’s not a lot that’s new in vegetables, but there are mushrooms people are just getting used to.”

Gourmet Mushrooms finds homes for its products in Whole Foods nationwide and in Raley’s and Safeway in Northern California.

“Our growth is 25 percent; the growth of the specialty mushrooms is probably in the neighborhood of 10 percent; and Button Mushrooms are 2 or 3 percent. The greatest growth is the specialty mushroom because of chefs and home cooks.”

It is worth remembering that even with the emergence of the Portabella, Baby Bella and specialty varieties, the familiar White Button mushroom remains No. 1.

“The White mushrooms are the most popular, but the browns, particularly the Baby Bellas, are picking up in popularity,” says Donovan.



A solution for retailers in this fast evolving category is to offer consumers plenty of choices.

“Baby Portabella sliced and whole remain very popular,” says Brous. “For this time of year, White or Brown varieties of mushrooms are popular — especially with stuffing recipes. We also offer customers larger whole Portabellas for stuffing.”

A HEALTHY ADDITION

A major selling point for all variety of mushrooms is that they are good for you.

“The healthy aspects of mushrooms motivate a significant portion of consumers. The Mushroom Council continues to find new ways to promote the health benefits that mushrooms offer,” says Litvin from Giorgio.

Nutrition has much to do with the continuing growth in mushroom sales across the board.

“Mushrooms are growing in sales year round,” says Litvin. “Specific varieties that are seeing excellent sales numbers include Brown mushrooms, Baby Bella and Portabella, and Shiitake mushrooms. My personal favorite is the Royal Trumpet, which has a great taste and is very easy to prepare.”

Producers support health claims by investing in peer reviewed nutritional studies of mushrooms, in particular their uniqueness as a plant source of vitamin D.

“Marketers are absolutely pushing the healthy angle as mushrooms have such a robust nutrition story to promote,” says the Mushroom Council’s Preis. “Mushrooms are not only low calorie and fat free but they provide potassium, B vitamins, vitamin D and more for consumers. The mushroom industry focused on providing resources and data for retail dietitians to promote the benefits of mushrooms to their customers on the store floor.”

Interest in good nutrition created some demand for enriched mushrooms, and even greater interest in the vitamins provided by all mushrooms.

“There is marginal interest in vitamin enriched, but there is naturally occurring vitamin D in mushrooms,” says To-Jo’s Wilder.

There is also significant and growing interest in some quarters in organic mushrooms.

“Most of our mushrooms have been organic for the past 12 years, and we are increasing our organic space,” says Donovan from Phillips Mushrooms Farms.

Fresh and healthy generally go with locally grown in the consumers’ eyes, and this trend applies with mushrooms.

“Locally grown mushrooms are a marketing advantage available to all stores and shippers,” says Preis. “Mushrooms are grown indoors and year-round in farms across the country. Virtually every region is able to receive local mushrooms, fresh throughout the year. Since mushrooms are grown fresh, all year they are great to promote as local especially in winter months when sourcing locally grown produce can be more difficult. Many stores are showcasing ‘Locally Grown’ POS around the mushroom section to educate customers on this benefit.”

pb



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“Our aim is to provide customers in our community with fresh, organic, locally sourced non-GMO foods at an affordable price,” explains store manager, Geoff Iguchi.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BARNES

TAKING THE FARMERS MARKET CONCEPT TO SUPERIOR LEVELS

Sprouts Farmers Market allures consumers with quality produce and dynamic visuals.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Displays mimicking fields of fresh fruits and vegetables are not the first feature you see when entering the Sprouts Farmers Market on Alton Parkway in Irvine, CA. Instead, there’s an impressive brick and mortar facade fronted in late October by more than 10 bins of bright orange pumpkins, rows of alternating red and yellow mums and bushel baskets filled with odd-shaped gourds.

Once inside, shoppers have to walk past the requisite row of check-out registers and through center-store aisles filled with shelf-stable grocery items to reach what is easily the biggest department in the store: fresh produce. Fruits and vegetables are one of the focal points at this store and the other 190 stores that make up the Phoenix, AZ-headquartered chain, which was named one of the “Ten Best Supermarkets in America” in 2014 by *Consumer Reports*. It’s fair to say fresh produce is what pulls shoppers in the front door and back to the core of the store on a daily basis.

“Our aim is to provide customers in our community with fresh, organic, locally sourced non-GMO foods at an affordable price,” explains store manager, Geoff Iguchi.

EXPANSION ON THE HORIZON

This particular location is an original Sprouts store rather than a

building converted from another banner. It opened on November 12, 2007, five years after the chain was founded in Chandler, AZ, by a family of California grocers who started a business with one fruit stand.

Since then, the health-oriented retailer has grown by way of acquisitions including Henry’s Farmers Markets, Sun Harvest Market and Sunflower Farmers Markets, as well as new store development. Sprouts became a public company traded on NASDAQ in 2013 and closed out that year with sales of \$2.44 billion, an increase of 36 percent over the year prior, according to a company press release.

Ten new stores are planned to open in early 2015, bringing the chain’s total to more than 200 stores in 12 states. This fast-growing retailer stays true to its roots and does not lose sight of the fact that the farmers market concept remains an integral part of its identity.

THE ROLE OF PRODUCE IN STORE

Produce represents 25 percent of total store sales at Sprouts’ 27,000-square-foot Irvine location. Here, there are some 500 fresh fruits and vegetables offered in wooden crates and bins, as well as on tables and refrigerated racks with overhead signage that looks as if it were written on a chalkboard. Displays are brightly lit, well-organized and colorfully arranged. The concept of freshness was clearly conveyed, for example, in a 6-foot by 8-foot waist-high, table-top display that was



beautifully set with bulk Russet potatoes, Brussels sprouts, Roma tomatoes, string beans, red and green bell peppers, asparagus and fresh corn. The majority of non-refrigerated produce is sold stacked with a minimum of packaging similar to what you would find in an outdoor market. The refrigerated racks look just as lush with several types of leafy greens, cabbage and carrots sold unwrapped by the pound. There is, however, a 12-plus foot-long, five-deck-high cold case displaying bagged salads, fresh-cut fruits and veggies, specialty salad dressings, marinades and dessert dips for those customers who crave convenience.

Nearly one-third (or 150) produce SKUs are organic. In fact, Sprouts was selected as the “Best of Orange County” winner for organic food selection in the Orange County Register’s *People’s Choice Awards* for 2014. An iron-man poster calling out this recognition stands at the entrance to the store. It’s also echoed at point of sale with an 8.5- by-11-inch version of this sign.

Green price signs identify organic produce. Produce sold singularly, such as apples, are affixed with green stickers imprinted with the word “organic.” There is a segregated display of organic apples, pears and other tree fruit in the middle of the department. Leafy greens and other organic refrigerated vegetables are grouped together in the cold case. Overall, there’s no need to walk far in produce to find something that’s organically grown.

“Locally grown to us means from our state,” says Iguchi. “So, our buyers look first to Southern California when sourcing produce. That’s not to say we don’t source outside the state or country. For example, we offer our customers fruit from Chile in the winter. The average number of locally grown produce items we have in store varies depending on the time of year.”

A wide assortment of produce is a signature selling point for Sprouts. For example, the Irvine store boasts more than a dozen varieties of tomatoes from vine ripe to Campari, basic Yellow cooking onions and Cipollini’s, Russet and Purple potatoes, and bins of popular Gala apples and seasonal pomegranates. This commitment to variety assures that customers — who demographically are middle to upper-middle class in income, well educated, multicultural and interested in eating healthfully — will find the fruits and vegetables they want.

PRICING STRATEGY

Sprouts customers are also interested in saving money and spending wisely. Consequently, affordable pricing is part of the chain’s go-to-market strategy.

“We can offer great pricing and specials because of our great long-term relationships with suppliers, high sales volume, correspondingly lower shrink, and the fact we are willing to accept lower profit margins on fruits and vegetables than conventional stores because of our farmers market focus,” explains Iguchi.

Price cards labeled “bountiful bargains” and “healthy savings” let customers know at point of sale the price and savings of fruits and vegetables on sale. Customers purchasing case-loads automatically receive a discount. The chain’s weekly ad circular runs from Wednesday to Wednesday — meaning twice the number of items are on sale each Wednesday.

MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Customers who sign up for Sprouts mailing list can receive coupons, and the chain also offers electronic coupons on its website for download each month, although fresh produce is rarely included in these couponing programs.

Fresh produce is delivered to the Irvine Sprouts store via the company’s Colton, CA, warehouse. Sprouts also has distribution centers in Glendale, AZ, and Grand Prairie, TX.

“When I interview someone for a job here in Produce, I not only look for someone who can break down loads, cull product, clean the back room and stock the shelves. I look at what passion they have for cooking and healthy eating,” says Iguchi.

A good example of this is produce clerk Jose Bautista.

“I love to cook,” says Bautista, as he uniformly lays ears of fresh corn on a display. “If a customer asks, I tell them the different ways I would prepare something.”

Customers receive suggestive selling in store from the staff in the meat and seafood departments about which produce would complement their meal best. The Sprouts website’s “Healthy Living Resources” content includes recipes, how-to articles and videos, as well as wellness webinars.

“Two of the biggest trends today are health and value,” says Iguchi. “We believe average Americans — particularly aging Baby Boomers and Millennials — will continue to be interested in improving their health through their diet.”

Finally, Sprouts corporate mission to improve the health of the communities in which it serves isn’t limited to its shoppers. The chain proves this in two ways. First, by way of local event sponsorship — such as donating fresh bananas and water to road races. Second, the Sprouts store in Irvine, like the chain’s other stores in Orange County, partner with Second Harvest Food Bank to donate extra or slightly distressed produce to feed the hungry in the Los Angeles area. It’s a recipe for success both in-store and out that is certainly working for this progressive health-oriented retailer. **pb**

SOFTWARE: From Food Safety To Inventory Control

Efficiency and reduced waste may pay for traceability technology.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Food safety concerns brought the produce industry to inventory management software, and food safety is about to take the category to previously unimaginable heights.

Retailers will be able to track suspect fruits and vegetables back to a particular field and, using the information on membership discount cards, even warn individual consumers that they purchased suspect produce.

“The real magic for the consumer is the retailer will be able to email or text customers to let them know something they purchased is under recall,” says Todd Baggett, chief executive of RedLine, Santa Clara, CA. “Retailers want to be able to manage the transaction to know what items were sold to their customers.”

Food safety brought the produce industry to this dance, and will continue to drive implementation of tracking software, but high-tech firms are also working to make the technology pay for itself by offering programs that will reduce shrink by making it easier to display the oldest produce first, and by tracking the cold chain from the field to the display shelf.

MAKING IT PAY

There is money to be saved with perishable produce and software that makes it easier to choose from shipments with the oldest product in the distribution center.

“The payoff is verifying that the correct quantity and lots are being picked in the warehouse,” says Chris Reynolds, national sales manager for Solid Software Solutions, Houston, TX. “You’re controlling your losses by making sure you’re not picking a lot that just came in.”

Solid Software (a company specializing in installation and support of software and web development for the wholesale food distribution industry) will be able to package inventory management and food safety traceability in a single product, because their solutions programs are compatible with the labels developed by Wal-Mart and other major retailers.

“The applications we have verify the lot against an order,” says Reynolds. “The lots can be pre-selected so the warehouse is sending the right product. It also gives you full traceability.”





(Photos above courtesy of Silver Creek Software.) Experts say the largest retailers, led by Wal-Mart, already ask their suppliers to use labels that can be used to track cases, and soon the entire produce industry will be required to have case tracking ability.

With some produce items, this higher level of inventory control can begin in the field as vegetables are harvested.

“Some packers of head lettuce, broccoli or cauliflower in the field can identify the inventory when the pallet is completed, and then send that information to the receiving office,” says Baggett. “At the receiving office, they can scan it when it comes in.”

Software that tracks cold chain management will play a particularly important role in shrink reduction.

“The other part of the cold chain I’m seeing interest in is the time it took to get the product from cut to cool,” says Baggett. “If it was two hours, that might be acceptable. But if you’re on the West Coast and it was three hours, you might ship it nowhere past the Midwest. As people get their inventory management together, they will definitely have better control.”

Inventory software can also greatly improve the ease and efficiency of making and receiving orders.

“The Produce Pro Software solution allows customers to order in many different ways; EDI, online ordering, mobile ordering app, or a straight forward downloadable order guide,” says Courtney Heim, sales representative at Produce Pro Software, Oak Brook, IL. “All ordering options provide the customers with a fast, simple way to order that saved them time and in return saves the foodservice distributor order entry time.

The software may also pay for itself by generating detailed reports on sales and inventory trends.

“Some of our customers have partnership reports they send regularly to their retail customers,” says John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software, a Boise, ID-based software company specializing in accounting systems and visual produce ERP (enterprise resource planning) solutions. “The formats of

“WE BELIEVE THE EFFICIENCY YOU GAIN BY HAVING BETTER INVENTORY CONTROL BY SCANNING PALLET AND CASES WILL BRING A RETURN ON INVESTMENT THAT IS VERY GOOD.”

— Tony Fazio, Famous Software

the reports have these columns available by product and by store: Sales velocity for today; sales velocity for the last five days by date; sales velocity for this week; sales velocity for last week; monthly sales velocity to date; monthly sales velocity last month; sales for same week last year; same for same month last year; sales velocity for last year looking into upcoming weeks and month.”

A produce software system adopted to meet food safety requirements might offer enough inventory management advantages to pay for itself.

“We believe the efficiency you gain by having better inventory control by scanning pallets and cases will bring a return on investment that is very good,” says Tony Fazio, mobile product manager at Famous Software, a Fresno, CA-based company providing accounting, inventory management and shipping software to fresh produce growers, packers, shippers, distributors, etc.

The largest retailers, led by Wal-Mart, already ask their suppliers to use labels that can be used to track cases, and soon the entire produce industry will be required to have case tracking ability.

“The Food Safety Modernization Act says we need to be able to trace the cases,” says Baggett. “When we’re talking about lettuce, celery or anything that is 24 to a case, we’re not talking about more than two or three cents an item. There are a number of suppliers who are not doing it yet because of the added cost. I would say, realistically, it’s probably in the

range of 25 percent of produce that has case labels. In five years, I think we’ll be at 100 percent or close to it.”

The largest retailers have the advantage of incorporating produce traceability into their already highly sophisticated computer program systems.

“The big boys like Wal-Mart, Costco and Target already have hundreds of millions of dollars in information technology,” says Ron Myers, executive vice president of North American operations at LinkFresh, a Ventura, CA-based software and IT consultancy organization with extensive supply chain expertise.

He believes it will pay to invest in systems replacing multiple fragmented programs that are all out of date with modern programs unifying numerous functions.

“Unless we’re talking about enterprise resource planning, it’s difficult for one product or vendor to do everything you need,” says Myers.

Many people in the produce industry currently have multiple software systems, each one of which helps with some but not all of the important inventory management issues.

“In three to five years we’re going to see more end-to-end solutions,” says Myers. “The industry is still maturing. Grower-shippers will have systems that tell them how much to plant, when to harvest, and how to bring in enough material of the right grades for packing. It will help them put produce for the last stop in the truck first.”

Myers estimates reduced waste and

increased manpower efficiency should be enough for a grower-shipper to recover their investment in inventory software within nine to 24 months.

“All the grower-shippers are concerned about anything that has to do with food safety,” says Myers. “The whole track and trace technology is cost avoidance for them.”

If inventory software is to reduce costs, however, it must become practical, which is why suppliers are working on products that are a lot easier to use.

MAKING IT WORK

Software system developers are also trying to make this technology work in the real world by offering systems that can be used in warehouses by workers who are more adept with forklifts than computers.

Unwieldy UPC readers could become relics as software companies move toward products that can be read by smartphones.

“We transferred our hand-held applications to Android and Windows mobile devices,” says Reynolds of Solid Software Solutions. “We had a pretty good response when we introduced it at the Produce Marketing Association’s Fresh Summit this year. The standard

for a long time was those bulky zappers. This is sleeker and easier to use. We are updating the look and feel of the software.”

Solid Software already made some of its inventory products smartphone compatible, and is moving quickly to transfer its entire line.

“The receiving software is the next to be transferred to mobile devices,” says Reynolds. “It will let you scan pallets or cases as they come in; you will also be able to print labels if cases come in without them. We already have that software, but we will be adding it to the mobile devices.”

There is competition among firms offering inventory software that can be used on any mobile device.

“One of the things that is also becoming popular is apps on tablets and smartphones that allow access to a company’s software. This could be used to place an order or look at reports,” says Tina Reminger, general manager at Silver Creek Software. “It is quick and easy and everyone has a smartphone (or tablet) these days. Silver Creek Software has several different apps we offer to customers for these purposes, and this area will continue to grow depending on each client’s individual needs, requirements, resources, etc.”

The next generation of inventory software should also offer menus that are straightforward and easy to use.

“We’re developing a fully integrated suite of warehouse management products designed specifically for the produce industry,” says Fazio. “The user interface is simple, straightforward and easy to read. We use a simple menu that gives the warehouse worker a system that is reliable, stable and easy to use. The biggest challenge has been making the product easy to use.”

EARLY WARNING

Many shippers are already using software that identifies lots — largely in anticipation of food safety requirements.

“The use of the software depends on the size of the company, but it is getting more widespread,” says Charles Shafae, president of dProduce Man Software, Half Moon Bay, CA. “I would say 75 to 80 percent of our customers use inventory control. It happened within the past five years. Our customers tend to be medium-sized wholesalers and distributors; the customers of our customers are supermarkets, restaurants and foodservice.”

More supermarkets — that went public



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with their policy — are already asking shippers to use labels on cases.

“Wal-Mart, Food Lion, the other Delhaize Group outlets and Publix are all using the label required by the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI),” says Baggett. “When I talk to our customers, I hear that other major retailers require it but have not gone public about it yet.”

In addition to serving as chief executive at RedLine, Baggett is also co-chair of the PTI technology working group.

Wal-Mart makes their software available to vendors, and so do other major retailers.

“Safeway, Albertsons, Delhaize, Target, etc. are all moving to these types of automated systems,” says Silver Creek’s Reminger. “They are not only using it, they are demanding their vendors do as well. With a few of our products, the transition of data necessary or required is made with fewer personnel demands, which is the magic of automation.”

The case-tracking label is uniform, but other software may vary from retailer to retailer.

“Each retailer has a specific format that can be used to place orders with fresh suppliers, receive advance ship notices and also receive invoices for products shipped,” says Myers from LinkFresh.

Only a minority of shippers are already using case labels, according to Baggett, but as federal food safety rules are finalized, they will become an accepted part of doing business.

“By the time the Food Safety Modernization Act comes in, there will be an acceptance that there is a cost to this, and people will be willing to pay it,” says RedLine’s Baggett.

There could be a payoff from this technology if it helps identify food safety problems early, and limits the losses to only those cases that are suspect.

“If you have lettuce from five suppliers with no labels, and there is a problem, everybody in the category has to be pulled out,” says Baggett. “That’s when we have major recalls. There are a lot of people in the fresh vegetable arena who are doing it voluntarily because it reduces their liability and protects them against unnecessary recalls.”

The technology has already shown inventory management software can be used to remove suspect produce before it ever reaches the display shelf.

“It’s allowed Wal-Mart to identify when problems occur and take care of it before the produce even reaches the public,” says Baggett.

The perishable produce industry may be



Experts believe food safety issues can benefit from case-tracking labels.

dragged kicking and screaming to adopt technology that eventually brings unprecedented efficiency from farm-to-fork.

“The produce industry was really behind in inventory management for a long time. Control of inventory is critical to the produce industry,” says Shafae of dProduceMan. “The produce industry didn’t care that much about it until traceability and country of origin became relevant. Traceability and country of origin are forcing the industry to pay attention.” **pb**



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TAKING A BITE OUT OF WINTER

Best marketing and merchandising practices for controlled-atmosphere apples during the coldest season.

BY KEITH LORIA

They say, “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” and thanks to savvy business practices and strong foresight into what’s needed throughout the entire year, apples are in plentiful supply through all seasons — including winter.

Storing apples is a traditional practice and allows retail displays to be filled with almost all popular varieties.

Retailers, particularly this season, will have the opportunity to heavily promote apples in the winter and spring, with a record amount of apples coming out of Washington in 2014, so promotional opportunities are plentiful.

Julie Bancroft, executive director for the Harrisburg, PA-based Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program, says the East Coast has been very fortunate to have a high-quality crop of traditional sizes this year, as well.

“Our local and regional [crop] continues to be quite strong. Eastern apple growers are using the best practices in harvest management and post-harvest as well as state-of-the-art technology in storing, packing and sorting, including the use of SmartFresh [a system offered by Collegeville, PA-based AgroFresh that manages fruit and vegetable ripening by controlling naturally occurring ethylene during storage and transport] for controlled atmosphere storage and internal defect sorting,” she says.

“Our packer/shippers take great care in packing and storing fruit to create a process that is seamless for the buyer — ensuring the best tasting, highest-quality fruit is reaching the consumer.”

'TIS THE SEASON

Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for

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Rainier Fruit Company, headquartered in Selah, WA, says apple sales typically remain strong through the end of March/April, and really begin to slow when spring/summer fruits start hitting the market.

Fred Hess, co-owner of Hess Brothers Fruit Company, doing business in Leola, PA, says while there is typically a slight post-holiday slowing of the market, volumes pick right back up to normal rates by March and continue through the end of April.

Don Roper, vice president of sales and marketing Honeybear Marketing LLC, based in Brewster, WA, doesn't quite agree, saying apple sales usually decrease after practically owning the produce section during the fall.

"There's a lost space in the front due to a focus for holiday vegetable items," he says. "Plus, there's inroads from Southern Hemisphere soft fruit, cherries, berries, nectarines and peaches, and it's the start of citrus season."

Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission, headquartered in Wenatchee, WA, says all sales are cyclical and consistent September through April domestically. It's only after berries and melons come available that apple sales see a slight drop off.

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit, Yakima, WA, says apple sales historically stay steady in the winter months and even increase out of Washington.

"The winter months are a great time for apple sales," he says. "Regional offerings are featured in the fall and more focus is on Washington apples in the winter months. The winter months are a great time for apple sales."

STORAGE ISSUES

Fryhover says Washington apples account for 65 percent of those in storage with Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and California making up the rest. Washington stores its apples in a nitrogen atmosphere, minimizing the CO₂ and O₂ that substantially decreases the production of ethylene (the gas that fruits emit as they mature).

The amount of fruit going into storage depends on the overall size of the crop. For Pennsylvania, Bancroft predicts one third to 50 percent of the crop will likely be packed by the start of the New Year.

Roper says, historically, Washington stored a higher percentage of apples than both Michigan and New York, but that

difference is rapidly changing as more storages and more apples are grown in those states, pushing the season longer for both.

While Gala is the first apple normally harvested, and Pink Lady the last one, during the winter all varieties will be out of CA (controlled atmosphere) storage. According to Wolter, come wintertime, apples exiting storage include Fuji, Granny Smith, Honeycrisp, Jazz, Lady Alice, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious.

The biggest factor in storing apples, most apple experts say, is having the right harvest and storage plan and the ability and discipline to execute.

"With really large crops, retailers need to ensure their partner suppliers handled their crop properly," says Roper. "The pitfalls that need to be looked at include: Was the variety harvested at the right time? Did fruit sit in bins outside of the proper harvest protocol? Did your packer/marketing partner make the right decision about what fruit is being put into CA to support retailers winter/spring needs? It is a fine balancing act of doing both the right thing for the grower and for your retail partner. In the end, both parties need



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Sinks says he usually stores between 75 and 85 percent of the apple crop for winter.

“Many decisions have to be made during harvest on which orchard sites have the ability to store well, and we develop a history with different orchards,” he says. “Our field team has a good idea of what sites and varieties will store well and CA rooms are filled accordingly.”

Sinks says if you pick too early the fruit may not eat as well. “You have to pick the fruit at its optimum time to get the best results,” he adds. “Different orchard sites lend itself to storage better than other sites as well. We try to fill CA rooms in a manner that works best by variety. For example, we fill Red Delicious rooms quickly; for a Honeycrisp room, we tend to slowly bring the apples respiration rate down before sealing the CA room.”

The apple companies work hard to quality control fruit while it is in storage and when rooms are opened for packing. Some varieties actually become more flavorful during storage. Sinks says Pink Lady, for example, tends to mellow out during storage and has more of a sweet-tart mix later in the season versus being tart at the beginning of the season.

Still, the most important factor for shipping high-quality apples from storage is putting high quality apples into storage upon harvest.

“Fruit quality begins in the orchard,” asserts Wolter. “Having a thorough understanding of the internal qualities of the fruit, the historical experience of fruit from a particular orchard, regular monitoring throughout the storage season, and having the ability to adjust packing plans as needed are all important storage protocols.”

A solid controlled atmosphere program is vital for the success of apple sales in winter for all retailers, so proper training of retail produce associates is important to apple shelf life.

Kelly Ciceran, manager of the Ontario Apple Growers, based in Vineland Station, ON, says Ontario has lots of apple sales movement that happens in the fall at roadside markets and farmers markets, so sales normally

“THESE CROSS-MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES HELP CONSUMERS THINK ABOUT APPLES WELL BEYOND THE TYPICAL HARVEST SEASON.”

— Brenda Briggs, Rice Fruit Company

increase in the winter months at retail.

“The best thing that apple farmers can do is harvest the fruit on time and at the proper maturity for storage,” advises Ciceran. “It really is the apple packers/shipper’s job to deliver the right product to the retailer. Open communication between the retailer and shipper is key to providing what is needed for each retailer.”

MERCHANDISING MATTERS

Brenda Briggs, vice president of marketing for the Rice Fruit Company, headquartered in Gardners, PA, says, during the holiday season and winter months, retailers have an excellent opportunity to cross-merchandise apples with baking items such as pie crusts, cinnamon and other spices used for applesauce and baking, or even apple-pie filling for those who are pressed for time.

“There is also opportunity to pair fresh apples with other center-store items such as nut butters, which makes for a healthy and filling snack,” she says. “These cross-merchandising opportunities help consumers think about apples well beyond the typical harvest season.”

When it comes to merchandising the apples in winter, Wolter suggests creating an apple display that drives consumption, such as keeping them up front and all apples together with color breaks using different varieties. She says it’s also important to visibly and correctly sign each apple variety. Additionally, rotating should be done every time apples are replenished on display — with proper care given to unblemished apples that are newly placed into the display or rotated.

“The space of display should be in line with current apple category trends. If the

retailer hasn’t reviewed the apple variety space allocation plan recently, time should be spent reviewing sales data and adjusting displays accordingly,” says Wolter. “Rainier Fruit Company is collaborating on this subject with many of our retail partners the past few years, which has profitably impacted the apple category.”

Jim Allen, president and chief executive of the Fishers, NY-based New York Apple Association, would love to see retailers build big displays of CA apples in the front of produce departments with great pricing, but he knows that’s not always realistic. The marketing decisions, he says, must be made based on the quality of the fruit.

“The industry knows what we have to pack and ship and our limitations as far as quality and varieties, so we just have to adapt and make sure we put out the very best possible product every chance we can,” says Allen. “If the industry was late harvesting apples and has problems with those apples in storage, they have to make tough management and marketing decisions. On the other side of the coin, if you have a good, strong crop and good storage conditions, then you have more flexibility on how to market it.”

To increase sales, Sinks says retailers should take advantage of New Year’s diets to promote apples during the month of January and increase promotions on Pink Lady apples for Valentine’s Day and Granny Smith apples for St. Patrick’s Day.

According to Ciceran, apples maintain their quality longer when they are refrigerated, so retailers should be doing all they can to make sure they are in a cool environment.

“Displaying apples in the produce section’s cooler would be very helpful to overall quality and freshness,” she says. “For us, during this period, most of the competition at retail is from Washington State fruit. At the beginning of March is when Southern Hemisphere apples will start to appear.”

Industry insiders point out several handling mistakes made by retailers. The most common occurrences happen by dropping apple cases while placing stock in the cooler or storing on work trucks and dumping apples from boxes to the display area.

pb

pb

■ Foreign Competition

Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission, headquartered in Wenatchee, WA, says foreign imports primarily start in late February from Chile and New Zealand. He also points out it’s consumers who make the choice — and ultimately the level of competition — but it hasn’t had too drastic an affect on controlled atmosphere sales.

“There is minimal competition from imported apples during the winter. They really don’t start their harvest until mid-late February on Gala apples,” says Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit, Yakima, WA. “The month of February in the Southern Hemisphere is the equivalent of August in the Northern Hemisphere, so they are at the front end of their apple harvest in the winter.”

Squeezing MORE OUT OF Tofu

Education, samples and smart marketing are key to increasing sales.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Retailers have the opportunity to increase sales of tofu to mainstream shoppers by providing more education about how to prepare it, offering flavorful samples, and reminding consumers of its health benefits, suppliers say. Tofu, which consists primarily of soybeans and water, is high in protein and other nutrients, and is often available in organic varieties. Its versatility and ease of preparation also meet consumer needs for convenience, but many home cooks simply may not know what to do with it.

Tofu remains a relatively unglamorous food, bland in appearance and taste on its own. While tofu and other soy-based products enjoyed a surge in popularity and sales in the early 2000s, tofu has since largely faded from the spotlight.

“In the mainstream media, you don’t see tofu used that much, unless it is in vegetarian magazines or Asian magazines,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, which offers a line of tofu and other soy-based products. “You

don’t see the celebrity chefs using it on their TV shows, unless it is one of the segments that are few and far between on vegetarian cooking.”

Although data from research firm Nielsen Perishables Group, West Dundee, IL, show tofu sales have been flat in recent years, some suppliers say those figures may be misleading, and tofu sales are increasing in some venues — particularly with the growth of Asian-focused retailers.

“We believe tofu consumption is on the rise,” says Paul Eastman, national sales manager for the American market at Garden Grove, CA-based House Foods America Corporation, which offers fresh premium and an organic variety as well as other specialty tofu products. “However, Nielsen data may show stagnant growth in the tofu category — since much of the increase is in non-Nielsen reporting retailers such as Costco Wholesale, Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe’s, and ethnic-focused independents.”

He notes the Asian population in the U.S. grew 43 percent from 2000 to 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and still



appears to be growing.

“This growth significantly contributes to tofu consumption,” he says. “Also, consumers are getting more familiar with tofu as vegetarian menus are being offered at restaurants and campus dining across the U.S.”

He also notes tofu was approved for the USDA’s National School Lunch Program a few years ago, and some schools offer tofu on their menus.

“This is great news for us, as children will become more accustomed to eating tofu at a

younger age,” says Eastman.

Tofu suppliers say there’s an opportunity for retailers to do a better job of teaching customers not only about the health benefits of tofu, but also about how to cook it.

“People want to eat more tofu because of the trend toward healthy eating, but they still need a lot of education about how to prepare tofu,” says Andrew Yap, president and chief executive of Miami, FL-based Leasa Industries, which makes a tofu with cilantro, a spicy tofu with cayenne pepper, and a tofu mixed

with fresh vegetables among other varieties.

“When we are in stores doing demos, a lot of times people say they don’t know how to prepare it.”

He notes people are often surprised to learn that the soft white cubes in the miso soup they order in restaurants is actually tofu. “They might have thought it was cheese or something,” says Yap.

He says Leasa prepares a simple marinated tofu for its demos, with the tofu fried in one-inch cubes. “It’s often clear during the demos that consumers are not familiar with tofu,” he says. “We had people say, ‘Wow, that’s some awesome chicken.’”

Adam Solomon, a marketing representative with Morinaga Nutritional Foods, the Torrance, CA-based maker of Mori-Nu tofu products, agrees product demos are very important to drive new customer trial of tofu and to educate consumers about how to use the product.

“When doing demos, one of the No. 1 questions people ask again and again, is, ‘OK, I hear it’s healthy for me, it’s heart-healthy, and it’s a good source of protein, but what do I do with it?’”

He suggests retailers display simple recipe cards, offer recipe ideas, and incorporate some practical information for their customers about how to prepare tofu.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Most tofu suppliers say the logical place to merchandise tofu is in the produce area — since it is a vegetable-based product. They note retailers often also display it in the deli area, in the dairy section, or — in the case of Morinaga’s shelf-stable variety of tofu — on the grocery shelf in the Asian or ethnic section of the store.

Suppliers say some mainstream customers, however, might not even know where to look for tofu and could use better direction.

“People actually need help finding it in the store,” says Solomon. “It’s not something that people instinctively know where it is.”

He suggests when stores do tofu product demonstrations they indicate all of the places where product is found in the store.

“It seems redundant to people in the industry. It’s not natural for them [customers] to go to the refrigerated area in the produce section, or for our customers, to go to the Asian or the international/ethnic aisle,” says Solomon.

Tofu products tend to have their own larger designated sections in Asian retail stores such as the fast-growing H Mart chain. Solomon notes that a new H Mart in the Koreatown area

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of Los Angeles has a tofu section designated with an elegant sign that simply says, “Tofu.”

Eastman of House Foods agrees merchandising can vary based on the customer base of the retailer. “In conventional markets, it is best merchandised in the produce department near the other value-added refrigerated products, such as pre-cut veggies or salad,” he says. “Water-packed tofu is best placed in Produce as well, and vacuum-packed tofus on the shelves above with a display rack.

“In Asian supermarkets, tofu is merchandised in produce as well, but with tofu being a staple in Asian diets, sometimes an entire 8-foot cooler is dedicated to as many as 30 different SKUs of tofu varieties,” says Eastman.

Hyun Lee, a Mississauga, ON-based manager at NatuSoy Foods, says it is up to individual stores where they want to merchandise the product. “Some stores might want to put it in the produce section, and we see it in the dairy section, too,” she says.

Schueller of Melissa’s notes that, because the product has strong appeal among vegetarians, it makes sense to merchandise it in the produce section.

“For stores that recognize they cater to a vegetarian consumer, they merchandise it in the produce department,” he says, noting that he has sometimes seen it merchandised in the deli area of stores.

“The ironic thing is that vegetarians do not shop in the deli area,” says Schueller. “So if the store is catering to the vegetarians, your best bet is to merchandise in the produce department.”

ATTRACTING NEW CUSTOMERS

While vegetarians and Asian customers might be the primary targets for tofu consumption, retailers also have an opportunity to target mainstream consumers interested in eating healthier, tofu suppliers say.

The New Year presents a perfect opportunity for such healthful positioning, asserts Schueller. “I think a great time to reintroduce tofu to potential new customers is the New Year, where America’s No. 1 resolution is to eat healthier, and eat more produce.”

One way some retailers are introducing tofu to mainstream consumers is in juice bars, where soft tofu is sometimes an ingredient in smoothies.

Currently, many Americans seem to think of tofu primarily as a meat substitute, which explains the popularity of firm and extra firm tofu varieties, given that its texture is more like meat. Many mainstream consumers might be more familiar with soft varieties, however, if they have only had it in soup or in smoothies.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOUSE FOODS

Solomon points out soft tofu is typically used as a dessert ingredient.

NEW VARIETIES

Many manufacturers are seeking to bring excitement to the category on their own with new flavors and varieties.

“Firm and extra firm SKUs seem to be selling better than the softer ones,” says Eastman of House Foods. “Overall, I still think non-flavored tofus dominate the marketplace since people like to add their preferred sauces and spices to them. However, many tofu manufacturers are launching flavored tofus to attract new users by adding sauces they may be more familiar with such as teriyaki, sesame or orange.

“Also, the trend seems to show more vacuum-packed tofus as opposed to water-packed ones,” says Eastman. “This is also the case in Canada and Europe. Another trend is fortified tofu, such as tofu with DHA Omega-3, which we recently launched.”

Yap of Leasa says texture is still the most important distinction when it comes to varieties of tofu, but consumers do seem to be seeking out more flavors. “We see customers are looking for pre-prepared type of products, like grilled and baked,” he says. “Spicy tofu is also still really popular, and teriyaki is still prevalent.”

This month, Leasa is introducing kale tofu, which includes fresh kale inside the tofu blocks and is manufactured in a similar way to the company’s vegetable and cilantro tofus.

“There’s a big trend toward eating kale in the last two years, so if we combine that with tofu, it’s a double whammy,” says Yap. “We think customers are really going to like that.”

At Morinaga, the company is planning to introduce a traditional Japanese tofu, which uses a different coagulant instead of the salts

and acids traditionally employed on soymilk to create the tofu. Solomon says the company will debut it this month at Natural Products Expo West.

This past summer, Morinaga rolled out new packaging for its core products, which Solomon says has been well received. “A lot of customers thought the packaging represented the recipes more than the products, so we tried to simplify it with clean lines, making it very obvious that it’s tofu,” explains Solomon. “We are getting a lot of good responses that packaging is very clear and easy to spot on the shelf, so we are glad to hear that.”

Some suppliers say they are not rolling out additional varieties of tofu but are focusing on promoting the healthfulness and flavor of their current offerings.

Lee of NatuSoy, which offers a smoked tofu and a baked tofu in addition to water-packed fresh tofu products and vacuum-packed super-firm tofu, says the company has done well with its sprouted tofu. The super-firm sprouted tofu offers added health benefits, she says.

“We sprouted tofu in Canada for 60 years,” she says. “It is usually found in health-food stores and not usually in larger food stores.”

At Melissa’s, the company promotes its Soyrizo and Soytaco products as meat alternatives for vegetarians, but Schueller says there could be opportunities to promote it to health-conscious Hispanic consumers as well.

Yap of Leasa says the healthfulness and versatility of tofu give it a tremendous amount of potential for growth. “When people see this white block of tofu, they think, ‘Gee, that looks very bland,’” says Yap. “But when you take tofu out of the package, it takes the flavor of whatever you cook it with — that’s the magic of the tofu.” **pb**

Top Ways To Increase Sales Of Tropical Fruit



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPARTAN NASH

Industry insiders share tips on the best ways retailers can merchandise and manage the category.

BY KEITH LORIA

The growth in demand for tropical and exotic fruits can be attributed to rising consumer incomes and an increasing awareness of the health benefits of diets heavy in fresh produce.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's Produce, based in Los Angeles, CA, says there is also the effect of a growing U.S. population of immigrants — particularly Asians and Hispanics who are accustomed to a culture of heavy fresh produce meals.

In fact, according to the latest U.S. Census, Hispanics and Asian Americans are experiencing the highest growth rate in the country (142 percent and 167 percent respectively) between 2010 and 2050.

"In response to the rising demand for fresh fruits and vegetables, domestic production rose, but not at the same rate as the increase in demand — mainly due to the unfavorable U.S. continental climate, seasonality in production,

and high domestic farm labor costs," he says. "As a result, the U.S. increasingly became more dependent on imports to satisfy demand."

Marion Tabard, director of marketing at Turbana Corp., based in Coral Gables, FL, notes this new demographic landscape led to a boom in fusion restaurants that integrate ethnic tropicals into menus.

"Chefs are educating themselves and designing innovative menus by adding tropical flavors to popular dishes," she says. "While tropical foods are staples for most Hispanics and Asians, they are relatively unknown to Caucasian Americans. This demographic shift and the greater availability of tropicals have given them the opportunity to discover some of these products."

According to Tabard, the tropicals that are experiencing the most significant growth are avocados, yuccas, plantains, mangos, pineapples, and kiwis.

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties, based in Pompano Beach, FL, says to compensate for the increased demand in the category, the company made significant investments in its lime fields in Guatemala.

"For Southern Specialties, the tropical category includes bananas, pineapples, mangos, papayas and starfruit. We consider our limes part of that program, but they are typically

merchandised in another area," says Eagle. "Many retailers are doing a great job. We do find some stores that fail to rotate product properly and display inferior product."

Meredith Gremel, director of corporate affairs for Spartan Nash, a food distributor for military commissaries and exchanges as well as independent and corporate-owned retail stores headquartered in Grand Rapids, MI, says exotic tropical varieties seem to be helping the overall tropical category with impulse sales.

"Consumers are looking to add variety and color to their fruit platters," she says. "Kiwi sales are strong over the past year due to better consumer education on how to eat them properly and new clamshell packaging to display them better."

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Donald Souther, vice president of marketing and sales development for Vision Produce Company, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, says the company increased its digital presence through social media this year in an effort to raise consumer awareness of its tropical fruit offerings.

"Mangos continue to grow in consumption as consumers learn of their many recipe functions," he says. "The efforts of the National Mango Board have been instrumental in education to the public and the industry."

Turbana offers a line of 18 ethnic tropical fruits — in addition to bananas, plantains and pineapples, which includes yuca, chayote, coconut, Malanga and Calabaza — catering to the needs of the growing ethnic communities and providing a turnkey solution that helps retailers access new and growing consumer markets.

“We work with retailers hand in hand,” says Tabard. “Not only do we bring them our expertise, we offer them different tools to educate merchandisers, produce managers and consumers. One of these tools is a mobile app available for produce managers to learn about ethnic tropicals and help them manage the category. This app also allows them to understand the demographics in the store areas in order to customize their assortment to the specific needs of their market, as well as to be informed of upcoming holidays in order to promote tropicals accordingly.”

Additionally, Turbana offers its retail partners videos, recipes, and other tools to educate consumers that are not familiar with these products. These tools give the basic information consumers need to know about the tropicals to feel comfortable buying them and cooking with them.

Karen Caplan, president and chief executive of Frieda’s Inc., doing business in Los Alamitos, CA, understands many tropical fruits look strange to shoppers when they are unfamiliar, and stresses the importance of including labeling and point of sale information to educate the consumer and produce manager.

“We share timely information with our clients through our weekly *Market Report*, our monthly promotional calendar, and our annual planning calendar,” she says. “If a retailer would like more information, we would love to have them contact us.”

PROPER GROUPING

It’s no secret bananas and pineapples constitute the majority of tropical sales, but there are plenty of other fruits that fit into this segment. Typically, the tropical category includes any produce item grown in tropical climates. Since they are becoming more popular, grouping varieties under the same category is becoming more challenging for merchandising purposes.

Schueller lists first-tier fruits as papaya strawberry, coconut young, coconut quick crack, mango, cherimoya, kiwano melon, plantains and Korean pears; second-tier fruits as passion fruit, red banana, baby pineapple, feijoa, coconut brown, cactus pear red, tamarillo red and kumquats; and third-tier fruits as lychee, rambutans, guava and dragon fruit.

“Depending on customer demographics, the depth of the category varies,” he says. “However, there is a dominate presence in many retailers that is growing with an Hispanic mix of fruits including items like plantains, red bananas, cactus pears, variety mangos, papayas and more.”

Tabard recommends tropical items be grouped corresponding to the target audience. “Retailers need to understand that the ethnic consumers don’t eat all the same food; each country has its own culture and preferences,” he says. “They need to discover the relevant demographics living in each of their store market areas and customize the assortment to cater to the specific needs of the communities living in the store area.”

Tabard advises the tropical roots and vegetables targeted to Hispanics and Asians should be merchandised together while the tropical fruits such as pineapples, bananas and mangos that cater to a wider audience should be merchandised separately.

Frieda’s Caplan thinks grouping the items



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into one-destination display makes the most sense as it looks “awesome and interesting to consumers.”

“We encourage retailers to create a tropical destination, near the bananas and pineapples, as they are high traffic areas,” she says. “Along with pineapples and bananas (and mangos), we recommend our most popular items, which include Zululand queen baby pineapples, papayas, passion fruit, cherimoya, starfruit, pepino melons, kiwanos, rambutan, lychee, dragon fruit, feijoas, tamarillos, and red, baby, manzano and burro bananas.”

MARKETING MATTERS

For retailers looking to maximize incremental sales in the tropical fruit category, Melissa’s Schueller suggests it’s important to develop a culinary format that excites consumers by introducing fresh, unique eating experiences.

His tips include increasing collaboration with category managers on a category plan and program goals; reduce emphasis on “exotic” and focus on culinary; and create merchandising sets that use well known produce as “anchor products” to promote other items in the tropical category.

In Tabard’s opinion, mainstream tropical items should be merchandised separately, while tropical items that are targeted to ethnic groups should be merchandised together.

“When large ethnic communities live nearby, the stores should merchandise the ethnic tropical on large and attractive displays to attract these consumers,” she says. “Keep in mind these consumers are willing to drive long distances to find these products. Also, since these products are staples for them and most

“Educate your produce staff on tropical items by allowing in-store sampling when fruit ripens. Sampling ripe fruit turns ‘shrink’ into an educational tool.”

— Karen Caplan, Frieda’s Inc.

likely purchased on a weekly basis, these consumers are very price sensitive.”

During the winter, Tabard says retailers should promote products that are cooked or used in soups or stews such as yuca, yams, chayote and Calabaza. She suggests retailers do this by creating big and attractive displays.

Eagle says retailers need to display a variety of fruit and suggests featuring a mango or papaya cut in half, on display, to reveal the vibrant colors.

“We love to see cut fruit,” he says. “Halve papayas, scoop out the seeds, and fill the cavity with berries or slices of lime.”

Like many companies, over the years Spartan Nash had success with a taste-of-the-tropics theme ad. Gremel offers these top tips for retailers to increase sales: interact with consumers through informative signs, explaining selection and use; include recipe ideas and health benefits; display fruit at proper temperatures to ensure the highest quality product available; and encourage active sampling and demos to increase

consumer awareness.

According to Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropical, headquartered in Homestead, FL, getting the consumer from “umm, what can I do” to “hmm, let’s try it tonight” requires the right information on how to select, ripen and eat the different tropical fruit.

“It takes two steps to go from ‘umm’ to ‘hmmm,’” she says. “The first is signage. With limited-sign real estate, you’ve got to be concise. A photo of the fruit as it looks on the shelf and a photo of the next step in its use. For Starfruit, how its cut is a must. Or for passion-fruit, how it looks before it is cut and a photo of it cut. Your customers will appreciate the fact that this aromatic fruit needs time to wrinkle to ripen. Having such a great smell in the kitchen is a bonus.”

WINTER WONDERLAND

While tropical fruit sells all year long, winter months actually are a great time to promote tropical fruits, according to Caplan, as the colors and the flavors break away from the humdrum of typical winter fruits like pears, apples, and oranges.

It’s an opinion shared by most in the industry. “We think winter is a great time to ‘go tropical,’ and it’s important retailers create excitement with warm colors and great flavors of mangos and papayas,” says Eagle. “Our team is in daily contact with our customers, both retail and foodservice, and we promote our tropical line at every show we attend.”

Vision Produce Company’s Souther believes tropical fruit lends itself to creative marketing themes in the winter months. For example, Jungle Jim’s in Ohio does extravagant displays with grass huts, coconut trees, and monkeys to bring attention to the produce.

“On the store level, promoting themed displays is always a great way to have the store build attractive displays in high-traffic areas which drive sales,” he says. “Providing the consumer with the best quality promotes good eating, satisfied customers and return purchases.”

Caplan also thinks providing samples of the products will go a long way, arguing that many consumers haven’t experienced the great flavors of the tropics. “Educate your produce staff on tropical items by allowing in-store sampling when fruit ripens,” she says. “Sampling ripe fruit turns ‘shrink’ into an educational tool. The more they know about the products, the more they can chat with shoppers about them. And the more shoppers know about tropical items, the more likely they are to buy.”

pb

THE NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW 2014

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Reflection

It's Still A People Business

By John Pandol



John Pandol,
director of special projects
for Pandol Bros. in Delano, CA

**THE SMART PEOPLE WERE JUST
“WALKING THE FLOOR,” BUT
THE WISE ONES WERE
“WORKING THE FLOOR.”**

THE FOLKS WHO put on trade shows and industry events think a lot about what makes them successful, and you should, too. After all, perhaps 30,000 of us in the industry will attend at least one this year. Why?

At first glance, trade shows are about . . . well . . . trade. Sellers at their booths, armed with samples, displays, brochures and business cards, attentively watch the passing traffic as the attendees ply the aisles, glancing from side to side like they were leafing through a catalog. But thinking of trade and trade shows in such a simplistic transactional exchange sense misses a big part of what attracts people to these events.

Like most of the 5,000-plus attendees, I made the day trip to New York City to attend The New York Produce Show and Conference. Yes, from the West Coast: red eye there and late flight back. Like most, I attended a little bit of education, dutifully walked all the aisles, but I spent most of my time talking to people. Yes, that's right. I flew coast to coast for the day to hang out and talk with people. Know what? I wasn't the only one. The smart people were just “walking the floor,” but the wise ones were “working the floor.”

What's the value of a day spent “working the floor”? Is there value? Is it tangible, and what metric should be used to evaluate it? After all, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. How does one calculate the ROI? Is my dust-and-feathers whirlwind coast-to-coast trip just an exercise in motion or is there actually some action? After all, growers around the world hire my company to turn their crops into cash. My hours at The Show should increase my ability to do that.

Much of the trade show literature highlights sales metrics, mostly prospecting and qualifying numbers — sales leads generated or new customers qualified. For newer companies these might be useful benefits, but what about the vast majority of long-established businesses in mature product lines? What's in

it for us?

The primary benefit of The Show and event attendance is increased social capital. Note to accountants: in your chart of accounts, social capital is a component of the goodwill. You remember goodwill, the place where you stick all the stuff you can't measure but markets determine have value.

Social Capital is a concept that has been around sociology since the 19th century but received lots of popular attention in the 1990s from Robert Putman's book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Putman's point is that society's social experience is poorer because people do not engage in the social activities as they once did (such as bowling leagues or service clubs). That is, a society's social capital is diminished. The idea is there are benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation associated with social networks.

Think about the produce business for a minute. Are trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation benefits or not? You bet they are. Not only are they benefits, they are assets. How does one increase it? Networking. Numbers of known persons X frequency of contacts = increase in social capital.

Why would thousands of people hang out on a working weekday in the winter at the Javits Convention Center, many neither buying nor selling but simply working the floor? The situation is recognition that an open venue that permits short contacts with a large number of the right group of people is an efficient way to increase social capital. That's why cocktail receptions trump sit down dinners in our business. Oh, by the way, did I say The New York Produce Show and Conference had a dandy reception?

So get out your calendar and plan on a few more trade shows in 2015. Prepare to work, not walk, the floor. Listen to the thought leaders. Most importantly, talk to people. After all, the produce industry is still a people business.

Global Trade Symposium

KARINA AMALUISA



ROBERTA COOK



CHRIS COWAN



DIEGO DIAZ



CONRAD FALCO



JEFFREY JACKSON



AMIR JALALY



TINASHE KAPUYA



MAYKOOL LOPEZ



DIRECT IMPORTING PANEL



TONY REYNOLDS



TONY WALSH



WHOLESALE DISRUPTION PANEL



AT THIS YEAR'S Global Trade Symposium, industry influencers from around the world challenged global traders to respond to dramatic changes sweeping retail, foodservice and global markets.

Presenters for the conference — themed, “Produce Import/Export: The Disruption of Established Markets,” — included: **Jeffrey Jackson**, former chief executive and managing director for MGroup, an Australian grower/packer/marketer; **Alistair Stone**, produce buying manager for U.K. cooperative Waitrose; **Tony Reynolds**, managing director for U.K.-based foodservice distributor Reynolds CS Limited; and **Jin Ju Wilder**, marketing director for Los Angeles-based Valley Fruit and Produce.

With the shopper landscape changing, **Amir Jalaly** and **Chris Cowan** from London-based consulting firm, Kantar Retail, explained that data is “paramount” to being able to react to the shift in consumers’ purchasing and eating habits.

Prepared leafy salad brand Florette has benefited by the use of data compiled with the support of Kantar, and company information was shared with the industry to drive growth across the entire U.K. salad category.

Through research, the firm found there

were several groups of salad buyers: *avoiders*, *accepters*, *selectors*, *adorers* and *addicts*, explains Florette’s category controller **Tony Walsh**. Florette also discovered that bag bounce, moisture content and leaf vitality were the key influencers for shoppers at the point of purchase.

The Wholesale Disruption panel included: **Chris Hutchinson**, chairman of London-based Spitalfields Market; **Stefanie Katzman**, management and sales for Bronx-based S.Katzman Produce; **Gary Marshall**, chairman of London-based New Covent Garden; **Alan Siger**, chairman of Virgin Island-based Coosemans Worldwide; and Valley Fruit and Produce’s **Wilder**.

Roberta Cook, Ph.D. cooperative extension specialist and lecturer at the University of California, Davis, introduced how new technologies and market access is increasing the role of Mexico in global produce trade.

Top leaders from Central and South America also discussed growth, product diversity, food safety and sustainability, and how their dynamic produce industries create opportunities for global buyers. These leaders included **Maykool Lopez**, director general and trade commissioner for the Trade Office of Costa Rica; **Diego Diaz**, trade commissioner of the Guatemala

Trade Office; **Karina Amaluisa**, trade commissioner of Ecuador; **Juan Ariel Reyes**, president of Mexico’s AMHPAC; and **Conrado Falco**, director of the Peru Trade Commission.

“Direct sourcing has a definition that can be skewed, depending on who you ask,” according to **Dick Spezzano**, former vice president of produce for the Phoenix, AZ-based Vons Companies. Spezzano and a panel of produce juggernauts answered questions regarding the pros and cons of direct global procurement at the Global Trade Symposium.

The other panelists included **Reggie Griffin**, former vice president of produce for Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger; **Bruce Peterson**, senior vice president and general merchandise manager of perishables for Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.; Waitrose’s **Stone**; **Tim York**, president of Salinas, CA-based Markon; and **Andreas Schindler**, chief executive of Don Limón, Hamburg, Germany.

Tinashe Kapuya, manager of International Trade and Investment Intelligence at the Agricultural Business Chamber (or Agbiz) for South Africa, spoke to an international audience about how the race for South African citrus exports has major roadblocks ahead, and how South Africa aims to diversify its citrus agribusiness into new export markets.

Opening Cocktail Reception



EXHIBITORS, ATTENDEES and guests were treated to an evening of light bites and cocktails in the gilded ballroom at the Midtown Manhattan Hilton to mark their first night in the Big Apple.

Guests had their choices of mixed drinks customized with juices and produce sponsored by **Del Monte Fresh, Hunts Point Terminal Market** and **New York Apple Association**. After the reception, many attendees hit the town to enjoy the eclectic and delicious choices New York City has to offer for dinner, and some took in a Broadway show.



Keynote Breakfast



Lorri Koster of Mann Packing and Jim Prevor of Produce Business presented Matt Seeley of The Nunes Company, Inc. with this year's Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation in Service of Expanding Consumption of Fresh Fruits & Vegetables.



Tim Fleming of Strube Celery and Vegetable Company accepts the Chandler Copps Award on behalf of his late wife, Jan Fleming.

INDUSTRY MEMBERS made their way to the Jacob Javits Center's scenic River Pavilion for the Keynote Breakfast the morning of the exhibition. Arriving guests were serenaded by New York City's acappella doo wop group, the Tee Tones.

After a brief introduction by **Ken Whitacre**, publisher of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, the National Anthem was performed by the Tee Tones.

Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association, delivered an eloquent invocation.

Continual outreach to the produce industry and constant learning are the exceptional traits

that earned the late **Jan Fleming**, former president and chief executive office of the Strube Celery & Vegetable Co., in Chicago, the Chandler Copps Award, sponsored by *Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit*. The award was presented by **Jim Prevor** to Fleming's husband, **Tim Fleming**, Strube's executive vice president.

In accepting the award on his late wife's behalf, Fleming said: "Jan broke many glass ceilings for women in the produce industry. She wanted everyone in the fresh produce industry to succeed but always worked hard to mentor and coach any women who wanted to

move up in a very much of a man's business."

The Chandler Copps Award, named for the late retailer and former board president of the Produce Marketing Association, was among the most influential people in the produce industry in the last half of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st.

Other recipients of this award include **Paul Kneeland**, vice president of produce and floral at Kings Food Markets and **Alan Siger**, senior advisor at Consumer Fresh Produce.

The ground-breaking discovery of what could be the "next kale" earned The Nunes

Keynote Breakfast

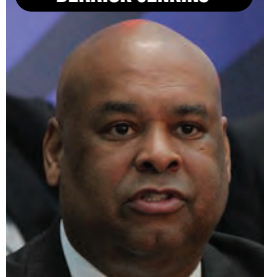


Thought Leaders Panel

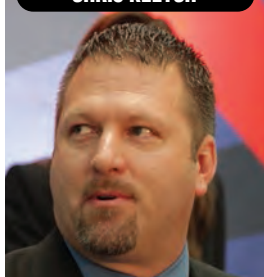
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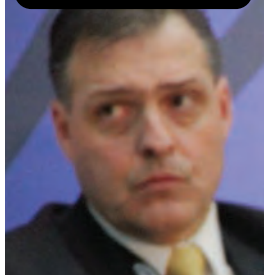
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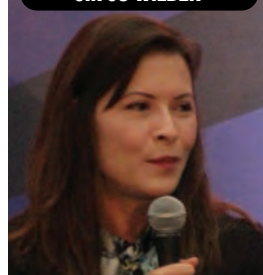
JAY SCHNEIDER



ALISTAIR STONE



JIN JU WILDER



Company, Salinas, CA, the fifth annual Joe Nucci Award for Product Innovation in Service of Expanding Consumption of Fresh Fruits & Vegetables, sponsored by Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*.

The award, which was presented by Prevor and **Lorri Koster**, chief executive of Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing, recognized the

Nunes Company's new Foxy-brand organic BroccoLeaf. **Matt Seeley** of Nunes accepted the award.

Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit "Thought Leaders" Panel began after the industry recognitions. Participating panelists representing the retail, wholesale and foodservice distribution sectors included: **Rich Dachman**, Sysco

Corporation; **Derrick Jenkins**, Wakefern Food Corporation; **Chris Keetch**, Ahold USA; **Paul Kneeland**, Kings Food Markets; **Tony Reynolds**, Reynolds; **Anthony Sattler**, C&S Wholesale Grocers; **Vic Savanello**, Allegiance Retail Services; **Jay Schneider**, Acme Markets; **Alistair Stone**, Waitrose; and **Jin Ju Wilder**, Valley Fruit & Produce.

Ribbon Cutting/Trade Show



(L-R) Robert Goldstein, Genpro; John McAleavy, Eastern Produce Council; Jim Prevor, Produce Business; Vic Savanello, Allegiance Retail Services; Paul Kneeland, Kings Food Markets; Alicia Glen, Deputy Mayor of New York City; Hugh Weathers, South Carolina Department of Agriculture; Richard Ball, New York Department of Agriculture; Al Murray, New Jersey Department of Agriculture; Barbara Turk, Director of Food Policy, Office of Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services.



Trade Show Floor



THE EXHIBIT FLOOR, located in the new North Hall of the Javits Center, hosted more than 400 vendors. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen and Food Policy Director, Barbara Turk, were escorted around the show floor.

The day was jam-packed with activities and plenty of food to experience. Old friends caught up by talking business, and attendees watched chef demonstrations while indulging in the gourmet fresh dishes made from produce around the world.

The North Hall was also home to educational micro-sessions. A total of seven sessions occurred throughout the day, each one lasting 45 minutes. Some topics included: Getting produce into hospitals; opportunities for organic ethnic greens and herbs; organic labeling and its influence on consumers; produce as a performance art; and mobile technologies.

Trade Show Floor



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Micro-Sessions & Educational Outreach Program



BRAD RICKARD



RAMU GOVINDASAMY



THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE continued with the annual University Outreach Program developed for the show. Select students from participating international institutions were granted access to the show and mentored by renowned industry leaders and professors during the show.

Students represented Cornell University, Rutgers University, St. Joseph's University and the University of Connecticut. In addition to U.S. schools, students representing Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche in Bra, Italy, and New Castle University from the U.K. also were in attendance.

Mentors included industry consultants **Bruce Peterson**, **Dick Spezzano** and **Reggie Griffin**, as well as **Jin Ju Wilder** of Valley Fruit and Produce, **Alistair Stone** from Waitrose, and Professors **Linda and Jack Allen**.



New Product Showcase & Sports Fans



UPON ENTERING JAVITS NORTH HALL, attendees could examine the New Product Showcase, where participating companies displayed "What's New? What's Fresh? What's Innovative? What's Unique?" in

the produce industry.

Graig Nettles, legendary New York Yankee (third baseman from 1973 to 1983) delighted sports fans during an autograph session that took place at the Apio booth.



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Celebrity Chefs & Culinary Students

Celebrity Chefs And Culinary Students Take Produce In New Directions

By Mark Hamstra

THE INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED

consumer palate has opened the door for chefs to experiment with new flavors and ingredients, and to infuse menus with produce items in novel ways that delight consumers eager for exciting dining experiences.

That openness was evident at this year's show, where celebrity chefs took the stage to showcase produce-centric creations, and culinary students competed to concoct sophisticated flatbread pizzas on the spot using only their imaginations and ingredients foraged from show exhibitors.

"Now more than ever, people are interested in new flavors and new experiences, and are excited about food," says **Heather Goldberg**, who together with her sister **Jenny Engel** own Spork Foods, a Los Angeles-based company specializing in gourmet vegan food dishes.

The duo, who partnered for the first Celebrity Chef Demonstration, also operate a cooking school, through which they teach about 10,000 people a year how to prepare healthy dishes.

"People are demanding healthier options, and produce is a great way to meet those demands," says Goldberg. "We are encouraging people to think differently about produce, and get a lot of different textures in their diets using produce."

Consumers have become much more attuned to the various flavor and texture possibilities that fruits and vegetables can offer, they say. "People want to taste the produce, rather than covering it up with sauces," says Engel.

The Spork Sisters, as they call themselves, say they increasingly find they are able to incorporate more ethnic produce items into their menus, such as jackfruit, which they source from local Thai or Indian markets.

"We like to use young jackfruit because of its texture — you can use it like meat," says Engel. Dishes they make using jackfruit as a meat substitute include carnitas and a vegan "pulled pork" product.

Doug Stuchel, assistant professor at Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI,

who led a student team from his school in the Culinary Innovation Station competition, noted that chefs now are "doing produce right."

"Who would have thought that you could roast a cauliflower and slice it like a steak?" he asks. "These days, produce is much more than overcooked, army green broccoli and spinach. Now it is being cooked right, and seasoned right."

He also noted that consumers no longer have to wait to try new produce dishes in restaurants, thanks to the proliferation of TV cooking shows and the volume of food-related activity on social media.

John Abels, department chair at Le Cordon Bleu in Chicago, whose student team was competing against Johnson & Wales, notes that the increasingly global consumer palate has freed chefs to let their imaginations run wild. "There are no lines anymore," Abels says. "Back in the '90s, fusion cuisine was a new thing. Now, you put things together in your head and try them out, and sometimes it works. Who would have thought barbecue sauce and cilantro would work together? But they do."

One of the chefs who demonstrated the versatility of vegetables — as well as the globally influenced nature of their preparation — was Indian-born chef **Jehangir Mehta**, chef/owner of Graffiti, Mehtaphor and Me and You in New York City.

Taking the Celebrity Chef Stage on the show floor, Mehta encouraged chefs and home cooks alike to "do whatever works for you" when preparing recipes. "If you don't like cheese, leave it out," he says.

Mehta demonstrated a vegetable taco made using thinly sliced watermelon radishes as the exterior "shell," topped with diced avocado and shredded kale.

He later showed how some of the same ingredients could be combined into a salad, along with a variety of other vegetables mixed to the diner's taste. Those included purple Brussels sprouts from his demonstration's sponsor, Babé Farms, which he blanched and



CHEF JEHANGIR MEHTA

shredded.

"They are one of the best things I have tried in a long time," Mehta says.

Mehta also made a pickled fennel with a 50-50 mix of red wine vinegar and water, along with sugar and spices, chili and herbs; and he made a bell pepper dish with pea shoots.

For salad dressing, Mehta suggests saving the water that is squeezed out of fresh tomatoes and pouring it over a veggie mix.

"Think about how you can use food in different ways," Mehta says.

Chef **David Pasternack**, owner of New York seafood restaurants Esca and Barchetta, demonstrated the diverse possibilities offered by Tuscan kale, which he included in all three of his demonstration dishes. Those were a Tuscan Kale Pesto, which he served over homemade penne; Clam & Kale Chowder; and a Tuscan Kale Salad with Bacon Vinaigrette.

He created the recipes especially for Earthbound Farms, a supplier of kale and sponsor of his demonstration.

Student Chefs/Flatbread Pizza Competition

TWO CULINARY Innovation Stations were home to student-chefs from Johnson & Wales University and Le Cordon Bleu of Chicago. Throughout the day, they foraged from the exhibitor booths for fresh produce to create a variety of dishes on the spot. Exhibitors and attendees enjoyed observing the station with the student-chefs in action — and most of all tasting the delicious meals they created.



TOP CULINARY STUDENTS from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, and Le Cordon Bleu in Chicago competed in a flatbread pizza competition — where the only parameter was to use produce from the show floor.

Designed to showcase how produce can bring vibrant colors, tempting textures and appealing flavors to pizza, the competition asked four students from each school to work as teams to create pizzas in four categories: Red Sauce Pizza, White Sauce Pizza, Specialty Pizza and Dessert Pizza.

“PRODUCE BUSINESS works to support the next generation of leaders in the foodservice industry by creating opportunities like this that bring together students and produce industry leaders,” says **Jim Prevor**, editor-in-chief of PRODUCE BUSINESS. “The invited judges complete the picture by providing ‘real world’ expertise on what the students did well and where they can improve when it comes to creating produce-centric menu items that will sell in today’s competitive foodservice marketplace.”

The competition started with students “foraging” from select exhibitors at the show.

Students were able to choose from a wide range of fresh and value-added processed produce items.

Judges included celebrity chef, cookbook author and restaurateur **Suvir Saran**; **Bob Karisny**, vice president of Menu R&D for Taco John’s International; **David Groll**, director of culinary development and corporate executive chef of McAlister’s Deli; **Gerry Ludwig**, corporate consulting chef at Gordon Food Service; **Jesse Gideon**, chief operating officer and corporate executive chef at Fresh to Order; and **Amy Myrdal Miller**, president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting.

The competition was fierce, as each school showcased the talents of their students guided by seasoned faculty members. Judges ranked the entries on four attributes: appearance, texture, flavor and overall appeal.

The two teams tied in the red sauce category. Le Cordon Bleu won the white sauce category, and Johnson & Wales won the specialty and dessert categories. The top scoring pizza was Johnson & Wales’ specialty pizza, which featured kale, roasted garlic and sundried tomatoes.

'Connect With Fresh' Media Luncheon

Consumer Media Connects With Produce Innovators

By Jodean Robbins

MORE THAN 60 representatives from the consumer media explored unique and exotic fresh produce items during a luncheon and presentation. Journalists from cooking magazines, news services, food blogs, radio programs and TV spent one-on-one time with specialty produce supplier Frieda's and Israeli date supplier Devik International. The opportunity allowed them to explore several exotic items and dates.

Frieda's Specialty Produce presented an introduction to uncommon items such as Dragonfruit, Goldenberry, Green Dragon apples, Zululand Queen Baby Pineapples and Kiwano melons. **Karen Caplan**, president and chief executive of Frieda's, discussed the company's initiative to encourage consumers to eat "scary" fruits and vegetables.

"It's our mission to change the way America eats fruits and vegetables, and encouraging consumers to try something new is one of the many ways to increase consumption," said Caplan. "Our 'Eat One Fruit A Day That Scares You' campaign resonated with the luncheon attendees. They had fun sampling and talking about ways to spread the word about celebrating fresh produce."

Devik International intrigued attendees with a variety of dates. **David Daks** spoke about the varietal differences, their applications and even explained how to judge a date by its appearance. Attendees enjoyed sampling the fresh and dried dates.

The lunch also welcomed special guest speaker **John Mariani**, a columnist for *Esquire* and *Bloomberg News*. Mariani shared his opinions on evolving food trends and challenged attendees to view and write about produce in a new light.

After the lunch, media representatives interacted with more than 400 produce companies at the exposition, attended educational micro-sessions and viewed multiple chef demonstrations throughout the day.



Charitable Giving/Spouse Program/Women's Leadership

Exhibitors Band Together For Food Donations

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD



SIX YEARS AFTER the onset of the financial and economic crisis, hunger remains high in the United States. One in five residents of New York City and nearly one in six Americans nationwide are food insecure, according to 2013 statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau. Many companies exhibiting at this year's show helped take a bite out of hunger by donating their products to City Harvest, a New York City-based non-profit food rescue, distribution and education organization.

Beyond the event, a new year-round cause marketing campaign will make it easier for produce suppliers and retailers to fulfill corporate social responsibility goals while feeding the hungry healthfully.

"City Harvest rescues excess food from

WHILE ATTENDEES DELIGHTED in walking the show floor pursuing new business, the Spouse Program commenced in the penthouse of the Hilton. **Debbie Prevor**, wife of show co-founder **Jim Prevor**, hosted a group of spouses and significant others to a day of shopping and sightseeing in the City. The itinerary also included manicures, massages, and high-tea at the Plaza Hotel.

many events throughout the year," says **Lisa Sposato**, associate director of food sourcing and donor relations. "The New York Produce Show is extra special, because the majority of the rescued food is top-of-the-line fresh produce. This year, we rescued more than 43,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables and other specialty items, including nuts — enough to fill two 48-foot tractor trailers and three 24-foot commercial box trucks."

More than 500 community food programs in New York's five boroughs receive City Harvest food donations. These operations include homeless shelters, food pantries, religious institutions and soup kitchens. The fresh fruits and vegetables donated were used in a variety of ways, including as tossed salads, guacamole and healthy side dishes for lunch service.

In October, the Growing Forward with Feeding America campaign was introduced to the industry at the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit Convention & Expo. The year-round cause marketing campaign is designed to help produce companies align with Feeding America through a shared commitment to help fight hunger and provide more fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks nationwide. Feeding America is the largest domestic hunger-relief organization in the nation. **Melissa McDill**, president and chief executive of Soquel, CA-headquartered McDill Associates and marketing director, **Lisa Hansen**, attended the New York Produce Show to tell industry members about the produce-centric cause-marketing initiative they created in partnership with Chicago-based Feeding America.



Celebrating Women In Produce

By Michele Sotallaro



LAST YEAR, the Eastern Produce Council established a Women's Leadership Committee, and in conjunction, The New York Produce Show and Conference conducted its first Women's Leadership Reception. At this year's reception, the recipient of the annual Woman of Distinction Award was **Theresa Nolan**, founder, president and chief executive of The Nolan Network, a marketing agency based out of Plymouth, MA.

At the event, Nolan humbly accepted the second annual award and gave praise to **Jim Prevor**, **Paul Kneeland** and many dear friends for their support over the years. "I am thankful to be a part of the produce industry where we can all be proud of the healthy products we sell," said Nolan. "I am even more thankful to be surrounded by so many wonderful produce industry friends, such as Prevor and [journalist], **Bill Martin** — without whom I would have never have been able to survive my husband's death and the long ordeal of our legal action [with Ocean Spray]. Winning that trial allowed me to offer my scholarship programs through the James & Theresa Family Foundation and bring something good out of something bad. It has been a great blessing to me."

Foodservice Embraces Produce And Looks To Suppliers For Help

By Mark Hamstra

FOODSERVICE OPERATORS around the country are expanding their use of produce in myriad ways, working with their vendors to navigate supply and execution challenges as they recast their menus to satisfy evolving consumer tastes and preferences.

Joining a host of industry professionals at the 4th Annual Ideation Fresh Foodservice Forum at the New York Produce Show and Conference, **Keith Brunell**, senior director of culinary and corporate executive chef at Maggiano's, the Italian casual dining chain, described the current health-conscious environment as a "perfect storm" for the growth of produce on foodservice menus.

"Our guests are asking for more vegetables, and we have to give it to them," says Brunell who, along with other culinary experts, shared his expertise and insights at the day-long event.

Chefs — from single-unit operations to large chains — have been strong advocates of putting more produce on their menus, but they say such efforts can pose challenges.

"Costs are keeping me from offering more produce," says **Bob Karisny**, vice president for menu strategy and innovation at Taco John's, a quick-service Mexican chain based in Cheyenne, WY.

Cheesecake Factory, the Calabasas, CA-based casual dining chain, also faces challenges as it expands its produce offerings, says **Bob Okura**, vice president of culinary development and corporate executive chef.

The company has retooled and expanded what was already a vast menu by adding more items, including several appetizer salads priced at under \$10. Salads now rank fourth in menu popularity at The Cheesecake Factory, behind burgers, pastas and entrees, Okura says.

Rich Dachman, vice president of produce at foodservice distributor Sysco, cautions that foodservice operators risk adding costs into their operations by placing demands that force suppliers to change the processes they have established to maximize efficiency. For



example, he cites restaurants that seek delivery five, six or seven times per week.

"The more delivery we do, the more it will cost you," he says, urging operators to limit deliveries to two to three times per week.

Ken Toong, executive director for auxiliary services at the University of Massachusetts, says he's seen vegetables take a more prominent position on his school's menus.

"When I joined U. Mass, we had a chicken stir-fry that was mostly chicken, with a little vegetable, and now it is just the opposite," he says.

"Fresh" has become the key attribute for young diners, Toong says.

"They want fresh, they want unprocessed food, they care about responsibility, and they care about animal welfare," he says.

David Groll, director of culinary development and corporate executive chef of

McAlister's Deli, says his restaurants have doubled the number of salads offered, from four or five to about nine.

Salads now account for about 28 percent of sales at the chain, driven in part by the popularity of McAlister's "Choose Two" menu offering, which allows customers to pair a cup of soup with a half-portion of a sandwich, salad, appetizer or potato, or to combine two half-portions.

Groll says training is key for restaurant employees, especially with produce, which can often require careful handling and precise cooking skills. The chain offers an online program called McAlister's University that employees participate in, at a cost of \$4 per year per worker for franchisees.

"You have to be prudent about how employees can actually operate in the kitchen," says **Gerry Ludwig**, corporate

Ideation Fresh Foodservice Forum

KEITH BRUNELL



JESSE GIDEON



DAVID GROLL



JEHANGIR MEHTA



BOB KARISNY



GERRY LUDWIG



DON ODIORNE



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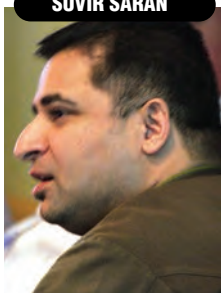
JOEL PANAGAKOS



RICH DACHMAN



SUVIR SARAN



RAFI TAHERIAN



KEN TOONG



TIM YORK



Attendees of Ideation Fresh worked through lunch brainstorming and conversing about how to bring more fresh produce into the foodservice arena. Panel discussions covering topics such as innovation, reinventions and profit generation included a number of renowned chefs and specialists in their respective fields.

consulting chef at Gordon Food Service, Grand Rapids, MI. "One of the big enemies of creativity is scalability."

Ludwig's presentation focused on some of the creative ways chefs are using what he described as "under-used" vegetables, including okra and beets ("Beets are the other red meat," Ludwig says.)

Jesse Gideon, chief operating officer and corporate executive chef at Alpharetta, GA-

based Fresh to Order, a concept that seeks to combine fine dining cuisine with the speed of a fast casual operation, says vegetable preparations should be kept basic.

"I think with produce, the simpler you can get, the better," he says. "If you are trying to have 9,000 restaurants, obviously you can't have 20 guys hovering over every plate."

When asked what vegetables they believe may be "under-used," one group of panelists at Ideation Fresh cited cabbage, king oyster mushrooms, rapini and several root vegetables, including potatoes, radishes and rutabagas.

Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice at Eagle, ID-based Idaho Potato Commission, cited cauliflower as a vegetable getting much more attention on menus,

especially when paired with aromatic cheeses. He says the trend toward more produce-centric menus can also be seen in the event catering business.

Odiorne says he sees university campuses at the vanguard of culinary trends more so than fine dining restaurants.

"When I tell people where the trends are coming from, I usually don't say upscale restaurants anymore," he says. "I say go out to a college or university."

Rafi Taherian, executive director at Yale Dining at Yale University in New Haven, CT, says he thinks diners have become much more accepting of new culinary experiences.

"Today, there is more sophistication toward new flavors, and an appreciation of the bitter flavor," he says.

Industry Tours

ATTENDEES ON the industry tours had a chance to experience one of five bus tours including a behind-the-scenes look at retailers, wholesalers, suppliers and rooftop produce production across the tri-state area.

Manhattan bus passengers visited: Whole Foods Market, Fairway Market, Grand Central Market, Gotham West Market, Chelsea

Market, Gourmet Garage and Eataly.

Brooklyn bus passengers visited: Whole Foods Market, Gotham Greens Rooftop Farm, PSK Foodtown, Cherry Hill Gourmet and Pomegranate.

New Jersey bus passengers visited: Morton Williams, Pathmark, Whole Foods Market, HMart, Kings Food Market and Stew

Leonard's in Yonkers, NY.

Hunts Point Terminal Market and the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market bus passengers stopped at multiple vendors on each of the wholesale markets, and Philadelphia passengers also visited a Rastelli Market in New Jersey on the ride back to Manhattan.



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A Taste Of Sunshine In The Winter

Florida strawberries are highly recognized during winter months because of their availability, versatility and profitability.

BY JANEL LEITNER

PHOTO COURTESY OF WISH FARMS

Florida is well-known for its influence in reinforcing and sustaining strawberry sales in the United States. “When you realize 95 percent of consumers purchase strawberries, it is advantageous to produce departments to have them available year-round,” states Kenneth Parker, executive director for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA) located in Plant City, FL.

“The berry category as a whole is in the top five in the produce department, with strawberries contributing 85 percent of total sales and profit,” explains Keith Cox, produce category manager at K-VA-T Food Stores in Abingdon, VA, which operates 104 stores. “We understand the impact strawberries have on our produce sales and have equipped over half our stores with standalone berry cases. Stores with these cases have seen a substantial sales increase.”

Strawberries are a mainstay on shopping lists. “Strawberries are a destination item in the produce department,” states Amber Kosinsky, director of marketing at Wish Farms located in Plant City, FL. “Consumers view strawberries as a weekly repeat purchase.”

“Florida Strawberries are a big part of our business plan,” agrees Jay Schneider, produce sales lead with Acme Markets in Malvern, PA, with 110 stores. “It is one of the top volume sales items in the department and a big part of our quarterly sales plan.”

WHY STRAWBERRIES FROM FLORIDA?

Strawberries from Florida add character to the category. Dan Crowley, vice president of sales and marketing with Well Pict Berries in Watsonville, CA says, “Well Pict strawberries from Florida have the classic conical ‘berry shape,’ full red color, a healthy green calyx and great flavor for good eating.”

Florida strawberries represent a legacy of excellence. “Plant City is the ‘Winter Strawberry Capital of the World’ and home to the Florida Strawberry Festival,” says Peggy Parke, co-owner of Parkesdale Farms located in Dover, FL. “R.E. (Roy) Parke founded Parkesdale Farms almost 70 years ago and pioneered many of the ways strawberry farmers grow, ship and market their berries. Roy always said, ‘God must have really loved strawberries because he shaped them like hearts.’ Strawberries are the heart and soul of Plant City, FL.”

Parker agrees. “The ideal climate and productive soils, along with dedicated multi-generational family farms provide the most locally grown, fresh from Florida strawberries



(L-R) Shannon O'Brien and her dad, Tom O'Brien (president of C&D Fruit and Vegetable Company) in the strawberry field located in Bradenton, FL.

PHOTO COURTESY OF C&D

to the eastern half of the United States during winter months.”

The Florida strawberry season yields a generous harvest. “Florida is the second-largest producer of strawberries after California,” says Parker. “Our soil is very rich in minerals and the weather during those months makes for the ideal berry.”

“Florida growers produce 10,000 to 12,000 acres of fresh market strawberries from November through April,” adds Parker.

Timing plays an important role. “Our window makes our deal unique,” asserts Kosinsky. “It is a nice transition from California strawberries in the summer and early fall.”

“December into April, Florida strawberries are what customers want,” says Tom O'Brien, president of C&D Fruit and Vegetable Company of Bradenton, FL. “Customers will tell you they cannot wait until they are on the shelves.”

AN EVEN BETTER BERRY

Growers continuously work for a better product. “The Florida growers are investing heavily into the breeding program at the University of Florida,” says Parker. “Our goal is to create and maintain satisfied customers at a reasonable profitable level for the growers. The way to accomplish this goal is to produce strawberries meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations.”

New varieties offer Florida an advantage in

the industry. “Florida 127 is a new release from the University of Florida's strawberry breeding program,” says Parker. “This new variety will be planted on a limited amount of acreage this season. The Florida 127 has received overwhelming reviews in terms of flavor. We believe this new variety will set the standard for all others to follow.”

Whether the variety is new or old, many still produce a good strawberry. “This season we are primarily growing Radiance, Festival and Albion varieties,” says Kosinsky. “We continue trials with newer varieties like the Florida Sensation.”

THE BENEFITS OF 'LOCAL'

Promoting Florida strawberries as ‘local’ yields benefits. “When you buy Florida strawberries you not only give the consumer a fresher, riper strawberry, but you stimulate the local economy,” explains Parke. “Buying from local farmers helps in so many ways.”

“Consumers want to buy as local as possible and are insisting on knowing the point of origin of their produce. This validates our planned marketing campaign and interest in growing our partnership with the Fresh from Florida initiative,” says Sue Harrell, director of marketing for FSGA.

The locality of Florida strawberries also helps decrease cost at retail. “Florida has proximity to the marketplaces of the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and the Southeast United

States, along with Eastern Canada,” says Well Pict Berries’ Crowley.

“Based on our location, we can receive strawberries in one to two days from Florida, instead of four to five days from the West Coast,” says K-VA-T’s Cox. “This helps with inventory turns and freshness for the stores. Since the travel distance for delivery to the distribution center is shorter, the cost of freight is also lower.”

“A benefit for us in the East is the short ride for Florida berries,” agrees Acme Markets’ Schneider. “Typically, we ship fruit in about two days or less; we can get fruit in fresh and move it.”

BACKED BY GREAT MARKETING

A consistent marketing plan makes a big difference. “Growers want to see Florida strawberries promoted throughout the season,” says O’Brien.

Various techniques for reaching out to the consumer are also being employed.

“The 2014-15 marketing program is geared to a greater increase in awareness and consumption of Florida winter strawberries in target markets and beyond,” says Harrell. “Mass media outreach, including social media and internet-based marketing, is integral to encouraging strawberry consumption by both current and potential strawberry lovers.”

“We have done a lot on social media, including Facebook and our blog,” says Parkesdale Farms’ Parke. “Marketing the Florida strawberry was such an important part of Roy Parke’s life when he started Parkesdale; it’s in our genes.”

For the past few seasons, Wish Farms has offered a variety of on-pack co-promotions featured on its Misty the Garden Pixie strawberry label.

“We plan to implement similar programs this upcoming season. We will be partnering with well-known brands, pairing nicely with fresh Florida strawberries. The promotional labels will offer a money-off coupon to the consumer. We’ve seen great results with these types of co-branding promotions. Featuring a coupon on our label gives consumers incentive to purchase our strawberries in addition to the partnering product,” says Kosinsky.

FSGA will offer a series of grocery chain in-store sampling demonstrations in the top five Florida markets, including Miami, Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale. “These are the same cities where Strawberry Sue will be appearing on television and radio programs, and where local TV meteorologists will be showcasing Florida



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISH FARMS

strawberries on air to celebrate the winter strawberry season,” says Harrell. “FSGA will work with a retail chain to coordinate in-store-sampling programs and create awareness to increase sales.”

USE CREATIVITY IN MERCHANDISING

Creative and versatile merchandising in stores helps boost sales. “We love a fresh berry display front and center in the winter months,” says Harrell. “It is a taste of summer all winter long. Strawberries are great for holidays, including Christmas, New Year’s and Valentine’s Day.”

“Strawberries are best displayed at the front of the produce aisle, in well-maintained displays kept full with fresh product,” adds Well Pict Berries’ Crowley.

Look to drive impulse sales with freshness and cross-merchandising. “Strawberries are an impulse item, especially when displays are well merchandised and fresh,” says Cox of K-VA-T.

According to O’Brien most retailers will tie in whip cream and angel food cake, and put them in multiple locations.

Promote consistently and often during the season. “We do several weeks of advertising of Florida strawberries, especially when there have been good growing conditions,” says Cox. “This helps keep the momentum going on this high dollar and profit category.”

Healthy eating habits aid in strawberry popularity. “Increasing numbers of Americans are turning to nutrient-rich strawberries year-round because of their deliciousness, health benefits and availability.

“Consumers love recipes and ideas for ways their children can eat more fruits and vegetables. We offer recipes on the retailers’ websites as well as in-store recipe cards,” says Harrell.

PRICE AND HANDLE CORRECTLY

Appropriate pricing is key for increasing sales. “If strawberries are being displayed and priced at multiples — such as two for \$5 — the display will disappear in front of your eyes,” says O’Brien.

Packaging also plays an important role. “Large pack two-pounders are becoming more popular now versus years ago,” says Acme Markets’ Schneider. “More shippers are packing them due to the success retailers have from Western strawberries.”

Correct handling is also crucial. “Making sure you properly handle and store your strawberries is very important,” says Parke. “They can be refrigerated or frozen, and should be handled as little as possible.”

“Always keep berries on display in a refrigerated case so as not to break the cold chain,” suggests Wish Farms’ Kosinsky. “The berries will have a longer shelf life if they stay refrigerated. We advise consumers to look for berries that are stored in a refrigerated section of the produce department and keep packages refrigerated until they are ready to eat the fruit.”

As interest in traceability grows, Wish Farms is promoting a unique marketing technique used since 2009. “We are utilizing How’s My Picking? — a patented tool for traceability to ensure quality by tying consumer feedback to the harvest time, field location, picker and other information,” says Kosinsky.

Wish Farms has plans to get the stores involved. “POS material will be available for our retail customers upon request. The POS will promote our How’s My Picking? Grocery Money Sweeps. The promotional in-store signage includes floor clings, display case messaging and info cards to clip onto strawberry flats.”

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Chefs Across Restaurant Landscape Cater To Meatless Diners



PHOTO COURTESY OF NOODLES AND COMPANY

Plant-based fare now considered part of foodservice's fabric.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

There's been an edible evolution in meatless cuisine in the foodservice arena over the past few decades. No longer does the obligatory "vegetarian" menu option mean a double serving of sides sans the center of the plate. Many chefs also progressed from a heavy-handed reliance on "faux meat" soy product entrees. Today, it's an amazing array of fruit, vegetable, dried beans and whole grains combos that are increasingly served on the bill of fare in everything from QSR to white-tablecloth restaurants, campus dining and even sports stadiums.

"Dining out well is no longer synonymous with a 32-ounce steak," says Todd English, a Boston, MA-based celebrity chef, television personality, author and owner of eight restaurant brands with locations nationally and internationally. "Chefs today are taking time to look at vegetables and how they are prepared. Even if they are served with meat, vegetables have become a differentiating factor on the

plate rather than an add-on — to the extent that customers, whether they are vegetarian or not, want to order the dish due to the vegetables and how they are prepared. This isn't new to me, as most of my concepts have long been based around Mediterranean cuisine."

English isn't alone in his outlook on the growing popularity of plant-based fare. Sixty-two percent of the nearly 1,300 American Culinary Federation (ACF) member chefs surveyed in the Washington, D.C.-headquartered National Restaurant Association's (NRA) "What's Hot" culinary forecast named meatless/vegetarian items as a "hot trend" for 2015. What's more, 20 percent of these chefs called meatless a perennial favorite and only 18 percent dubbed it yesterday's news.

"Meatless dishes evolved past a fad or a trend and are now becoming a part of a normal way of life for many people. Just look at the popularity of Meatless Mondays," says Christopher Tanner, executive chef of U.S. retail at the Camden, NJ-headquartered Campbell Soup Company and ambassador for the St. Augustine, FL-based ACF.

Consider that while only 3 percent of Americans never eat meat, poultry or fish, 47 percent say they eat at least one vegetarian meal per week, according to a 2012 National Harris Poll, an online poll commissioned by

the Vegetarian Resource Group, headquartered in Baltimore, MD. This presents a profitable opportunity for restaurateurs and producers of plant-based ingredients, such as fruits and vegetables.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

Diners who order meatless meals are no longer easy to recognize by their beards and Birkenstocks.

"Our customers range from high school and college students to senior citizens and everyone in-between," explains Julie Derry, chief marketing officer for San Diego, CA-based Souplantation & Sweet Tomatoes, a mid-scale buffet/cafeteria concept with 128 restaurants in 15 states.

There's even diversity in the meaning of "meatless" within a particular age group. "The definition of vegetarian is large for us," explains Cheryl Garner, executive director of dining services at the University of California, Riverside, CA. "Some students eat eggs and cheese, or just vegetables, or just chicken. The term 'vegetarian' is not specific in students' minds."

Nearly one in every five full-time college students (18 percent) would like to see more vegetarian/vegan options in cafeterias, according to the Chicago, IL-based Mintel International's *Colleges and Universities Food-*

service – May 2014 report.

“The younger generations are the ones who benefited the most from health campaigns, so it makes sense that they better understand the relationship between what they eat and how they feel,” explains Julia Gallo-Torres, senior analyst for food and drink and foodservice reports at Mintel.

This has a beneficial carryover effect on students as they grow older. In Mintel’s *Fruit and Vegetables – U.S., October 2013* report, 18 to 34-year-olds said they are more likely to be high users of vegetables at home. In turn, veggies like kale, cauliflower, squash and broccoli rabe are sought-after ingredients for this generation.

“Baby Boomers are a larger segment of the population now, and one that we see looking more for meatless choices due to concerns over health,” says Patrick Peterson, executive chef and vice president of Moe’s Southwest Grill, a 550-plus fast-casual chain based in Atlanta, GA.

There are several trends driving diners’ request for meatless meals. Health and wellness are huge initiators. Thirty-five percent of consumers say they feel guilty when they don’t eat enough fruits or vegetables. Plus, almost 25 percent of men say their doctor or another health professional has suggested they eat more fruits and or/vegetables, according to Mintel’s *Fruit and Vegetables – U.S., October 2013* report.

“These attitudes show Americans are looking for ways to eat healthier, including vegetarian/vegan options,” says Mintel’s Gallo-Torres.

What’s more, 69 percent of respondents in Chicago, IL-based Technomic, Inc.’s October 2014-published *Healthy Eating Consumer Trend Report*, say they thought vegetarian fare is healthier and 90 percent report they like the idea of a course containing a full serving of vegetables.



(L-R) PHOTOS COURTESY OF UMASS AND USD

LOCAL AND SEASONAL HOT TRENDS

“An increasing number of consumers are concerned about where their food comes from, and they want a menu that is fresh, local, seasonal and transparent,” says Mary Chapman, Technomic’s senior director of product innovation.

This observation translates to greater interest in simpler less processed ingredients such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

“We let the ingredients and menu speak for itself,” says Rob Corliss, who as chef-consultant at ATE (All Things Epicurean), helped to launch the fast-fresh restaurant Unforked in Overland Park, KS, in 2011, and continues to create the eatery’s LTO’s (limited time offers). “We tout where the food comes from, the seasonality and the quality. This creates a powerful connection with the guests.”

Some of the most popular meatless LTO’s at Unforked include: Crispy Avocado Taco (tempura fried avocado topped with seasonal

pico de gallo and micro greens on a choice of jammer lettuce or whole wheat, flour or white corn tortilla); Voodoo Veggie Taco (roasted spiced sweet potatoes and Anjou pears, cranberry-honey glaze, toasted pumpkin seeds, queso fresco and a hint of shagbark syrup); and a vegan selection called Thai Me Up Salad (slivers of green mango, rainbow crunch carrots, Mung bean sprouts, toasted coconut, peanuts, red miso dressing) — which Corliss developed with the National Mango Board.

“Fresh mango is often used to add flavor, texture and color to a meatless dish,” says Rachel Muñoz, director of marketing for the National Mango Board, in Orlando, FL. “Mango condiments (salsa, relish, chutney, pickled) may be used to complete the flavor profile of a dish. Fresh mango can be grilled and roasted to caramelize the sugars and bring out a deeper level of flavor.”

Moe’s Southwest Grill offers seasonal salsas in addition to its year-round offerings. These include Pineapple Cucumber Salsa and Roasted Jalapeno Garlic Salsa last summer and Smoky Jalapeno Salsa and Cranberry Lime Salsa in the fall.

Bob Campbell, owner of Campbell Ranches, in Lompoc, CA, is one of a dozen farmers who make guest appearances at “re-grand openings” of refreshed Souplantation & Sweet Tomatoes locations. Campbell grows 120 acres of broccoli that are exclusively sold to the chain, which uses this popular vegetable in a variety of vegetarian offerings, such as its Joan’s Broccoli Madness Salad.

“In addition to these re-grand opening events, where we hand out bags of fresh produce to the first 100 customers, we tell the

SUSTAINABILITY DRIVES MEATLESS MENU OPTIONS

On the consumer front, “there’s much greater stress today on vegetable-based proteins, the health of the planet and the larger issue of figuring out how to feed 8 to 10 billion people by 2050,” explains Christopher Koetke, vice president of the school of culinary arts at Kendall College, in Chicago, IL. Koetke worked with the Greeley, CO-based National Onion Association to develop a number of foodservice recipes — including a meatless pasta primavera with caramelized onions.

On the operator side, “proteins tend to be the most expensive plate component, therefore meatless alternatives can be a good way to introduce dishes along the lower end of the price spectrum that add value for consumers and cost management in back-of-the-house for operators,” explains Annika Stensson, senior manager of research communications for the National Restaurant Association (NRA).

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“Eighty percent of respondents say they want the opportunity to choose the ingredients in their foods.

— Julia Gallo-Torres, Mintel

stories of our farmers in print materials such as table tents, FSI’s [free-standing inserts] in the newspaper and on our website,” says Souplantation’s Derry.

A TASTE OF MEATLESS

More than one-third of restaurants offer a vegetarian dish according to the November 2014-compiled *Vegetarian Menu Trends Report* by Datassential Research in Chicago, IL. More specifically, 34.1 percent of QSR (quick service restaurants) restaurants menued meatless choices, 41.9 percent mid-scale, 33.9 percent casual and 21.9 percent fine dining.

QSR chains such as Chipotle Mexican Grill and Subway are growing more vegetarian-friendly. Last year, Chipotle, a 1,600-plus-unit chain headquartered in Denver, CO, introduced its braised tofu-filled burritos called Sofritas.

Subway, a Milford, CT-based multinational chain with more than 40,000 restaurants worldwide, started test marketing two new all-vegan sandwiches last summer. The Malibu Garden patty is made with whole grains and veggies topped with a fiery roasted tomato sauce. The Black Bean burger is seasoned with garlic, bell peppers, cilantro, corn and comes with a sweet potato curry sauce.

“Taco Bell features a completely customizable menu so those diners who do not eat meat can always sub our seasoned beef, chicken or steak for pinto beans or black beans,” says Ashley Sioson, spokeswoman for the Irvine, CA-based subsidiary of Yum! Brands, Inc., that has nearly 7,000 units nationwide.

In addition, some of Taco Bell’s most popular menu items that do not contain meat are: Bean Burrito, Black Bean Burrito, 7-Layer Burrito, and the 2014-launched Cantina Power Veggie Bowl and Cantina Power Veggie Burrito.

At mid-scale chain Souplantation & Sweet Tomatoes, there are more than 50 selections daily, ranging from fresh produce, salads, soups, pastas and breads to desserts. The chain’s recipe repertoire includes 26 tossed and 52 prepared

salads that are either vegetarian or vegan. These include everything from the ordinary Carrot Raisin and Pesto Pasta to extraordinary Thai Peanut & Red Pepper, Roasted Vegetable with Feta & Olives, and Roasted Potato with Chipotle Chile Vinaigrette and best-selling Roasted Vegetable Kale salads.

Fast-casual chains such as Panera Bread, Noodles & Co. and Moe’s Southwest Grill all make it easy for patrons to eat meatless. Panera, headquartered in Sunset Hills, MO, with more than 1,800 units nationwide, offers vegetarian selections on its menu such as a Mediterranean Veggie Sandwich, Tomato & Mozzarella Panini, Autumn Squash Soup, Creamy Tomato Soup, Black Bean Soup, and Garden Vegetable Soup with Pesto.

“Eighty percent of respondents say they want the opportunity to choose the ingredients in their foods, according to our *Dining Out: A 2014 Look Ahead – U.S. – January 2014*,” says Mintel’s Gallo-Torres. “Customization is an easy way to make something vegetarian or vegan.”

The menu at Noodles & Company, a chain based in Broomfield, CO — with nearly 430 units throughout 32 states — is infinitely customizable.

“Our multitude of noodles and pastas gives us a nice base to develop a variety of vegetarian dishes,” explains Nick Graff, director of research and development in culinary innovation. “Customers who want meat can order it as an add on. Some of the most popular vegetables we use are broccoli, mushrooms and roma tomatoes, as well as seasonal ingredients such as asparagus and corn in the spring. In fact, our Bangkok Curry has four servings of vegetables in every order.”

Other favorite vegetarian selections on the Noodles & Company menu include Penne Rosa (mushrooms, tomato and spinach), Pesto Cavatappi (basil pesto, garlic, mushrooms, tomatoes and Italian parsley) and Whole Grain Tuscan Fresca (linguini, roasted garlic, red onion, tomatoes and spinach).

Meatless has been part of the DNA at Moe’s Southwest Grill since it started in 2007. “We offer more than 20 fresh veggies and organic tofu as an add-on in a customizable format. Additionally, we sell pre-composed menu selections and seven of these are vegetarian. Approximately 12 to 15 percent of our entrée sales are vegetarian,” says Peterson of Moe’s Southwest Grill.

Vegetarian entrees, all with pop-culture names, include Band Camp (a burrito bowl with seasoned rice, beans, cheese, pico de gallo and guacamole), Art Vandalay (a burrito made

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with seasoned rice, beans, cheese, pico de gallo, lettuce and guacamole), and the Personal Trainer (a salad with romaine, beans, pico de gallo, cheese, cucumber and black olives.)

As for fine dining, there are several excellent vegetable-based entree examples on Chef English's menus. One is the English pea ravioli with Beech mushrooms, broccoli and charred corn served at Bluezoo, a restaurant at the Walt Disney World's Swan & Dolphin resort. At Tuscany restaurant, in the Mohegan Sun Casino complex in Uncasville, CT, the Ricotta Gnocchi is topped with crushed tomatoes, fresh herbs, brown butter and a dollop of Ricotta cheese. Finally, there's the Crazy Mushroom Pappardelle, a signature dish served at Olives restaurant, in the Bellagio Las Vegas, which is a mix of King Trumpet, Shitake, Oyster and Crimini Mushrooms, English peas and Piquillo peppers tossed with Parmesan cream and topped with lemony pea shoots.

"Mushrooms fit well in meatless dishes, because they are hearty enough to carry the flavor for the center of the plate," says Katie Preis, marketing manager for The Mushroom Council, in San Jose, CA.

A preference by many Millennials for meatless fare means colleges and universities are catering more now to this segment.

"Some of our college and university accounts are as high as 25 percent vegetarian,

"There's an expectation foodservice will be on trend and serve a wide variety of great-tasting dishes, including those that are meatless."

—Cheryl Garner, University of California

others are a minimal group. Either way, they are all entitled to the same level and quality of foodservice," says Kevin Blaney, regional executive chef for the Northeast region of the Charlotte, NC-headquartered Compass Group North America, in the Chartwell Higher Education Division.

Examples of vegan and vegetarian dishes Blaney puts on the menu at campus dining facilities includes Barley and Mushroom Risotto; Quinoa Pancakes with tomato chutney; Eggplant and Provolone Panini; Portabella Mushroom Ravioli with grilled vegetables and an Asian Barley; Wheat Berry and Shiitake Mushroom Burrito.

On the West Coast, Garner at the University of California, Riverside, serves more than

3.5 million meals per year in the campus' residential restaurants and nearly 1 million meals annually at retail and C-store formats to an ethnically diverse student population. Vegetarian and vegan purchases average 20 to 27 percent, depending on dining venue. Selections include everything from Thai Curry, Pesto Pasta and Vegetable-topped Pizza at sit-down eateries to Hummus sandwiches, Vegetarian Sushi, or a mix-and-match meal of three salads such as Curried Cauliflower, Roasted Beet Salad and Brussels Sprouts with Nuts, for example, at retail and C-store settings.

"Students today won't put up with poor dining. There's an expectation foodservice will be on trend and serve a wide variety of great-tasting dishes, including those that are meatless," says Garner.

The Mushroom Council worked with many institutions of higher education across the country to create meatless meals featuring mushrooms. Examples include a Tandoori Portabella Burger and Mushroom and Spinach Bolognese Penne at the University of North Texas, a Mushroom and Chickpea Wrap at the University of Massachusetts, and a Crimini Pot Pie at the University of Southern California.

Vegetarian menu selections are even showing up at one of the bastions of meat-filled dining: sports stadiums. Back in 2009, Aramark, based in Philadelphia, PA, earned a top supplier spot on PETA's "Most-Vegetarian-Friendly NFL Stadiums" by serving veggie dogs, veggie burgers and veggie burritos at stadiums in Philadelphia, Kansas City and Oakland.

"The recognition we received for our vegetarian friendly menus and other culinary innovation is symbolic of our ongoing commitment to working closely with our customers and clients to create great-tasting menus that enhance the dining experience," says David Freireich, director of corporate communications.

pb

THE FLAVOR FACTOR IS KEY

"With the right culinary techniques, herbs and spices, vegetarian dishes can be rich and satisfying enough to also attract meat eaters," says Annika Stensson, senior manager of research communications for the National Restaurant Association (NRA).

The increasingly multi-cultural nature of the nation means naturally meatless dishes are moving center stage.

"We're also seeing a fair amount of ethnic influences in meatless items, especially from vegetable-rich cuisines like Indian and Asian, which is also an attractive proposition for today's adventurous diners," says Stensson.

More mainstream, it is pizza, Mexican entrees, pastas and sandwiches that are the most frequently menued vegetarian dishes, according to the November 2014-compiled *Vegetarian MenuTrends Report* by Datassential Research in Chicago, IL.

pb

The Nostalgic Nut



(TOP TO BOTTOM) PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL PEANUT BOARD

Sports games, holidays, and other gatherings are key to sales.

BY KRISTEN POPE

Any occasion for gathering people together, from the holidays to major sporting events, is a great time for peanut promotions. “We learned in our research that people don’t eat in-shell peanuts alone,” says Eric Boonshaft, brand marketing director, Hampton Farms, Severn, NC. “It’s all about sharing. Go to a football or baseball game and watch how the in-shell peanuts are passed from one person to the next.”

Early in the year, sports are a key part of peanut promotion. “Any time people are getting together, peanuts deserve promotion,” says Boonshaft. “We can start in January with Bowl games, NFL Playoffs, and the Super Bowl. You can then move to college basketball and March Madness. From there we go to spring training for baseball and opening day in early April.”

Warm weather holidays and activities also promote peanut sales, from the Fourth of July to road trips and camping. “Peanuts are portable and shelf-stable,” says Ryan Lepicier,

senior vice president of marketing and communications, National Peanut Board, Atlanta, GA. “They’re fun to eat. It’s perfect for camping, a day at the beach, a road-trip vacation, or a campfire where you can throw the shells in the campfire. They’re also an affordable snack.”

Harvest-themed opportunities are a ready promotion tactic as well — since the peanut harvest occurs between late August and early November. This is particularly applicable in the states with significant peanut production.

The Virginia/Carolina region has a display contest where grocery store teams create themed displays, and the winning team receives a prize, according to Lepicier.

Even the traditionally slower times for peanut sales offer opportunities for marketing efforts. March is National Peanut Month. Keeping a ready supply on hand is key to successful promotions. “Having product available year-round is essential,” says Maria Brous, media and community relations director, Publix, Lakeland, FL.



When you develop a display around a particular event or holiday, cross-merchandising with other products will significantly impact the sales of that product.”

—Terry Williams, Sachs Peanuts

Memories are also a key component in advertising the all-American snack. “It’s the perfect snack to go with holiday cheer,” says Lepicier. “People have an emotional connection to eating peanuts at the ballpark with Dad. And the holidays are a perfect time to tap into fond memories of food attached to positive events and good times.”

EYE-CATCHING DISPLAYS KEY TO INCREASING SALES

While peanuts have year-round, all-ages appeal, keeping them in consumers’ line of sight is one of the best way to boost sales. Eye-catching displays and cross-merchandising are two tactics to increase sales. “When you develop a display around a particular event or holiday, cross-merchandising with other products will significantly impact the sales of that product,” says Terry Williams, national sales manager, Sachs Peanuts, Clarkton, NC.

Boonshaft also emphasizes the importance of good merchandising efforts and cross-promotion, saying the key is, “Display! display! display! Partnerships with soft drinks or beer that include secondary locations in-store proved to be very successful. We often use themed, knockout display cases for special events such as holidays, tailgate season, or Major League Baseball’s opening day.”

Providing enough peanuts in the produce department is important, as well as providing a variety of peanut options. “If you look at syndicated data for the grocery channel, peanuts account for about 25 percent of all nut category dollar sales, but are just over 50 percent of nut volume sales,” says Boonshaft. “And that is before you consider that peanuts are included in most mixed nuts and trail mixes.” With this data in mind, he recommends stocking peanuts in 33 to 40 percent of the nut section.

Publix also carries a variety of year-round

peanut options. “We carry packaged private label nuts in our produce department year-round,” says Brous. “In addition, during the fall and winter holidays, we offer an extended variety of bulk packaged nuts.”

Williams likes to see at least 4 to 6 feet of shelf space devoted to peanuts. “Peanuts are an impulse item. The more space you devote to an impulse item, the more sales,” he says. He notes recent years have seen a rise in pre-packaged peanut products due to allergy concerns. He estimates 70 percent of peanuts sold by retailers

are sold through pre-packaged products. “I think stores are being cautious to protect the consumer, and we agree with that philosophy,” says Williams.

Lepicier and Williams agree that visibility is key. “They are an impulse item, so they have to be very visible,” says Williams. “Anywhere with high traffic is a good place. End caps work well. If they’re on the bottom shelf, they’re out of sight, out of mind.”

Boonshaft notes that the produce department is an ideal location. “The great thing

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“We see an opportunity for growth in flavored peanuts, similar to what we have seen in other nut categories.”

—Eric Boonshaft, Hampton Farms



PEANUT PRICING 101

Due to allergen concerns, many produce departments have moved away from bulk peanuts and supply packaged nuts. This has been a boom for retailers, who can sell more product this way — increasing both pounds and dollars sold. According to Boonshaft, consumers would often fill a self-serve bag with 10 to 12 ounces of peanuts. However, those same consumers will readily snap up a 1-pound bag at the same per-pound price point. Boonshaft says that larger bags sell even better, and one key product is a 2-pound bag at \$3.99. “We moved a consumer from a bulk 12-ounce purchase at \$1.50 into a 2-pound packaged purchase for \$4, while reducing the shrink to zero for the retailer.”

And when it comes to per-pound price, Boonshaft says, “We let the market determine pricing, but anywhere under \$3 per pound is a great value for the consumer. When compared with other nuts, typically selling for above \$5 or \$6-pound, the peanut is the unquestioned value winner.”

Williams cites similar prices, encouraging retailers to sell multiple packages on special, with five small packages for \$5 or 10 for \$10. For medium-sized packages of 1.5- to 2-pounds, he suggests \$2.49 to \$2.99 as a good price point, and below \$8 for a 5-pound bag.

The National Peanut Board conducts brand studies and found that between 2001 and 2012, daily peanut consumption doubled. “Our research shows peanuts are America’s No. 1 preferred nut,” says Lepicier.

Boonshaft also emphasizes the role of peanuts in meat-free diets. “Peanuts can also play an important role in vegan diets,” says Boonshaft. “Consumers turning to vegetarian diets need to replace the proteins in meats. These consumers are extensively shopping in the produce departments. Peanuts have more protein per serving than any other nut, so they play an important role in these diets.” **pb**

about being in Produce is that it is often the first department a shopper sees when entering a store,” says Boonshaft.

Produce also offers numerous cross-merchandising options. “Our bulk packaged offerings may be placed alongside the traditional items needed to make stuffing or by the sweet potatoes and salad mixes,” says Brous.

In traditional peanut-growing locations, green peanuts are a hot item during harvest time, when people purchase them for boiling. The region where these fresh peanuts are available, in the southern U.S., typically includes 10 states. However, due to the harvest season, it’s only a limited-time opportunity. “It’s a very small window,” says Lepicier. “People look for them during that time of the year.”

A HEALTHY, ALL-AGES SNACK

With more than 30 vitamins and minerals, the “Perfectly Powerful Peanut” has health benefits that resonate with consumers, according to Lepicier. These health benefits are a cornerstone of the National Peanut Board’s marketing strategy. “Peanuts have more protein than any other nut,” says Lepicier. “They’re heart-healthy and taste great. Peanuts are part of a well-balanced diet and a good source of nutrients.”

Health-conscious consumers and snackers are a key demographic, as many enjoy the convenience factor and health appeal. “We know that fat in nuts is great for us and contributes to heart health and weight management,” says Lepicier. “People have the message that peanuts and nuts are a nutritious food they should be eating.”

All ages enjoy peanuts, according to Boonshaft. “Given that peanuts account for more than 50 percent of grocery nut volume in the U.S., we know they are enjoyed by all age groups.” He also notes younger consumers enjoy the new flavors they are producing, including Cajun Hot Nuts and Hickory Smoked in-shell flavors in 10-ounce bags. “We see an opportunity for growth in flavored peanuts, similar to what we have seen in other nut categories,” says Boonshaft. “Both flavors bring new consumers to the category when merchandised and promoted. Flavors allow us to reach more consumers and some of the demographics that are currently growing.”

Seniors are another, somewhat unexpected, target market for in-shell peanut sales. “We tend to think a lot of elderly people buy in-the-shell peanuts to keep their hands active,” says Williams.

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Is Retail Pricing Dampening Produce Consumption?

BY DON HARRIS

As 2015 commences, we all face a year filled with many challenges and the need for change in many parts of the industry. Management will be focusing on challenges, such as increasing sales and profits, sustainability, carbon footprint, “green” technologies, and development of local resources.

While many similar challenges will face the produce industry, retailers have an opportunity to confront the biggest challenge and make substantial impact by providing the solution and enforcing the changes needed to continue successful produce operations. Unfortunately, this major challenge is not “on the radar” of many in upper management. It is not a priority for them, as they do not deem it as a challenge to their operation. In other words, “They just don’t get it!”

This major challenge is the rapidly increasing retail price of produce commodities. Ever since upper management discovered that produce could be used to quickly add extra dollars to the bottom-line simply by raising prices, this practice is used by a large number of retailers throughout the industry.

Basically, management deems the majority of produce items to be price non-sensitive and thereby can be raised without any or little affect on the volume sold. This allows for quick increases of dollar sales to meet financial targets necessary to keep Wall Street happy. Because this is a pricing issue, the supplier side of the industry doesn’t discuss it, because retailers believe it is none of “their” business.

Anyone who challenges this practice risks the wrath of the retailer. Yet this is one of the biggest reasons for the fact that prices are rising far faster than the volume would indicate. The figures for 2014 — as far as retail cost-per-pound and volume increases — reinforce this fact. If allowed to continue unabated, the continued growth of the produce sector will be threatened.

To illustrate this fact, let’s examine the key factors from 2014. In terms of retail price-per-pound (according to research from the Chicago, IL-based IRI Fresh Look Marketing Group), the average increase for both fruit and vegetables is up 4.5 percent. Compare this with a national inflation rate of approximately 1.5 percent and a food-at-home inflation rate of 2.8 percent, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). While this shows that produce prices are definitely increasing at a faster rate than the national inflation rate, what is really happening to produce is illustrated by the contrasting rate of increase in volume sold. Fruit and vegetable volume sold increased by only .52 percent over the same period, according to IRI.

While some of this difference may be explained by the markets being overall higher than the previous year, as we see in the food-at-

home inflation rate, the increase of 4.5 percent in produce is substantially higher than the food-at-home rate by 1.7 percent. This trend has been going on for the past three years at approximately the same rate, with prices-per-pound for fruits and vegetables increasing at about a 4 percent rate. Volume increases have been 1 percent or less, and overall inflation remained fairly constant at from 1.2 percent to 1.5 percent. All in all, this is a very disturbing trend and allowed to continue will thwart efforts by the industry to drive consumption.

Any discussion of this situation is bound to be highly controversial. But to address this challenge to the industry, a constructive dialogue must be undertaken with all sides of the industry and retailers taking the helm. The solution seems to be a simple one and could be accomplished by retailers taking action to institute realistic pricing strategies that would encourage consumers to purchase more produce. These pricing strategies would reflect changing markets as well as seasonal promotions.

Utilizing a more rational pricing policy that reflects the retailers’ need for profit to offset costs and enhancing the natural affordability of produce would go a long way to stimulating additional sales dollars and volume sold. Without such action, the current trend would continue to lead ultimately to diminishing returns for everyone involved as well as the stagnation of growth in produce consumption.

While this will not be an easy or popular thing to do, certain retailers have already recognized this situation and instituted pricing policies that allow for healthy growth in sales while selling proportionately more product. Once again, this is not rocket science but simply supply and demand. A realistic pricing strategy at retail will have the unique impact of affecting both sides of the equation. By selling more volume at attractive, realistic price, we can keep supply in balance and encourage increasing consumer demand, which would drive sales. We cannot afford to delay action in this area. We reached the point in the industry where we must look seriously at this challenge and, at the least, engage in a serious, industry-wide dialogue to address the situation and reverse the present trends.

Don Harris is a 40-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from “field-to-fork” in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com

A realistic pricing strategy at retail will have the unique impact of affecting both sides of the equation.



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International Retailing

BY JOHN GILES, DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR, PROMAR INTERNATIONAL

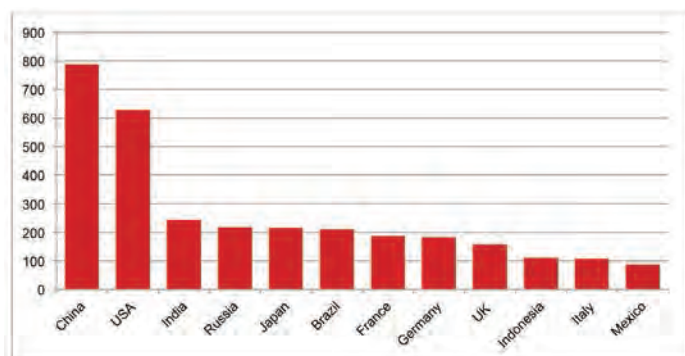
In the past 30 years, the development of major international retailers revolutionised the fresh produce supply chain. The process doesn't look anywhere near set to finish in the immediate future, in either the more mature markets of Europe, North America and Japan, let alone in the emerging markets of Asia, Africa, Latin America or Russia.

In Europe, major supermarkets often account for nearly 70 percent of the overall market. In some markets, such as Australia and Scandinavia, the figure can be even higher. In contrast, in emerging markets (India being an example), modern Western-style supermarkets account for less than 5 percent of fresh produce distribution. In China, it is around 35 percent.

Figure 1 sets out the scale of the Top 12 grocery markets around the world, and the basic attraction of the emerging markets is clear to see. China, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico are all there. Only four of the Top 12, in contrast, are from the EU.

***Figure 1 – Leading Global Grocery Retail Markets (US\$ billion)**

For many of the established leading retail groups, development of



international business will be key for their future development, as they often approach reaching saturation point in their own domestic market. The share of business accounted for international business varies from chain to chain, with some European retail chains, such as Carrefour, Auchan and Metro, already achieving more sales outside their home markets than in them.

For others, such as Wal-Mart, Tesco, Costco, Coles and Kroger, the domestic market still remains strategically important, but mid- to long-term growth can only really come from expansion in international arenas — this factor has sometimes proved easier said than done.

Some of the most ambitious growth plans come from the German-based discounters with a business model that appears to have widespread appeal. Longterm, Aldi stated its intention to continue expansion not only in new EU markets (such as the U.K.) but also in the U.S., as well as other attractive markets (such as China, Russia and New Zealand). Lidl is sizing up opportunities in markets such as

the U.S., Turkey and Russia. Aldi already operates in almost 20 countries — most of which are based in the EU. Germany is still the core market for Aldi, however, and accounts for about 50 percent of its turnover. Lidl is in a similar situation. The company operates mainly in the EU and is especially strong in Eastern Europe, but Germany still accounts for just over 50 percent of overall sales.

What does this mean for suppliers of fresh produce to the international markets? In summary, they are:

- The key players in Asia and other emerging markets are increasingly often the same as in the EU and North America. They will use the experience gained over 40 years in domestic markets to accelerate growth in new regions of the world. They are expanding rapidly, even if from a relatively small base, and this offers new market opportunities for suppliers.
- They will want the same standard of produce, and these new markets should not be regarded as outlets for sub-standard produce. They will expect the same standards of post-harvest protocols and post-harvest technology.
- European retailers will be looking for security of supply and comparative advantage in terms of production from their growers. There will need to be new levels of joint venture development and alliances for processing and distribution to meet the needs of a globalised customer base.
- Suppliers will need to demonstrate high levels of environmental awareness and good all-round Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) credentials, as well as awareness of issues — such as mid- to long-term climate change and its impact on the supply chain.
- A deep understanding of the changing nature of both customer and consumer demand is essential to go alongside more traditional excellent technical and supply chain skills.

The ultimate challenge for suppliers, regardless of source, over the next five to 10 years will be to adopt a well defined portfolio approach to international markets and customers — some of which are bound to be more attractive than others. This should be based on the maxim of: how much we want these markets; how much they really want us; and adopting a strategy of maintain, build, invest or treat as opportunistic only. Working out where international retail markets — albeit in North America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America or Europe — fit into the global export effort might be the greatest challenge of all for the international fruit supply chain in the coming years.

*John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, a leading value chain consulting company and a subsidiary of Genus plc. He can be contacted at the following email address: john.giles@genusplc.com. *Graph is from Promar, based on desk research, company information, IGD.*

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The Chia Company	32	212-226-7512	www.thechiaco.com.au
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December, 1926
The Ladies' HOME JOURNAL

Seeded raisins—and not sticky?
Sun-Maid Puffed
pour out of the package

It is a surprise—the first sight of these new seeded raisins. Many a woman has confessed she could hardly believe her eyes.

You know how the old kind came—all squeezed together in a mass. You had to pull them apart one by one—and you did it only because certain recipes demanded the flavor

of seeded raisins. Yet these are loose! You can pour them right into the measuring cup! A striking improvement.

But no more important than this: You get all the flavor and richness of the Muscat grape in these Sun-Maid Puffed seeded raisins. None of the process

is lost in the exclusive Sun-Maid method of removing the seeds.

Ask your grocer for Sun-Maid Puffed. He has them again—just in time for your holiday cooking.

And the new Sun-Maid Nectars. Surely you will want them. Seedless raisins like no others you have ever seen; fresh, fragrant and plump—as if the nectar in the ripened grapes had suddenly solid!

SUN-MAID
NECTARS [Seedless Raisins] in the red carton
PUFFED [Seeded Raisins] in the blue carton

MARKETING MAIDEN

The Roaring Twenties (also known as Age of Intolerance or the Age of Wonderful Nonsense) evoked a provocative and transformative era in American history. It was a time when Americans faced the effects of Prohibition, experienced the early version of talkies in movie theaters, personified gangsters as celebrities, and the produce industry took advantage of The Capper-Volstead Act (which permitted farmers to form cooperatives for buying and selling goods without being prosecuted for anti-trust violations).

Similar to today's Millennial generation and the uberification (the vertical integration of the customer experience within a specific industry) of consumerism, the 1920s initiated a cultural shift. The marketing and advertising around this decade showcased creativity and artistic expression through a narrative — especially on a single, printed page.

In the 1920s, iconic American painter, Norman Rockwell created a series of ads for Sun-Maid that ran in *Ladies Home Journal*. The collection illustrated Sun-Maid's integral place in the traditional American household. These illustrations appeared in other leading magazines of the time — including the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*. As the greatest commercial illustrator of his time, Rockwell's illustration technique was the inspiration behind bringing the Sun-Maid girl to life in 2006.

The scene for this ad was entitled, "Fruit of the Vine." It was painted in 1926 and features Sun-Maid's Blue Muscat raisin box. According to the company's *Sun-Maid Raisins & Dried Fruits Our 100th Anniversary Book*, in a 1967 letter sent from Norman Rockwell to Sun-Maid, Rockwell explained that the elderly woman in the painting was the mother of his first wife. (Rockwell often

used family members and people from his community as subjects in his work.)

"Sun-Maid continues to use print advertising today as a way to reach our core audience of moms who are concerned about the health, nutrition and well-being of their families," says Jackie Grazier, marketing director at Kingsburg, CA-based Sun-Maid.

"Given the fact that ads prior to the Rockwell series also targeted women and baking, I would say Sun-Maid has always identified this as a primary audience for our product," she adds.

Grazier says the most common grape used today to make raisins is the Thompson Seedless grape. "There are a few other varieties used today also, such as Fiesta, DOVine and Selma Pete, which are all seedless."

According to Tim Parker, Sun-Maid's director of continuous improvement, early raisins (such as the kind promoted in the Rockwell ad) were made from Muscat grapes, which had seeds. "The process of removing the seeds left the skin broken exposing the natural sugars contained in the raisins, which left the Muscats sticky," explains Parker in reference to the ad's messaging. "Sun-Maid invented a proprietary process of puffing the Muscat raisins after removing seeds. By 'seeding and puffing,' the Muscat raisins were less sticky and poured right out of the box."

Now Sun-Maid uses seedless grapes to make its raisins. "When they were first introduced, the Thompsons were referred to as 'nectars,' because these grapes were simply dried in the sun and needed no further processing to remove the seeds — thereby keeping more of their natural flavor," says Parker. "As opposed to the Muscats, which were heated and cooled during the seeding process and had more of a caramelized flavor."

pb

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