

**inside...** PUNDIT LOOKS AT WAL-MART'S PROCUREMENT PATTERNS • GRILLING WITH PRODUCE • MICHIGAN PRODUCE TRACEABILITY • NEW YORK VEGETABLES • SUSTAINABILITY IN SAN JOAQUIN • CORN • GARLIC DATES AND FIGS • FLORAL COLD CHAIN MANAGEMENT • INTELLECTUAL EATING

**producebusiness**  
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Foodservice Portfolio**  
starts on page 35

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# producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

## Restaurant Produce Strategies 9 Fresh Ideas For Beating The Recession

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New York Regional  
Market Profile 2009

*Market  
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## THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

**Chris Bass**  
Senior Buyer  
Wild Rocket Foods  
Riverside, CA

Chris Bass has relied on PRODUCE BUSINESS for twelve years. He has come to depend on its "fresh perspective about what's going on in the industry. Plus, it's a different perspective than the *Perishable Pundit*. I enjoy them both," says the senior buyer at Wild Rocket Foods, a full-line processor of value-added fruits and vegetable. Among the company's clients is Fresh & Easy, for whom Wild Rocket is the exclusive processor.

After more than 30 years in the produce industry, Bass has done it all — from box boy to produce manager to district manager to quality control manager — and loved every minute of it. "I've met so many wonderful people and traveled to amazing places. You see how valuable produce is and that you are feeding the whole world!"

When he's not at work at Wild Rocket's Riverside, CA office, Bass can be found at his wife's doggie day care. "She's located in an historic building in Upland, so I like to help her modernize the building. Or I'll help train employees, install POS, basically whatever needs to get done."



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

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- 1) What is the phone number for the fresh-cut sales team at Boskovich Farms Inc.? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is Driscoll's slogan? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Name two of the featured speakers at the upcoming Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Where in the Hunts Point Market is Jerry Porricelli Produce located? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) In what year did Spice World begin its business? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Which three companies partner with Del Monte for its Fitness Center promotion? \_\_\_\_\_

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\*\* After home use, Artisan Lettuce consumers most often say they like the flavor, freshness and variety.





# The Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009

Legislation that has been years in the making stands poised to pass in the very near future as Congress nears its recess and summer district work period in August. With a widening spotlight on the nation's food safety system, the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 (H.R. 2749) presents a comprehensive and sweeping reform of the food safety system in America.

With a discussion draft released in late May by House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair, Henry Waxman (D-CA), the House got the ball rolling with a new twist on legislation that is, according to bill co-sponsor, John Dingell (D-MI), "nearly old enough to vote."

Indeed, after close to two decades of debate over legislation on food safety, passage of the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 appears on a fast track. With Democrats in the majority in both the House and Senate, and a friendly President in the White House, the cards are stacked for food safety legislation to pass this year.

In response to Rep. Waxman's discussion draft, parts of which the produce industry supported — despite the fact it contained many provisions that would pose more than a few headaches — representatives of a wide range of the food industry were called to testify on the pros and cons of the bill. This invitation and openness to industry feedback was the perfect opportunity to ensure any reform of the nation's food safety laws takes into consideration the needs and intricacies of the various facets of the industry.

United Fresh's testimony on the legislation was based on three principles that must guide all movement on food safety matters. These precepts maintain any food safety policy must allow for a commodity-specific and science-based approach; must be consistent and applicable to the identified commodity or commodity sector, regardless of country of origin; and must be federally

**The industry hopes to continue to work with our allies in Congress as this bill moves through the House, and again when the Senate takes up its own version of the legislation.**

mandated with sufficient federal oversight of compliance to guarantee consumer credibility.

In late June, the official version of the bill passed through the House Energy and Commerce Committee, ready for introduction on the House floor. While the legislation is not perfect, there has been significant improvement from the discussion draft. This improvement reflects weeks of close collaboration between the produce industry and Committee members on both sides of the aisle, including a bolstering of the bill's commodity-specific approach to produce and the elimination of its prescriptive dictates on traceability that could have blocked progress on the Produce Traceability Initiative.

Additional improvements to the bill's language that have come to fruition because of this ongoing collaboration include the exemption of produce from any duplicative requirements for country of origin labeling, the enhancement of the ability of fresh processors to develop individual Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) programs, as well as an assurance of equal treatment of imported and domestic produce and the capping of registration fees for

both facilities and importers.

While it has been a considerable task working through the fine print to improve the details of the bill, it is easy to see that good progress has been made. The industry hopes to continue to work with our allies in Congress as this bill moves through the House, and again when the Senate takes up its own version of the legislation.

The bill that is likely to pass the House soon isn't perfect, and there will always be ways to make it better. But it's also fair to say that, as with all new legislation, our industry must prepare for some changes. There will be changes in good agricultural practices for some specific commodities; changes in the way importers certify the safety of their products; changes in the way we trace and track all food products; and changes in the way the federal government interacts with all sectors of our industry.

In light of these changes, it is critically important to remember that the House and the Senate, the produce industry and indeed the entire food industry have the same common goal that guides our efforts: establishing a sound and scientific food safety policy that promotes and protects the health and well-being of the American public.

As highlighted in our testimony and underscored by consumers across the nation, fears and speculation over the safety of our food supply have no place in the fresh produce department. Every step we've taken has been designed to rebuild public confidence in our industry and our system of government health protection. The rebuilding of the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 into legislation that considers the unique needs and intricacies of the fresh produce industry is a vital step toward reestablishing consumer confidence in both our industry and in the United States government's ability to oversee and ensure a safe food supply for all its citizens.

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# Casualties Of Super-Sizing

Is the recession an opportunity for produce in foodservice? Some say yes. No less an eminence than Bryan Silbermann, president of the Produce Marketing Association, has pointed out that produce is generally less expensive than protein, so restaurants and other foodservice outlets can reduce costs and improve profits by reducing the use of proteins and increasing the use of produce.

He is correct, but the journey is long before we reach the destination. The problem is this: Though produce is typically less expensive than proteins, the starches are far less expensive than the produce. So in our protein-centric food culture, most restaurants use the protein as the draw. Then to fill up the plate, restaurants use copious amounts of mashed potatoes, rice or pasta. Produce gets relegated to an almost garnish-like role, and that pound of steak and mountain of mashed potatoes is served with two asparagus spears and a grape tomato.

We need a solution. It is, however, more than the produce industry that needs a solution. A new report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reports what we already knew: Obesity is a major problem and it is getting worse. In 1980 just 15 percent of U.S. adults were obese; now the number is in excess of 33 percent.

Especially troubling is that 13 percent of high school students are now obese with an additional 15.8 percent classified as overweight. Among low income children aged 2 to 5, 14.9 percent are obese and 12.4 percent of all U.S. children aged 2 to 5 are obese.

These numbers point to a future burdened with high medical costs and illness due to the diseases of obesity — especially diabetes. The cost, the lost human potential and the increase in unhappiness caused by all this is startling.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation's *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* message hasn't had much of a role in restaurants and its message is somewhat opaque. Although the produce industry is fortunate to have the wind at its back as public health recommendations urge increased produce consumption, this is mostly because of an assumption that the more produce people eat, the less they will eat of items that are not as healthful.

Yet this is not always what happens at foodservice venues. The report references seminal pieces by Lisa R. Young and Marion Nestle, both of NYU, titled *The Contribution of Expanding Portion Sizes to the US Obesity Epidemic* and *The National Heart, Lung and Blood*

*Institute Obesity Initiative*, to point out that serving sizes have been growing on a large range of items. Somehow a typical Chicken Caesar Salad today is a 3½-cup serving size, whereas 20 years ago the same item was typically a serving of 1½ cups and only 390 calories. A Chicken Stir Fry serving went from 2 cups and 435 calories to 4½ cups and 865 calories.

Restaurants need dramatically different ways of marketing food, and consumers need to think about food differently. The whole "Super Size" phenomenon is based on a classic business strategy: Offer more for less. The consumers pay a little more to lower the cost per ounce of the food they buy. Now this may not be a problem at retail where one can buy a club pack and eat the contents over many meals. At a restaurant, however, the large portion sizes are

mostly consumed right there, making it easy to overeat. Yet changing consumer attitudes so they see the additional food as a negative is very hard.

David Kessler, former FDA Commissioner, has a new book out, *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*, and he explains that fat, sugar and salt promote the release of dopamine, which is associated with pleasure in the brain. According to Kessler, we crave the dopamine so much that we are driven to eat even when we are not hungry. He wants to rewire the population by culturally changing our perception of fat, sugar and salt so they are seen as unappealing, much as there has been a big shift over time in the way cigarettes are perceived.

There are some efforts out there. Darden has a terrific little chain called Seasons 52, and no item has more than 475 calories, desserts are served in little shot glasses — although you can still fit 324 calories of pecan pie in a shot glass! It is, however, as they self-identify, "a casually sophisticated

grill and wine bar," and the price point means its constantly changing menu is not a very useful model for mainstream foodservice.

In the midst of a recession, the appeal of cheap starches and filling proteins can make it a difficult time to focus attention on the virtues of fruits and vegetables. Yet, far more than the prosperity of the produce industry depends on our changing both the way foodservice operators market and the way consumers think about different foods. We need to switch the dynamic so individuals don't want just "more" like some impoverished Oliver Twist. Instead, what they want is truly good and healthy and will help them live better lives. Recession or not, the problem is too urgent to allow for delay. **pb**

**Far more than the prosperity of the produce industry depends on our changing both the way foodservice operators market and the way consumers think about different foods.**



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# Traceability Is Fundamental

There's good reason why the *Escherichia coli* outbreak of 2006 lit a rocket under the produce industry's existing traceability efforts. It's the same reason why the *Salmonella saint-paul* outbreak in 2008, and the more recent nut recalls, placed a public spotlight on traceability regulation. Plain and simple, the complex reality of today's food safety environment demands better preparedness: for industry, for regulators and for consumers. In the absence of full traceability, the consumer's sense of security — and the food industry's economic sustainability — is undermined. We can't afford *not* to change.

This I believe: Our industry will look back five years from now and be very thankful we pushed so hard with the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) to develop a standardized, chain-wide approach to enhance traceability systems. I believe this as strongly as I felt that standardized PLU codes would change our merchandising and information management capabilities when we introduced them in 1991. We'll also be thankful that we engaged our government regulators to educate them, that we improved their speedy access to information and that we helped them narrow the scope of recalls. In the process, we'll also have partly changed our business culture — because greater transparency and information flow from field to fork is not just “nice to have,” it's “must-have.”

As shown by a recent study done by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG), greater attention to traceability is clearly needed across the food chain. The study finds only five of 40 foods could be traced back fully to their source; produce wasn't in those successful five. As an outbreak management tool, traceability must quickly and accurately identify the product, locate the source, determine the amount of implicated product, determine which shipments contained the implicated product and get notice to those who received the implicated product — *all within hours*. System-wide traceability — as well as the efficiencies, accountability and security that

go with it — requires a common language of information. Establishing this nomenclature means more than technology upgrades; it also requires changing practices surrounding food-borne illness investigations — industry practices and regulatory agency practices.

For example, 25 percent of those contacted as part of the OIG survey weren't aware the Bioterrorism Act of 2002 mandates that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires companies to provide records showing traceability one step forward and one step back. Consider this a wake-up call to confirm your company's compliance if FDA called you today; visit [http://www.pma.com/issues/food\\_safety.cfm](http://www.pma.com/issues/food_safety.cfm).

But our existing processes and systems are not enough, and that's why the PTI developed its Action Plan. We need *internal*, proprietary traceability to achieve *external*, chain-wide traceability via standardized electronic case coding and recordkeeping. Not only will chain-wide traceability achieve business efficiencies, but it will also help the FDA do a better, faster job of tracing product back in the event of large-scale foodborne illness. Efficient traceback will remove suspect product faster, preventing the risk of further illness and returning the marketplace to “normal” as soon as possible.

The PTI is a real-world solution developed by real-world companies. It's designed to maximize the effectiveness of current traceback procedures. It's based on global GS1 standards proven effective by other industries. We're in the process of showing government how it meets our needs and theirs —

because if we don't act, they will.

Yes, our action comes with costs at a time when budgets are squeezed. How much it will cost you to implement the PTI depends on the current capabilities and sophistication of your existing internal traceability systems. But unlike sudden loss of product, customers and credibility that mounts daily during a recall, costs related to PTI compliance can be planned and managed as implementation phased in over several years. Furthermore, the PTI team is working hard to minimize costs by providing the industry with as much information and guidance as possible to address the learning curve and shed light on Best Practices. Got an idea for a helpful tool? Let us know. The PTI Web site, [www.producetraceability.org](http://www.producetraceability.org), already offers advice and best practices for every milestone. We're listening to concerns and seeking solutions. Add your voice to the dialog by endorsing the PTI action plan.

Food safety outbreaks are a fact of life, especially in an age of rapid detection and information sharing. There *will* be a next time for a produce safety outbreak. If we lack chain-wide, electronic traceability, there will be more stories of company-crushing and consumer confidence-crashing recalls that carry a price far greater than compliance. Enhanced traceability is as fundamental as insurance to manage your other business risks. To end a future recall in hours rather than weeks is worth what? To safeguard the health of consumers and the bottom line of your business by investing now to improve produce traceability costs what? Priceless.

Improved traceability does both public health and produce industry a favor.



# Will Buyers Ante Up For PTI?

**T**here is little question that the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) lays out a path of significant progress for the produce industry. Not only does it present a model for traceability in food safety, but the realization of an industry-wide standard will create exceptional efficiencies for trade. This will help the industry provide consumers better product less expensively.

At the same time, it is easy to see why so many are objecting. Though the objections are ostensibly about the cost, that is not the whole story. Part of the problem is the nature of standard-setting. Standards provide many efficiencies, but only when they actually become standard. Until that time they are just another expense. This is especially true if one is ripping up an existing system that functions well enough and making an investment one didn't plan to make.

In other words, the PTI is most appealing to those setting up greenfield operations, where a company was going to install some kind of traceability solution anyway and now it has an industry standard to implement.

Yet the dirty little secret of the produce industry is that the major players actually don't mind spending a lot of money to gain access to key buyers. Requirements for things such as compliance with the PTI are expensive and technically challenging, and these obstacles, if required to sell to major buyers, constitute a barrier to entry. Most major players benefit when such barriers are erected as it reduces the competition.

Aye, but there's the rub! These investments pay for themselves quickly if they are really the price to pay for access to the customer. The fear among many reputable producers is that, when push comes to shove, buyers will waive the requirements in order to access cheaper product. They won't demand that local growers meet the standards or that foreign growers meet the standards, and if PTI-compliant producers are more pricey than other producers, the fear is that buyers will opt for the cheaper product.

**I**f PTI-compliant producers are more pricey than other producers, the fear is buyers will opt for the cheaper product.

Recently, as deadlines approach, some key buyers, expressing sympathy with the plight of producers, have offered extensions on the PTI as long as producers show sincere intent to conform to the initiative. These buyers may be sincerely trying to help but, if so, they are going about it all wrong.

If buyers want to encourage adoption of the PTI, they should give no extensions. What they should do is reward those companies that have invested to become PTI-compliant by giving them the business, if necessary paying a premium to the small number of producers that have made all of the required investments. All it will take is for the industry to see that those who invested in conforming to the Produce Traceability Initiative have preferential access to buyers at profitable prices and one will be astonished at how quickly major sectors of the industry become PTI-compliant.

Of course, this is only half the battle. Even if every member of every national trade association in North America conformed to every aspect of the PTI, it would leave dangerous holes in the industry traceability systems.

First, the PTI is a case-level initiative, but the product is sold on an item-basis to consumers. So for the consumer who gets sick with product that caused the illness in the refrigerator and an uncertain memory of where and when it was purchased, PTI just isn't much help.

Second, the scanning is all a production and distribution center matter. PTI doesn't call for any efforts at store or restaurant level. Yet this is an important link in the chain.

Third, those representing the "soft underbelly" of the produce industry — small producers, wholesalers, repackers, chop shops, purveyors... those not members of PMA or other associations — are highly unlikely to invest in traceability systems of any type. Of course, a food safety outbreak among this sector will not be distinguished by FDA, by the media or by consumers from an outbreak in the mainstream of the industry.

Which brings us to one titillating difference we have with Bryan, who says we have to do this to hold off government regulation. As he puts it: "...if we don't act, they will."

Yet, we would say government action here is inevitable... and desirable. Traceability is a chain and, at the risk of being clichéd, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. This industry initiative needs the legal authority of government behind it. This is the only way of ensuring that big buyers don't compromise on standards to get cheaper product and that the informal sector of the trade doesn't put everyone else at risk.

The real industry challenge is to get government to adopt the Produce Traceability Initiative as its standard in the search for traceability. Only this will avoid still another round of duplicative spending.

### CASTLE ROCK VINEYARDS DELANO, CA

**Jason Fuller** joined the sales team. He brings more than nine years of produce experience and previously worked as a field inspector and buyer for Markon Inc. He has also sold lettuce and mixed vegetables for Freshkist and Tanimura & Antle. He will be responsible for domestic and international sales and logistics.



**Laurie Rinard** has returned to the sales department. She brings 25 years of experience in the stone fruit and table grape industries, particularly domestic trade. She previously worked for Safoco of America, King Fresh Produce and Gerawan Farming Inc. She will complete the sales team with Jason Fuller and Jim Llano.



### GOLDEN SUN MARKETING MINNETRISTA, MN

**Erin Bess** joins a new research division as marketing specialist. Her most recent experience includes serving as a research assistant in the Cal Poly Ag Business Department, where she participated in a variety of research projects. Her duties will include driving growth, conducting research activities and exploring industry issues.



### DULCINEA FARMS LLC LADERA RANCH, CA

**Bill Olvey** joined the sales and marketing team. He brings 22 years of sales experience in the produce industry. He will be responsible for spearheading the East Coast market development of the Dulcinea brand. He will also continue to invest in current and new marketing opportunities and explore premium product offerings.



## NEW PRODUCTS

### PREMIUM SLICED APPLES

Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, WA, introduces AppleSweets, a line of premium, sliced apples that allows consumers to purchase a healthful and affordable snack, while simultaneously boosting retail sales in the value-added section of the produce department. The 2-lb. bag is especially popular for summer parties and get-togethers.



Reader Service No. 300

### CULINARY TOUCH MEAL ENHANCERS

John B. Sanfilippo & Son Inc./Fisher Nuts, Elgin, IL, introduces Fisher Culinary Touch Meal Enhancers — distinct blends of nuts, fruits, savory ingredients and natural flavors that add texture and tang to vegetables, rice, couscous, pastas and other dishes. The blends are packaged in 5-lb. boxes and come in five flavors.



Reader Service No. 301

### HEALTHFUL SMOOTHIES

Conford Foods Inc., Brockton, MA, introduces Sunkist Smart Smoothies, a line of ready-to-drink smoothies in banana and strawberry with pomegranate extract. Each pouch contains 3 8-oz. servings with a suggested retail price of \$1.29/pouch. These pouches are available to retailers in 18-pack cases or 108-pack floor shippers.



Reader Service No. 302

### COLORFUL HARVEST BRINGS COLORED CAULIFLOWER TO MARKET

Colorful Harvest, Salinas, CA, has expanded its product line of colored cauliflower to include orange, purple, green and white variations of the vegetable. Each cauliflower is individually wrapped and packed in full or half-cartons in color combinations of the customers' preferences.

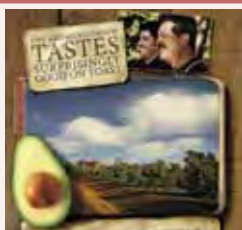


Reader Service No. 303

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CAC OFFERS TASTY AVOCADO RECIPES

California Avocado Commission, Irvine, CA, offers several free recipes collections, including Culinary Companion CD, The Magic of The California Avocado, The Foodservice Menu Guide and Too Hot Not To Be Cool brochures. All are available on the CAC Web site. Recipes include delicious snacks, salads, sandwiches and wraps.



Reader Service No. 304

### PBN PROVIDES SAVORY PEAR RECIPES

Pear Bureau Northwest, Portland, OR, offers a variety of versatile recipe ideas for incorporating USA Pears in every meal. For a free copy of *Fresh USA Pears... Inspirational Ideas for Menu Creations* as well as handling directions, visit PBN's Web site. Recipes include instructions on how to roast, bake and poach USA Pears.



Reader Service No. 305

### IPC SURVEY REVEALS AMERICA LOVES ITS SPUDS

The Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID, conducted a survey confirming that potatoes are "America's favorite vegetable." According to the survey, 26 percent of consumers said the potato is their favorite vegetable, while 19 percent noted corn and 17 chose broccoli. When it comes to cooking, consumers prefer mashed and baked potatoes.



Reader Service No. 306

### HAB PAIRS AVOCADOS WITH SALADS

The Hass Avocado Board, Irvine, CA, offers creative menu ideas in its free copy of *Foodservice Promotion Guide For Fresh Hass Avocados*, which is available by contacting the board by phone. Menu pairings include combining the mild flavor and creamy texture of a fresh avocado with crisp and crunchy salad greens.



Reader Service No. 307

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



**PRODUCE BUSINESS PRESENTS PUBLIX WITH SUSTAINABILITY AWARD**

PRODUCE BUSINESS Editor-In-Chief, Jim Prevora, and Publisher, Ken Whitacre, presented Publix Super Markets Inc., Lakeland, FL, with its 1st Annual Retail Sustainability Award for exceptional leadership in development of sustainable strategies. The presentation took place in front of the 1,002-store chain's Sustainability Team and CEO at its Lakeland office. Pictured from left to right are Tim Henning, district manager, Lakeland division; Dan Maloney, business development director, dairy and frozen food; Michael Hewitt, environmental services manager; Dave Duncan, vice president, facilities; Ed Crenshaw, CEO; Jim Prevora, editor-in-chief, PRODUCE BUSINESS; Kevin Lang, director of marketing and advertising; Ken Whitacre, publisher/editorial director, PRODUCE BUSINESS; Al Ebeling, manager of strategy and implementation; and Sam Middlebrook, business development director, meat and seafood.

Reader Service No. 308

**TABLE GRAPE SHIPPERS  
ROLL OUT TRACEABILITY**

YottaMark Inc., Redwood, CA, announced its HarvestMark solution was selected by leading table grape shippers, including Pandol Bros., Stevco, Sun World and Divine Flavor/Grupo Alta. In addition to item-level traceability, Divine Flavor/Grupo Alta and Sun World will also deploy the HarvestMark PTI solution to comply with the requirements of the Produce Traceability Initiative for case labeling.



Reader Service No. 309

**ONTARIO GREENHOUSE GROWERS  
AMALGAMATE OPERATIONS**

Twenty Ontario greenhouse growers have combined their resources to better serve the produce industry. The new company will operate as Clifford Produce, based in Ruthven, ON and continue to ship under the Paysanne label. It becomes one of the largest greenhouse produce marketing operations in North America, representing approximately 200 acres.



Reader Service No. 310

**GRANT J. HUNT  
CELEBRATES 75 YEARS**

Grant J. Hunt Company, Oakland, CA, celebrated 75 years serving the fruit industry as a domestic and international produce distributor. With offices in The Dalles, OR; Yakima, WA; and Kirkland, WA; Grant J. Hunt is a major cherry distributor and also has exclusive apple, Italian prune and plum deals out of the Pacific Northwest.



Reader Service No. 311

**UNCLE MATT'S ORGANIC  
CELEBRATES 10 YEARS**

Uncle Matt's Organic, Clermont, FL, celebrated its 10-year anniversary as a premiere brand of organic oranges. Uncle Matt's offers premium quality juices that boast a fresh-squeezed taste and gourmet quality without the additives, artificial flavors or preservatives. Uncle Matt's Fresh also offers premium quality, organic citrus produce.



Reader Service No. 312

**MANN PACKING ANNOUNCES ANNUAL  
SUMMER SLAW SPECTACULAR**

Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA, announced its Annual Summer Slaw Spectacular, which offers consumers \$1 in savings with the purchase of any two of its Mann's Broccoli Cole Slaw and Rainbow Salad products. The promotion runs through December 31. This past year, the promotion boasted a 17 percent redemption rate.



Reader Service No. 313

**TOP 10 PRODUCE LAUNCHES  
TRACEABLE PRODUCE BRAND**

Top 10 Produce LLC, Salinas, CA, announced a plan designed to help family farmers and small growers maximize the effectiveness of current and future trace-back technology, while ensuring and enhancing small growers' access to retail chains. The plan includes encouraging small growers to adopt GS1's item-specific traceability utilizing DataBar on loose produce items.



Reader Service No. 314

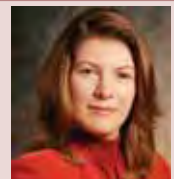
**CORRECTION:**

In the June issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, an announcement regarding Steve Koran's (pictured at right) hiring at Earthbound Farm ran with an incorrect picture. We regret the error.



**CORRECTION:**

In the June issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, the title of Paula Gonzalez, one of our 40 under Forty recipients, was incorrectly listed. Paula is the director of member relations for the Produce Marketing Association.



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

# Vendors Beware As Wal-Mart Alters Course On Procurement

From Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, May 27, 2009



**W**e've long tried to understand Wal-Mart, and recently the collapse of Ballantine Produce has led to a reassessment of the impact Wal-Mart may be having on the supply base. As Wal-Mart came to develop its produce procurement system, it was a brave band of brothers in the early years — vendors willing to experiment and improvise that made it happen. Now that system is in flux and many fear for the supply base — and for Wal-Mart. This old-timer who wrote to us accepts the critique of Wal-Mart, but also warns the supply base they can't change the customers; they can only change themselves:

*As usual, more good stuff in today's Pundit. Having been involved with Wal-Mart for many years, I thought I might offer a few additional comments:*

1. *The author of the letter you printed in your piece "Wal-Mart's Current Behavior," was exactly correct. Wal-Mart doesn't understand a couple of things: they don't understand how fragmented the produce industry is. They think buying tomatoes is the same thing as buying TV's from Visio or apparel from Starter. And it isn't.*

*The author correctly identified the hundreds, if not thousands, of support people in the supplier network that enable Wal-Mart to do what it does.*

*On more than one occasion, Wal-Mart has tried to hit up shippers for problems that resulted from Wal-Mart's own replenishment staff. Shippers, both smart and courageous, have told them to go pound sand, but doubtless there are many other suppliers, less courageous and often less knowledgeable about how retailers think, that are getting hammered for that type of thing and are afraid to fight back.*

2. *It is just tragic how Wal-Mart is approaching contracts. What is the point of a contract with a 50-case minimum? That's just ridiculous. Here was the way Bruce Peterson explained his plan when he set up Wal-Mart's produce contracting practices — a process you wrote about earlier:*

*Wal-Mart tried hard to contract about 80 percent of its projected weekly needs. When product got tight, Wal-Mart would raise the retail price to slow movement down to 80 percent. In other words, Wal-Mart would contract for enough product that through price adjustments it could reduce demand sufficiently enough that, barring acts of God and non-performance by a vendor, it never would have to pay above contract price.*

*If the market got sloppy, Wal-Mart still bought the 80 percent of anticipated volume it had contracted for, but would also buy in additional product at a reduced price, averaged the two costs, lowered the retail accordingly and blew the product out.*

*This was a win-win-win for everyone. The supplier still had a significant amount of his product being sold at the higher contract cost, Wal-Mart took huge volumes off the market, which kept it from totally tanking and Wal-Mart was able to increase sales, while the customer got a great in-store experience.*

**Wal-Mart is very large now, perhaps 25 percent of the retail food business. What would happen if suppliers just chose to stop selling Wal-mart?**

*To be truthful, this concept was not always easy to execute perfectly, especially as volume grew. The whole key to the plan was to keep inventories really tight. THAT'S WHY THE REPLENISHMENT NETWORK WAS SO IMPORTANT!*

*Wal-Mart was actually a supplier's dream. This giant retailer could "turn on a dime," as it had no ad lids! Wal-Mart also paid its bills and you could cash the check! And, crucially, Wal-Mart never negotiated a contract that was below the cost of production.*

3. *My last comment is in regard to something you wrote today. You pointed out there was a time "...when Wal-Mart CEOs believed, as they once did, that Wal-Mart needs its vendors more than the vendors need Wal-Mart."*

*It was Wal-Mart CEO, Lee Scott, who said that at a supplier summit. I heard him with my own ears, and, even if they don't believe it anymore in Bentonville, AR, it has never been truer.*

*Wal-Mart is very large now, perhaps 25 percent of the retail food business. What would happen if suppliers just chose to stop selling Wal-Mart? Suppose they did something really radical, say, for instance, like NOT SELLING PRODUCT BELOW COSTS!*

*In fact, there is a lesson here in dealing with all large retailers, such as Kroger, Safeway, SuperValu, Costco and many more. Many shippers have and have had in the past all kinds of deals, including rebate arrangement, with many retailers that were and are FOB-MINUS! That really makes very little sense.*

*You have been focused on Ballantine and Wal-Mart and, it is certainly true, as your letter from Mike Stuart of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association pointed out, the pressure from retailers is immense.*

*Still, pressure is not exactly the same as coercion and in that sense blaming Wal-Mart — or any other retailer — is just half the story. Take the case of Ballantine (and others). What kind of business model is it to sell product below cost? And here's the problem for the industry: all it takes is for one grower to do that, and here's what you'll hear from the buyer: "Why should I pay you 'X,' when I can buy the product for 'Y' (X-minus) from so and so?"*

*This starts a chain reaction. Frankly, many top executives, including those at Ballantine, took and continue to take the position, "I'm a fighter and will hang in as long as it takes." It's a "last man standing" mentality that you've written about before, which just kills the entire industry.*

*Now some grower/shippers have become large and diverse enough that they can "take the hit" for a season in order to gain market share. And then couple all of that with the "market mentality" of individual growers, and you see a train wreck. But again, go back to my original statement. What would happen if large, quality grower/shippers would just say no to Wal-Mart and retailers in general, enough is enough. You want quality, in volume, at reasonable costs, with account resources? Well, this is what it will cost!*



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Go back to the concept that Wal-Mart is 25 percent of the retail market. WHERE WILL THEY GET THE PRODUCT?

Bruce Peterson has been giving speeches to grower groups all over the country and he explains it clearly: The problem with today's grower/shippers is that they want to apply business models that were effective in the 70s, 80s, and 90s to today's business climate. And as someone pointed out in different circumstances, "someone moved the cheese."

I think it's fair and reasonable to point out what Wal-Mart and other large retailers are doing. But at some point, suppliers need to quit whining and begin to rethink their "go-to market" strategies. This includes what they grow, how much they grow, who their customers are, and what they are willing (and can afford) to do. If you listen to Bruce, though, he doesn't believe this will happen strategically or intellectually. Instead the winnowing out will be, in his term, DARWINIAN!

We appreciate the letter and suppose we can wish for a better outcome but, truth be told, when has there ever been a great commercial battle that has been decided on a basis that was otherwise than Darwinian? And it is always the one weak competitor that ruins the market for everyone else. We suspect that exhortations to producers to have a stiffer spine are not likely to prove productive.

Additionally, of course, there is a whole other issue, which is that many vendors have assumed the contracts would be used fairly and not manipulated so they become one-sided documents. Often the price in the contract is fine. It is the way Wal-Mart decides not to buy under the contract when markets are weak and demand every box they can demand when prices are strong that is the problem. Yet this is nothing new either.

When the Pundit was cutting his eyeteeth in the business, he was sent by the Pundit Poppa down to Puerto Rico to study under the tutelage of one of the Pundit uncles, Sydney Previor, who had long run the firm's Puerto Rican affairs.

We imported many items, potatoes prominent among them, and we would sell them to small wholesalers at the *Mercado*. One customer was a little bigger than the rest and he could order, in advance, a full trailer. In exchange for doing so, he wanted a discount. So each week we gave him an offer, he accepted and we had a contract for the week.

Yet, a youthful Pundit learned about contracting from this customer. For it turned out that when the ship would arrive, if the market price was below the contract price, our customer would speedily come to get his trailer of potatoes and, in fact, would always have a story as to why he needed a few pallets extra at the same price this week. Yet, when the contract price was above the market, he never came for his potatoes. We would call him and there was always a reason why he needed it cheaper this week.

In time, Uncle Sydney advised our customer that a contract with him was no contract at all and told him we would no longer give him a price in advance and he was welcome to buy at market from us every week. Little did we understand that the mighty Wal-Mart in its behavior would come to mirror our Puerto Rican potato customer.

Now, we could refuse to contract when the contract was a sham because our business did not depend on this one guy. When Bruce Peterson was running produce for Wal-Mart, he had a rule that Wal-Mart should never account for more than 25 percent of any produce supplier's business. He developed that rule because Wal-Mart had a policy that it

should never account for 30 percent of anyone's business. So the 25 percent kept vendors from getting too close to the limit.

It is fair to say that every single vendor Bruce Peterson ever did business with heard him give this message: "Never put yourself in a position that you can't walk away from Wal-Mart — or, for that matter, any other customer." This was advice both wise and sincere — and also mostly ignored, not because vendors were foolish, but because of the realities of the situation.

First, if you got typed as one of the companies "helping Wal-Mart," it wasn't as if Kroger and Safeway were going to beat down the doors to buy from you. Sure, if they needed you, they used you, but the good steady business went to their own teams — vendors who were strongly encouraged not to work with Wal-Mart.

Second, even giant produce companies are tiny compared to the big CPG companies, such as Procter & Gamble. Wal-Mart was growing so quickly that few had the capacity — both financially and managerially — to grow at four times the rate of Wal-Mart and thus keep their Wal-Mart business both growing at Wal-Mart's rate of expansion and keep the Wal-Mart business at a steady 25 percent of business. Most had their hands full keeping up with Wal-Mart.

Third, as Wal-Mart grew, it was grabbing market share, which left it very difficult to pick up market share from the non-Wal-Mart segment of the industry. Now, if Wal-Mart's market share is about 25 percent, it would be mathematically impossible for Wal-Mart's vendors to stay at 25 percent, unless every producer in

the country was a Wal-Mart vendor or unless the vendors have lots of unrelated businesses.

So most vendors decided to take their chances. This was and continues to be very dangerous. Fleming doesn't exist anymore because it took too much business from K-Mart. Yet for most produce companies it was a risk worth taking and, in fact, worked out very well for many.

It seems the bottom line is this: Wal-Mart is changing the way it approaches vendor relations. We have written about it for years. Many of the changes are objectionable to the vendor community, but it's a free country and Wal-Mart is allowed to make its own vendor policies.

So Wal-Mart vendors have to be mindful they now live in a much more adversarial world than they entered into years ago when first dealing with the behemoth. Bruce Peterson sincerely believed that a vibrant vendor community was in Wal-Mart's interest. His successors don't seem to think about that subject at all. So vendors need to beware and not rely on goodwill to make a contract work.

We would encourage Wal-Mart not to press too hard. As we have written before, Wal-Mart has interests in ensuring food safety, traceability, sustainability and other supply chain matters. If it squeezes the profit out of the system, there won't be the capital available to ensure Wal-Mart's interests in these matters are fulfilled.

We also suspect, as we mentioned here, that government will not just stand aside and let Wal-Mart capture 50 percent of the food retailing business in America. At some point, the government will move to split up Wal-Mart, and Wal-Mart will wish it had many passionate allies all across the country, people like farmers who could testify as to how important Wal-Mart is to the prosperity of the farm economy. But if all the farmers went broke or live on a shoestring — who will be there to speak on Wal-Mart's behalf?

## Wal-Mart vendors have to be mindful they now live in a much more adversarial world than they entered into years ago when first dealing with the behemoth.



# RESTAURANT PRODUCE STRATEGIES:

## 9 *Fresh Ideas* For Beating The Recession

*Consumers are eating in more and dining out less. Here's how you can grab them back — or at least steal them from your competitors.*



**T**here is no doubt that these are some of the toughest times restaurants have faced in decades. That's the bad news. Now, here's the good news: People are still enjoying dining out. According to the National Restaurant Association's 2009 Restaurant Industry Forecast, the restaurant industry is projected to **grow** in 2009, despite one of the most challenging economic environments in nearly three decades. However, in real terms — adjusting for inflation — the industry's sales are actually projected to decline 1 percent this year.

Jarrett Paschel, Ph.D., vice president of strategy and innovation at The Hartman Group, a provider of consumer insights and marketing strategy based in Bellevue, WA, discloses, "Based on what consumers tell us, things have become a whole lot more competitive in very short order. Simply put, folks are dining out less often and with less gusto. Business-expensed dinners also appear to be facing decreases in frequency and increases in spending caps."

Foodservice distributors are noticing the pinch, including Tim Ray, produce manager, marketing and sales support for the Denver Division of Shamrock Foods Co. Inc., a foodservice distributor based in Commerce City, CO. "Not only has our Denver division seen a decline in sales throughout all distribution, but it is also evident in the closing of many accounts — new and well-established," he says. "Walking into Cheesecake Factory at 6 p.m. on a Friday with 13 people with no reservation and being seated immediately tells the story."

"The restaurant industry is down," agrees Lloyd Ligier, vice president of business development at Pro\*Act LLC, a Monterey, CA, produce supply chain management company. "In a recession, the first two things that people eliminate are dining out and clothing purchases. It's no surprise to anyone in this industry. They not only cut back on eating out but they 'trade down.' That's why McDonald's is doing so well." Indeed, according to Escondido, CA-based foodser-

vice consultant Sloan Trends Inc., quick-service restaurants were the only segment of the foodservice industry to post traffic gains in 2008.

That's great news for businesses such as Subway Restaurants, based in Milford, CT. "We're actually getting upticks in customer counts," reveals Les Winograd, public relations coordinator for Subway. And while other types of restaurants around the country are closing, he says, "We've opened nearly 500 stores since January."

But there's good news for other segments, too. According to the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association (NRA), 45 percent of adults admits restaurants are an essential part of their lifestyle. One of three note they are not eating out as often as they wish and 35 percent of adults reveal that on a weekly basis, they are not purchasing takeout foods or having restaurant food delivered as often as they would like. Because restaurants have become such an integral part of consumers' way of life, they are likely to step up their restaurant spending and patronage as soon as their personal finances allow it.

"Operators who are successfully currently implementing productivity-increasing and cost-cutting measures are positioning themselves for future growth, as their profit margins could actually grow bigger than they were once the economy turns around," relates Annika Stensson, director of media relations for the NRA.

Paschel of The Hartman Group reveals, "Our data suggest that folks are eating out less, and that this behavior will likely continue until the economy recovers. In this, we would expect to encounter a new 'dining ecology,' where the weakest [restaurant] models and propositions are more quickly and more easily called out for removal. Put another way, a lot of sub-par business models and propositions that might have been able to limp along in mediocrity under the former economic climate will begin dropping like

## TIME TO EXPAND?

Opening doors instead of closing them during a recession may sound like a crazy idea, but Michael Muzyk, president of Baldor Specialty Foods Inc., located in the Bronx, NY, sees it happening every day. "We see people expanding who have been savvy," he explains. "One person's trouble is another person's gain. You can purchase a second restaurant at a good price, if you're financially sound."

One trend sees upscale establishments opening less-expensive bar areas or taverns within, next to or across the street from the main restaurant. The plates may be smaller, or the food more value-oriented — think lobster roll instead of lobster dinner. It's a business plan that appeals to diners "trading down" in this economy.

When buying additional space isn't an option, warm weather offers another opportunity — outdoor seating. With outdoor dining areas, "Their seating can almost double," notes Muzyk. **pb**

dinosaurs — or flies, as the case may be."

Want to survive this "ice age?" Nine ideas to consider:

### 1. Take Chances

Denny's Inc., based in Spartanburg, SC, took a gigantic risk when it ran a Super Bowl ad offering free Grand Slam breakfasts nationwide one day in February between 6 am and 2 pm. "We had no idea what to expect. Nobody had done it before," says John Dillon, vice president of marketing and product development. "In a time like this, you have to do something different. You have to be disruptive and take a risk. We took a huge risk and it paid off for us."

That day, Denny's restaurants around the country saw lines out the door. "We gave away two million free Grand Slams in an eight-hour period," Dillon reveals. "A lot of our restaurants made money that day. Breakfast is affordable from a cost perspective and people would buy drinks and other items. We also got at least \$50 million in free media and public relations."

More importantly, "It got people back in the restaurant and re-introduced them to Denny's," says Dillon. He points out that Denny's is a value-oriented brand that has been around for decades, but that many consumers have not been to one of the chain's restaurants in years. This was an opportunity to bring them back. "We did some exit polling and 95 percent of people polled said they would come back. Since then, our sales have been good — above expectations."

### 2. Find An Emotional Connection

Giving away free meals not only allowed Denny's to bring folks in, it also made people feel good about the brand. "We gave America a big hug by giving away a free full meal," says Dillon. "It was an incredible experience for us and millions of guests around the country." Even Denny's staff members felt good about what they were doing. Dillon believes many people who took advantage of the give-away could not afford to take their families out to restaurants most days, so this was a special treat for them.

Denny's has held other promotions since then, including its own version of a buy-one-get-one-free deal, offering a free Grand Slamwich for every one purchased. "That worked very well for us, as well," says Dillon. But nothing has seen the kind of numbers the free Grand Slams saw, which is why he says Denny's will probably do it again. "It was very, very successful. A lot of brands have done something similar since. In that way, we're a leader in the restaurant industry," says Dillon.

### 3. Offer Value

The NRA reports the top trend restaurateurs see for 2009 is an expanded focus on value, with 36 percent of quick service operators and 16 percent of casual-dining operators seeing the demand for value as the year's top trend in their segment.

Last spring, before anyone was uttering the word "recession," Subway Restaurants began offering select \$5 foot-long sub sandwiches. "It started off with a franchisee who wanted to find a way to increase business. So he tried it and things picked up for him. A few other franchisees tried it and had great



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUBWAY

Since the beginning of Subway's \$5-foot-long sandwich deal, produce usage has risen 40 percent, on average. In some markets, that number rose 80 percent.

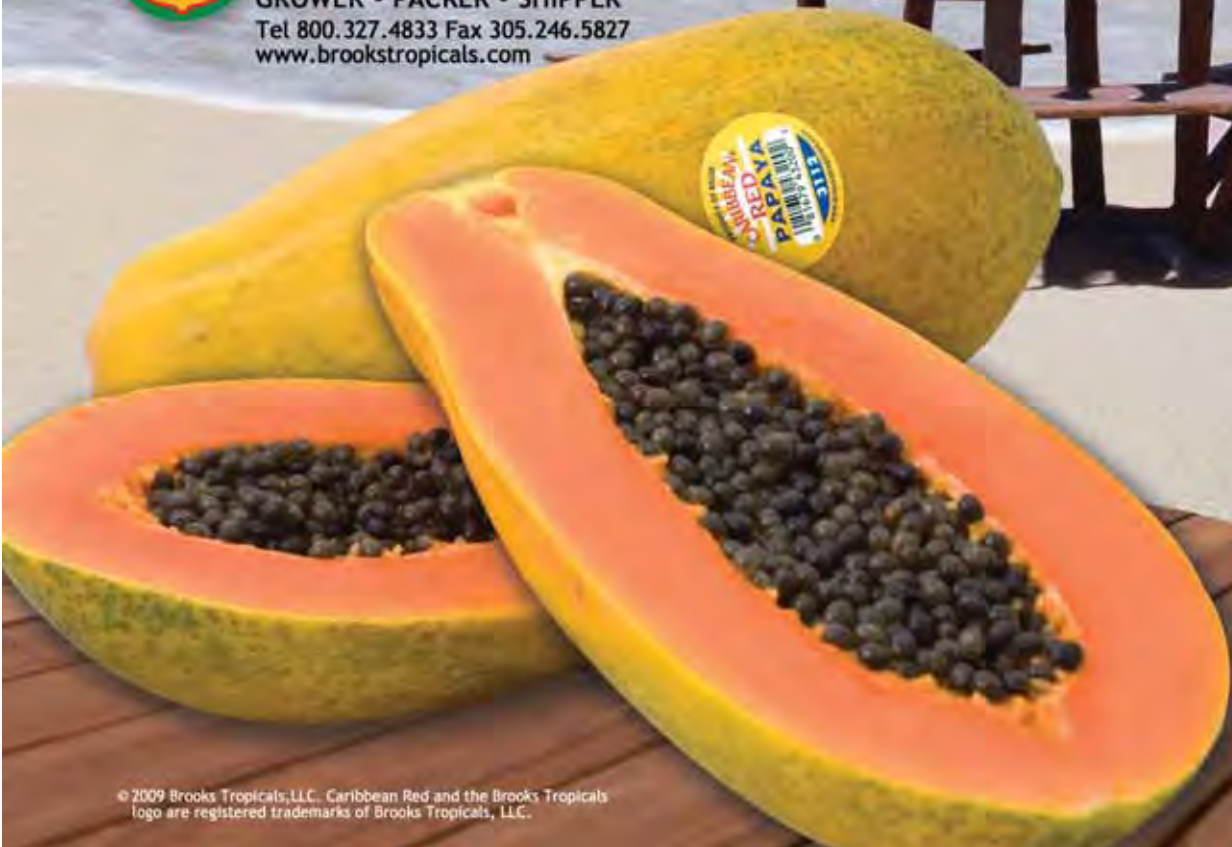
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success," explains Subway's Winograd. Soon every franchise began offering a selection of \$5 foot-longs. This spring, Subway also ran a promotion that offered \$1 sides to go with these sandwiches.

It seems value is especially important these days, but Subway believes its consumers have always cared about getting the most for their money. The timing of the \$5 foot-long promotion was pure coincidence, according to Winograd. "It's a price point that seems to resonate with consumers," he says. As a result, "2008 was one of the most successful years we've had." Now, \$5 foot-long subs are a permanent part of Subway's pricing structure, which means that the company can stay on top even when this recession is history.

Along with the \$5 foot-long promotion comes the need for additional produce. Tina Fitzgerald, director of produce for Miami, FL-based Independent Purchasing Cooperative, a franchisee-owned and operated purchasing cooperative for the owners of Subway restaurants, did much of the legwork in preparation for the launch of the \$5 foot-long promotion. When the first \$5 foot-long

**Cutting back on labor and other operating costs by cutting hours is often a better option than keeping staff busy chopping vegetables.**

campaign was launched last year, the company needed to determine how much additional produce would be needed. "We knew that our \$5 foot-long campaign was coming and had many meetings with our suppliers for months in advance," she explains. "We asked our vertically integrated suppliers to grow more product and our other suppliers to contract more in order to be sufficiently prepared."

As quick-serve restaurants lower their prices, casual restaurants are taking note. "Most of the casual dining restaurants have gone to what they call 'value meals,'" notes Ligier of Pro\*Act. Typically, these meals involve slightly smaller portions and better price points, he observes. For example, Chili's Grill & Bar, based in Dallas, TX, has recently begun offering "10 Under \$7," a selection of what the company refers to as "perfectly portioned crave-able values."

White tablecloth establishments are also offering deals, often in the form of *prix fixe* meals. "If you go out to eat, a lot of times you don't know if you're going to get nailed

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for \$150 or \$200," notes Marcus Agresta, director of sales and marketing at Piazza Produce, full-service produce distributors based in Indianapolis, IN. "Seeing that it's \$50 for a meal takes away some of that ambiguity."

Wine is often half of the bill at restaurants, and more patrons are taking note that the same bottles are much less expensive at the local liquor store — often marked up as much as 300 percent in restaurants. As such, BYOB nights have become popular.

Michael Muzyk, president of Bronx, NY-based Baldor Specialty Foods Inc., foodservice distributors for the northeastern United States, notes that some restaurants are offering deals on wine, such as 50 percent off of a bottle on Sundays. He has seen others change the types of wines they carry from those that typically go for \$80 a bottle to those that sell for \$40.

#### 4. Cut Costs

When it comes to survival, says Muzyk, "You ask, 'How do I grow my business?' and 'How do I save on my buy?'" Distributors such as Baldor work with customers to find the items that save money without sacrificing quality. For example, if an imported pepper is expensive, "We can introduce our clients to a domestic version of that item with the same flavor profile," says Muzyk. "When we

**“Do not fall victim to the temptation to fill chairs by cutting prices or offering ‘recessionary’ specials. Consumers do not decide to dine out to save money; they do so because they are looking for something better than what they could achieve at home.”**

— Jarrett Paschel, Ph.D.  
The Hartman Group

have those open dialogues we can help guide them through a minefield."

Just as restaurants look for ways to offer consumers value, distributors are doing the same for restaurants, such as when Baldor cuts costs by shipping appropriate items by rail when possible.

Distributors can also help restaurants cut labor costs. Fresh-cut produce, which has continued to increase in quality and availability over the past few years, is one option. Other restaurants are seeking to cut costs by doing it themselves. "I would say fresh-cut done in the back of the house is one of the biggest things I have seen. People are looking at yields and because they are slower, they have more time to do processing in-house," says Agresta of Piazza Produce.

But Muzyk points out even when employ-

ees have idle time, the yield from whole produce can be unpredictable, and restaurants are required to pay to have extra garbage hauled away. Cutting back on labor and other operating costs by cutting hours is often a better option than keeping staff busy chopping vegetables.

Although it may seem extreme, closing the doors for a few extra hours or on off days can often save a restaurant from closing for good, according to Agresta. "It's probably helping restaurants more than hurting them, with labor being such an expense," he says.

#### 5. Don't Sacrifice Quality

Consumers are not abandoning their interests in quality food experiences, according to Paschel of The Hartman Group.

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## USING STRAWBERRIES TO SELL PANCAKES

From April until June, IHOP Restaurants, based in Glendale, CA, promoted seasonal strawberry treats with its new Strawberry Festival. The limited-time offer, which was featured in television ads around the country, showcased the fruit in their Sweet Strawberry Crepe, Sweet Strawberry Pancakes and Strawberry Stuffed French Toast.

"Strawberries are the favorite fruit of both kids and adults. This time of year is very much associated with strawberries as they're ripening and we know guests love treats topped with strawberries," explains Jennifer Pendergrass, director of communications.

The casual chain, which is known for its breakfasts, as well as reasonably priced lunches and dinners, has sold plenty of strawberries in the past. Over the last 50 years, more than 155 million pounds of sweet strawberry glaze have topped IHOP treats — enough to fill 1,570 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

"Fruit-topped pancakes, crepes and French toast have always been popular menu items at IHOP and the restaurant has long used produce in popular promotions to drive traffic, from strawberries and bananas to apples and even black cherries," relates Pendergrass.

"What we know is happening in this economy is that a lot of these chains are trying to add value," says Chris Christian, vice president of marketing for The California Strawberry Commission, based in Watsonville, CA. "It's nice to see them add value by promoting healthy super-fruits like strawberries." **pb**



PHOTO COURTESY OF IHOP

meals, they knew the quality of both the food and the service had to be high. "That was one of the first times that people had been to Denny's in years," notes Dillon. "We needed to deliver."

In some cases, you can bring in folks with coupons, inexpensive meals, loyalty programs and freebies. But while great deals

may bring in customers, significantly dropping prices at the expense of the experience can backfire. Paschel warns, "Do not fall victim to the temptation to fill chairs by cutting prices or offering 'recessionary' specials. Consumers do not decide to dine out to save money; they do so because they are looking for something better than what they

could achieve at home." Instead, he recommends "focusing on the basics. Fill your seats by providing the highest quality experience possible."

Improving service may be easier and less expensive today than it was a year ago. "Some of the operators I talk to think the labor pool has improved due to skyrocketing

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unemployment levels, so they're able to hire more qualified or even over-qualified staff." says Agresta. That's good news, because he believes service is every bit as important as the meal. "The taste and quality of the food is important, but the whole experience should be good."

## 6. Include Healthful Options

According to Sloan Trends, 76 percent of adults surveyed say they are trying to eat more healthful at restaurants now than they did two years ago, and nutritionally balanced children's dishes and fruit/vegetable side options for children are among the top restaurant trends for 2009. It's not just talk. The company found that in 2008, sales of French fries were the lowest they have been in 15 years. Consumers' increasing desire to eat healthfully and feed their families well is recession-proof.

Also according to Sloan Trends: While cost is the No. 1 reason why people "brown-bag it" to work, the No. 2 reason is health. Seventy-two percent of women and sixty-one percent of men surveyed said they bring lunch to work for health reasons. Restaurants offering healthful meals stand a good chance of winning this segment back.

Subway knows this as well as anyone. "Back in the mid 90s we started to promote the fact that we had a number of sandwiches that were low-fat," says Winograd. The chain's most famous spokesperson, Jared Fogle, lost 245 pounds eating Subway sandwiches and many more write in to Subway every month to tell similar stories.

Since the beginning of the \$5 foot-long promotion, which includes some of Subway's low-fat sandwiches, "Produce usage has risen 40 percent, on average," reports Fitzgerald of Independent Purchasing Cooperative. "In some markets, that number rose 80 percent! We were delighted." All those vegetables are certainly helping to keep Subway's offerings healthful and nutritious.

Keeping with this trend, beginning last spring, Subway's kids' meals got new side options. "We had a smaller sandwich that came with a cookie and a soda. We swapped out the cookie for a healthier item, such as apples, yogurts or raisins, and the soda for a juice box. Now we have so many other things they can choose," says Winograd. The toys included with the meals, such as Frisbees, are designed to encourage exercise.

Denny's is keeping up with the trend, as well. "That's one of the things that we've heard over the past few years — people are looking for better-for-you or lighter items," says Dillon, which is why the brand is launching new breakfast items that can be substituted for its more calorie-laden Grand Slam

staples, including fresh fruit, whole wheat pancakes and chicken sausage. According to Gene Harris, senior purchasing manager for Denny's, initial reports on the chain's more healthful alternatives are very positive.

Harris notes the chain has increased its fresh produce purchases "by about 12,500 cases a week. We've also had to work in concert with quality assurance to get approximately six new grower/shippers approved for spring mix and baby carrots."

Fresh produce fits in so well with menus such as these because it not only stands out on menus as "healthy," it also offers flavors and textures that people love. "The fruit looks great on the plate, it tastes great. We couldn't be more excited," says Dillon.

Salads, too, have become more important on the Denny's menu. "People like the freshness. Frankly, we want to make sure there's something on the menu for everybody," says Dillon. And because portion control remains an issue, "There's an option to order a half or full portion, as well," he says.

## 7. Consider Customers' Priorities

Look at your patrons' demographics and what's important to them beyond their favorite foods or themes. For instance, have you considered "going green?" It may not be the only reason for someone to choose your restaurant but, according to the NRA, 44 percent of consumers surveyed recently said they are likely to make a restaurant choice based on an operation's practices in the areas of energy and water conservation.

Concerns such as these, along with being mindful of the manner in which product is grown — including with the farmers that grow it — have contributed to a new movement known as Intellectual Eating. (Turn to our Trend Trackers article on page 28 for more on this topic.)

## 8. Offer Something New

Consumer research conducted by Denny's found that "It's important to have new choices," says Dillon, even though core items still remain as important as ever. "They'll be attracted and come into the restaurant because they see something new, even if they order what they always order," he tells us.

Denny's launched 16 new menu items on April 21, including breakfast burritos, a new coffee, sandwiches, dinner items and three



PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNY'S

Whole wheat pancakes and sides of fresh fruit are just a couple of Denny's latest good-for-you options for diners who want to eat more healthfully.

salads: cranberry, pecan and chicken; prime rib and bleu cheese; and Baja chicken. "Whenever somebody walks into Denny's, we want them to say, 'Wow — there's always something new at Denny's,'" says Dillon. So far, "We have gotten incredibly positive feedback on these new items." The new, healthful options have been such a success that Denny's plans on rolling out a few more healthful items on both the general and children's menu, according to Harris.

While change can bring in new customers, you must be careful not to alienate the old ones. With money tight, common sense tells us that many consumers are sticking with the places they know. Those who have gone from eating out five nights a week to only one are likely to go where their experiences are consistently good, so one bad meal could put you on the "no" list. And with less likelihood than in the past that new customers will walk through the doors, it is especially important to keep the ones you have as happy as possible.

## 9. Don't Panic

This recession could last years, or just a few more months. "Even economists, analysts and financial types have a poor track record when it comes to predicting economic cycles," says Paschel of The Hartman Group. "So as to the question of how long this will last, the only responsible answer is that none of us have any idea, and you should not trust anyone who claims to have an answer. As for the effect on restaurants in the long term, we could only suggest that this will have a net positive effect. By selecting out the under-performers and poor propositions, the marketplace will simply be that much stronger. Likewise, the net effect for the consumer will be higher quality and more efficient pricing."

pb



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# Food For Thought: Intellectual Eating

*Concern for quality, health and the environment spawns new way of approaching food.*

BY DANIELLE OLDHAM

**The word “artisanal” is cropping up almost everywhere these days. So are “seasonal,” “local” and “sustainable.” For the past several years, these concepts have been showing up on many fine dining and even some casual-dining menus.**

With discretionary dollars spent at foodservice establishments shrinking, every venue is looking for an edge over the competition. The latest buzzword is “intellectual eating,” a term that encompasses all these ideas and more.

Intellectual eating can be described as eating to satisfy emotional, health, and nutritional and environmental needs. It appeals to the intellect as well as the emotions. The Web site, Tinder Box, part of The Hartman Group Inc., headquartered in Bellevue, WA, defines the term this way: “Intellectual eating is when nuanced quality criteria related to how food is produced dominate (e.g., local, artisanal), and when enjoyment originates from creating or discovering new quality distinctions.”

Lorna Christie, chief operating officer of Produce Marketing Association (PMA), based in Newark, DE, spoke about intellectual eating at last year's PMA Foodservice Conference & Exposition in Monterey, CA, calling it “a monster movement.” Consumers have lost touch with the people who grow their food and the places where it is grown, and as a result, a growing segment is expressing interest in “food with a conscious, knowing you can connect to the place behind the food,” she explains.

Foodservice professionals are responding to their customers' desire for local, healthful, sustainable food. “For the last four or five years, buy local/support the environment has been huge here,” says Ken Toong, executive director at University of Massachusetts Amherst Dining (UMass), in Amherst, MA.

Annika Stensson, director of media relations at the National Restaurant Association (NRA) in Washington, D.C., agrees, stating, “Many of the aspects of intellectual eating have been growing industry trends for the past several years and are making it into mainstream America.” The desire to eat intelligently has been gaining new ground thanks to “the Baby Boomer generation's interest in health and young consumers' interest in the future of the planet.”

## MAINTAINING TIES TO THE COMMUNITY

Connecting to the local food community is a very important part of the intellectual eating concept and, fortunately, the general pub-



Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

**UMass Amherst's dining program offers students a program called “Small Plates, Big Flavor,” which puts produce at the center of the plate.**

lic's faith in American farmers remains high. A survey done by PMA during this past summer's tomato recall found American farmers had an 87 percent credibility rating. Although “One would assume the number to be lower [given the magnitude of the negative media coverage],” Christie says, it shows the strength of the American farmer's reputation in the minds of fellow citizens.

There are many ways to connect to the community. Roger Pepperl, marketing director at the Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers Inc., explains the company has added a personal touch to its packaging. “We like to bring our family into the store. Our cartons have an actual photograph-based painting of a farmer located just 20 miles from here.”

Founded in 1993, Boston, MA-based Chefs Collaborative is a leading culinary organization providing its members with tools for running economically healthy, sustainable foodservice businesses. “We started a student chapter of Chefs Collaborative in 1994,” notes Eve Felder, associate dean of culinary arts for the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), located in Hyde Park, NY. “Back then, only one or two faculty members really understood farm-to-table. That has grown tremendously. A farmer has a farmer's perspective and a chef has a chef's perspective. There has to be a conversation.”

That conversation between farmer and chef or farmer and consumer has been taking place across the country. “In the last two years, farm events, food tastings and different locavore groups” have really taken off, relates Catherine Baggott, director of marketing for Epic Roots, based in Salinas, CA.

Restaurateurs are making sure the public gets what it wants by

telling the stories behind their menu offerings. In addition to satisfying the desire for information, a restaurant that stresses the back story sets itself apart from the competition. "We recently got in some organic, local pumpkins," says Richard Rosendale, chef/owner of Rosendales in Columbus, OH. "It's great to be able to tell customers about the farm and the farmer. We are all part of the process, but the consumer dictates what we buy and sell."

Farmers markets, an increasingly strong seasonal retail presence, have taught many consumers the value of buying and eating locally grown produce. Greg Drescher, executive director of strategic initiatives, Culinary Institute of America (CIA), headquartered in Saint Helena, CA, states, "Farmers

**"It's great to be able to tell customers about the farm and the farmer."**

**— Richard Rosendale  
Rosendales**

markets connect consumers to agriculture. Getting a sense of that is a plus above and beyond just buying local — it makes people more sensible to sustainability and where food comes from."

## **FOCUSING ON HEALTH**

Eating with health in mind is an important aspect of intellectual eating. "Our research shows three out of four adults are trying to eat more healthfully in restaurants now than they did two years ago," says NRA's Stensson.

The increased demand for sustainable, local produce evidenced on college campuses is a harbinger of what tomorrow's consumer is going to expect. UMass' Toong, whose dining program feeds 14,000 people annually and has revenues of \$55 million, has started a program called "Small Plates, Big Flavor." He relates, "These are cuisines, such as Southeast Asian and Mediterranean, that put veggies at the center of the plate, which is what students want."

Toong isn't the only one who sees produce taking up more real estate on the plate. "Consumers are taking local produce items to the center of the plate," offers Dean Simon, specialty produce wholesaler at

## **Economic Concerns**

**G**iven the current state of the economy, it's no surprise that many food-service operations see buying local as a great way to increase their revenue stream while supporting local business. "Our purchasing has become easier buying local," asserts Shawn LaPean, dining director at University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley), Berkeley, CA. "This is not only something we should do, but it's also good for business — for the last five years our sales have increased from \$2 million to a projected \$5 million annually."

Buying local can also cut costs. "Local is cheaper because you bypass the middleman," notes Ken Toong, executive director of University of Massachusetts Amherst Dining (UMass), based in Amherst, MA. "We have signs up that say we support local agriculture, and we have started to support local industry as well."

The high cost of shipping is also a hot topic. Even with moderating fuel costs, the days of cheap transportation are probably gone. "To ship from California to New York, you're often paying more for freight than for the food you're eating," states Timothy York, president of Markon Cooperative Inc., headquartered in Salinas, CA. "Western companies will get more involved in regional locations to grow produce," he predicts, in part due to high gas prices.

For some, ordering local, seasonal food is about more than saving money — it's smart business. "A chef has an opportunity and a responsibility to order food in season," explains Richard Rosendale, chef/owner of Rosendales, located in Columbus, OH. "The produce tastes better, recycles money back into the community and builds great relationships. It's more economical and just common sense." **pb**

Pro\*Act, headquartered in Monterey, CA. "Restaurants are cooking seasonally by using, for example, citrus fruit in winter, stone fruit in summer, and apples and pears in the fall."

Shawn LaPean, dining director, University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley), in Berkeley, CA, agrees produce consumption is on the rise. "Especially during the day, students are looking for more healthful options," he asserts. "We have a produce stand set up four days a week where students can use their meal cards to purchase produce." To see what college students are

doing to promote intellectual eating on college campuses, he recommends visiting the Real Food Challenge Web site ([www.real-foodchallenge.org](http://www.real-foodchallenge.org)).

Eating sufficient produce may be optimal for good health, but most of the country is limited in what can be grown locally during the colder months. "Although people should source as much as they can from local produce, it doesn't displace a need for a national nutritional source," according to CIA's Drescher. "We in the United States should be eating twice the produce we do now. Since half the country is covered in snow some of the year, we need other areas to supply our needs for us."

## **RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Taking care of the earth that grows the food we eat is a big priority for many people. In fact, according to a recent NRA survey, 62 percent of adults would likely choose a restaurant based on its environmental friendliness. Of course, environmental friendliness can mean many different things. From going green to simply using less packaging, conserving the earth's resources is a priority of intellectual eating.

The institutions turning out tomorrow's chefs are on board with the sustainability aspect of intellectual eating. "We have sustainability across the board, from recycling programs to new housing conforming to green specifications to organic farming," says CIA's Drescher.

At UMass, "Students want to know where their food comes from," relates Toong. "We serve sustainable seafood only — no farmed fish. The students are pushing us to look at food in a way that guarantees it will last us a very long time."

Growers have always been aware of the need to keep the environment healthy, but a new sense of concern has caused some to prioritize the environment. "We've been an organic grower since 1989," states Stemilt's Pepperl. The company is using less bleached cardboard and less wood pulp than in the past, and its boxes require less energy to produce. "We're on all hydropower. We use no fossil fuels. Our carbon footprint is very small here," he adds.

Environmental stewardship is not necessarily a new concept. Like many of the tenets of intellectual eating, it has always been a priority for some. But, Stensson stresses, "Infrastructure, price, and availability of items perceived as environmentally friendly have not always been compatible with the restaurant business. The good news is that these items are becoming available to restaurants of all types and sizes." **pb**

# Get Grilling With Produce

*Move over hot dogs and hamburgers. The new kids on the grill are fresh fruits and vegetables.*

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

**“There is so much untapped potential when it comes to grilling produce,” says Mike O’Brien, vice president of produce for St. Louis, MO-based Schnuck Markets Inc.**

This is especially true this summer. According to the 20th Annual Weber GrillWatch Survey, released April 30th, 61 percent of American outdoor grill owners are planning to grill at home more and eat out less this year, and 74 percent of this group cites the economy as the reason.

## A HOT OPPORTUNITY

Popular food magazines, TV cooking shows, best-selling cookbooks and celebrity chefs have all touted the idea of grilling healthful fare, including fresh produce. Retail supermarkets' consumer affairs publications have also jumped on the bandwagon. For example, the Summer 2009 issue of Publix Supermarket's *FamilyStyle* magazine features an article titled “Your Sizzling Summer Grill” Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for the Lakeland, FL-based chain, summarizes the article, “It describes family-favorite meals made right on the barbecue. Recipes include Hot Dogs with Tomato Relish, where the tomato relish is placed in a foil packet and grilled, Corn with Spicy Lime Butter and Grilled Mini Pizzas.”

Grilling is the ultimate summer pastime and no longer exclusively for meats and fish, says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., headquartered in Coral

Gables, FL. “Consumers trying to lead healthier lifestyles are adding variety to their summer meals by including fresh fruits and vegetables in the grilling mix.”

What specifically is game grill fare in the produce department? According to Christou, “Almost any vegetable or fruit can be cooked on the grill.”

The 22nd annual Eating Patterns in America report, conducted by the Port Washington, NY-based NPD — a leading global provider of consumer and retail market research — and released in May 2008, potatoes and vegetables ranked in the Top Ten Foods most frequently grilled, at sixth and seventh, respectively.

Both potatoes and a variety of vegetables star in Green Giant Fresh's April-launched Patio Grillers. According to Sarah Wangler, marketing manager for The Sholl Group II Inc./Green Giant Fresh, in Eden Prairie, MN, the five item line includes combinations such as Baby Red Potatoes with rosemary herb sauce, Green Bean & Carrot Blend with chive butter sauce and a BBQ Blend with broccoli, red potatoes, squash and carrots with garlic herb sauce.

“These special kits include the vegetables, sauce and grilling tray for a no-hassle preparation,” details Wangler. Each one can be prepared in 20 to 25 minutes on the grill, which makes it a perfect complement to whatever meat is also being grilled.”

Lee Anne Oxford, marketing director for L & M Companies Inc., based in Raleigh, NC, maintains, “All squash, asparagus and eggplant go well on the grill. So do traditional kabob fixings such as bell peppers, cherry tomatoes and onions.”

Wendy Brannen, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA, notes, “Cut wedges of onions have been a kabob staple for a long time, but the most popular Vidalia preparation is grilled whole, wrapped in foil with seasonings, allowing one onion per person. Of course, big, grilled slices go well with meats and hamburgers.”

Beyond this, “The trend for grilling vegetables continues to grow with more non-traditional types of veggies being used,” declares Lorri Koster, co-chairwoman and vice president of marketing for Mann Packing Co. Inc., based in Salinas, CA, “For example, grilled leeks, broccoli florets and even sweet potatoes are becoming popular.”

Year-round availability means a good supply of sweet potatoes during the summer, says George



Fresh vegetables rank among the Top Ten foods most frequently grilled.

# Packaging Prompts

**T**he pack and what's on-pack can help sell the idea of grilling the produce found inside. Sue Johnson-Langdon, executive director of the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission, in Smithfield, NC, notes, "Tray packs are ideal to promote for grilling since this type of preparation usually entails cooking for a group."

"If the label reads 'great on the grill,' consumers will respond to this," explains Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "It puts the idea immediately into their mind and prompts impulse sales."

Lorri Koster, vice president of marketing

for Mann Packing Co. Inc., based in Salinas, CA, reveals, "We use on-pack stickers to communicate both savings and grilling recipes. That works the best for us because the consumers still have the flexibility of doing something else with the item if they don't want to grill."

Last summer, Mann's summer grilling promotion saw a 23 percent rate of redemption for its on-pack, instant, redeemable coupon (IRC). This year, a 55-cent IRC, with a recipe for Grilled Sweet Potatoes on the back, was affixed to packages of sweet potatoes starting June 1. **pb**

Wooten, owner and president of Chadbourn, NC-based Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co. "Grilling is a good way to enjoy sweet potatoes in the summer and it's a method that shortens the cooking time, especially when the sweet potatoes are cut in slabs and wrapped in foil with maybe a bit of olive oil and seasoned salt."

But vegetables aren't the only produce making appearances on the grill. Even newer to the grill than vegetables is fruit. Denise Junqueiro, marketing coordinator for the California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA), headquartered in Reedley, CA, relates, "Peaches, plums and nectarines are fresh, sweet and delicious right off the grill."

Some favorite fruits to grill include bananas, cantaloupes and honeydew melons, says Del Monte's Christou.

Finally, don't forget the dogs... soy dogs and tofu, that is. According to Andrew Yap, president of Leasa Industries Co. Inc., located in Miami, FL, "Tofu takes on a delicious, smoky flavor when grilled." In addition to firm tofu, the company now offers Veggie-, Spicy- and Cilantro- flavored tofu.

## SUGGESTIVE DISPLAYS AND CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Education and suggestive selling is the way Schnuck Markets puts the idea of grilling fresh produce into customers' minds. O'Brien explains, "We have education workshops for our produce managers to teach them how to grill fruit and vegetables so they are able to relay that information to our customers. In addition, we try to offer solutions for our customers at point of sale (POS) by using 'Great for the Grill' signs, 'Fresh Fact' signs and recipe cards."

Summertime grilling recipes are displayed in the front-of-store recipe rack at Rice Epicurean Markets, a 5-store gourmet chain, headquartered in Houston, TX.

a real visual, a real eye-catching and enticing element to the display."

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA, suggests building an in-store grilling section. "Include everything you need, from the produce to sauces and seasonings. Or, create a make-your-own kabob display with all the vegetables, meats and even skewers grouped in one location. You could also offer packaged, pre-assembled kabobs."

The soy-based products or vegetarian section of the produce department is another perfect place to have a grilling station, adds Leasa Industries' Yap. "Create a section where you merchandize soy hot dogs and burgers, maybe teriyaki or plum sauce, and similarly sliced mushrooms and carrots to create a one-stop-shop."

Once everything is grouped, don't forget the visual aspect. "For example, POS recipes should have a photo of the finished product," advises Yap. "That will stop customers in their tracks and entice them to buy more quickly, compared to a recipe that is all words. Words alone don't have the same effect as a photo."

New this year, the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission is offering a variety of POS materials. "We're offering the materials to retailers to assist them in promoting

"We're looking at going one step further and cross-tying in items for a grilling promotion in the future," says Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral.

Some supermarkets, such as one of the Tyler, TX-based Brookshire's Grocery Co., located in Shreveport, LA, which participated in the VOC's "Thrill Your Grill" promotion, placed an actual grill into the display and grouped items such as Vidalia onions, bell peppers and corn on top and around barbeque. VOC's Brannen notes, "This adds



## BASCIANI BIDS FAREWELL TO ONE OF ITS OWN PIONEERS, FLAVIAN G. BASCIANI, 82.

Flavian Basciani, one of the founding brothers of Basciani Brothers Mushroom Farms, passed away peacefully on Monday, May 11th surrounded by his loving family.

Flavian founded Basciani Brothers, along with his two brothers, Emidio, Jr. and Mario, in the 1940s as second-generation mushroom farmers. Over the years, Flavian has helped to develop many of the techniques still used in mushroom growing today.

Flavian continued to consult with the third and fourth generation of the Basciani mushroom growing family up until the very end of his dynamic life, which was filled with the love and respect of his family and many friends. He will surely be missed.

sweet potatoes on the grill,” says Sue Johnson-Langdon, executive director of the Smithfield, NC-based organization.

The CTFA has used similar techniques. Junqueiro details, “In the past, we’ve conducted a fabulous grilling campaign, ‘Grillin-Chillin,’ featuring POS, posters and recipe cards that are still available for retailers to download on the CTFA Web site.”

Produce companies such as Trinity Fruit Sales Co., based in Fresno, CA, can also provide POS to retail customers, notes marketing director, John Hein. “Because we have an in-house culinary specialist and an in-house graphics department, we can create custom recipes and artwork.”

“Cross-merchandising is a great way to educate consumers about the benefits and ease of grilling vegetables,” says Mann’s Koster. “We did a joint promotion with Reynolds Wrap foil for years, which included a recipe handout for people to buy when they were buying their foil. Put similar handouts by grilling supplies, and barbecue sauces, and cross-promote with the meat and seafood departments.”

Pat Schweitzer, public relations coordinator for Richmond, VA-based Reynolds Packaging Corporation, asserts, “Packet-cooking with heavy-duty aluminum foil is an ideal way to grill vegetables. You can place a

packet of vegetables right beside meats cooking on the grill. Fruit is also easy to grill on our Non-Stick Foil.”

## FIRE UP SUMMER GRILLING PROMOTIONS

Summertime is ripe for outdoor grilling at Bristol Farms, a 15-store chain in Carson, CA. “The meat and foodservice departments set up a grill outside for four to six hours on the weekends and sell items such as bratwurst or tri-tip beef sandwiches,” says produce and floral director, Raul Gallegos. “We’ve tied in Vidalia and Walla Walla onions in the past, and have tested soft fruit and pineapple on the grill for the future.”

Joe Caldwell, vice president of Monterey Mushrooms Inc., headquartered in Watsonville, CA, adds, “Promote mushrooms on the grill as a meal concept, merchandized along with other ingredients for an entire meal. Retailers could offer mini grills as a promotional item at the same time. This is an especially good idea to implement around major grilling holidays,” such as the Fourth of July.

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), based in Eagle, ID, works with retailers to support category sales during grilling season. Vice president of retail, Seth Pemsler, explains, “The IPC partners with other grill-

related products and creates a major consumer promotion retailers can offer exclusively to their customers. Typically, these will involve a consumer pull, such as winning a fancy grill, along with POS materials, entry forms and Web sites to publicize the contest. Retailers would be asked to support the sponsoring products with displays and ads, but the contest would be theirs exclusively and consumers would be driven to their stores to enter.”

Tying two hot topics together – grilling and locally grown – is another great strategy, suggests L & M’s Oxford. “There are many local produce items that fit easily with a grill theme.”

This was exactly what Ukrop’s Super Markets, a 28-store chain based in Richmond, VA, did last summer as part of its locally grown “Local Route” program. Growers of produce, such as organic white and sweet potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, squash, zucchini, green beans, cucumber and peppers, were highlighted in the promotion, while the store provided step-by-step instructions on grilling vegetables available on its Web site.

“Grilling happens more than just three months in the summer,” says Mann’s Koster. “Many consumers grill year-round, so be sure to keep the message going.” **pb**

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# Michigan Produce Positioned To Grow

*The Great Lakes State provides a slew of diverse commodities that stay fresh year-in and year-out.*

BY AMY SHANNON

**Recognized for its bountiful presence in the fruit industry, Michigan offers retailers a wide produce selection as vast as its farmland and as massive as its bodies of water.**

Each year, Michigan's agri-food business generates \$71.3 billion in total economic activity and employs more than 1 million people — or 24 percent of the state's working class — according to the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), based in Lansing, MI.

"We're the second most agriculturally diverse state in the country behind California," reports Steve Wright, produce procurement manager for Spartan Stores Inc., a Grand Rapids, MI-based chain with 101 stores.

Michigan is home to about 10 million acres of farmland with 56,014 farms, according to the MDA. The state produces more than 200 commodities on a commercial basis, and it continues to expand at breakneck speeds. Between 2006 and 2007, Michigan's agricultural economy grew at a rate five times faster than the general economy.

"We're the No. 1 asparagus-producing state in the nation," reports Bob Craig, director of agriculture development division for the MDA. "We do a lot of fresh — about 25 percent of our asparagus

crop goes into the fresh market."

Michigan also leads the country in the production of tart cherries, blueberries, black and red beans, cranberries and cucumbers. It exports about one-third of its agricultural commodities each year, ranking fifth and eighth for national exports of fruits and vegetables, respectively.

## LOCATION COUNTS

Centrally located in the heart of the Midwest and within 500 miles of half of the nation's population and income, Michigan is geographically at an advantage for producing fresh fruits and vegetables. "We're close to major markets, allowing us to ship with a little more maturity," states Don Armock, president of Riveridge Produce Marketing Inc., a packer, shipper and marketer of nearly 20 apple varieties, as well as sweet cherries and prune plums, headquartered in Sparta, MI. "Our fruit is very highly flavored."

"We also have a great growing climate, with cooler nights and hot summer days, created in large part by the lake effect off Lake Michigan," explains Holly Whetstone, marketing and communications specialist for the Michigan Apple Committee (MAC), headquartered in DeWitt, MI. "We also have fertile soil, rolling hills and plenty of rainfall."

Riveridge is gearing up to start its sweet cherry deal on July 6, reports Armock. "We'll move into prune plums the third week of August and then begin apples at the end of that month." Armock adds, "Our Great Lakes are a huge asset for us — they really do moderate our climate, and combined with our processors, provide us an excellent comparative advantage."

## APPEALING APPLES

Michigan's warm summer temperatures create the perfect environment for producing sweet, juicy apples. "Michigan apples are noted for their great taste," says Whetstone. "Hence our slogan, 'Great Lakes, Great Flavors.' Our 950 growers pride them-



Photo courtesy of Michigan Dept. of Agriculture

**The Select Michigan program encourages retailers and consumers to purchase food grown and processed in Michigan.**

selves on producing delicious apples."

The state boasts a wide variety of apples. Paula Reds typically begin Michigan's apple season, followed closely by Ginger Golds, both in late August. "In early September, we're looking at Galas, McIntosh, Jonamacs and by the middle of the month, the highly awaited Honeycrisp," Whetstone adds.

**"There's a real movement by consumers to purchase produce grown relatively close to their homes."**

**— Don Armock  
Riveridge Produce**

"Many of our orchards are trending toward high-density plantings; upwards of 500 trees are planted per acre," according to Whetstone. "These trees are able to come into production more rapidly than standard apple trees of old, so growers can bring new,

desirable varieties to market more quickly."

With an estimated 2,000 acres of Honeycrisp now growing, plantings continue to soar. "Our growers are removing older, less-popular varieties and replacing them with Honeycrisps," notes Whetstone. "The first plantings were in 1990, when less than a handful of acres were planted."

### **GROWING "GREEN"**

Michigan prides itself on the earth-friendly growing practices used throughout the agri-food sector.

"Surrounded on three sides by the Great Lakes, the state's apple growers are committed to preserving the soil and water that is so valuable to the future of their industry," explains Whetstone. "Our growers, many of which are passing their orchards down from one generation to the next, are implementing sustainable growing practices, such as integrated pest management."

MDA's field inspectors are located throughout the state and work to manage or prevent the introduction of plant pests and diseases. The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) works with Michigan growers to ensure they are using effective stewardship practices that comply with state and federal environmental laws and standards.

### **LOCALLY GROWN SUPPORT**

In the past six months, MAC has conducted several consumer panels and surveyed apple buyers to find that Michigan consumers are primed and ready to support local farmers. In terms of transportation and delivery of goods, Michigan's close proximity to major cities and markets makes for a smaller carbon footprint than many other leading apple states.

"The locally grown movement has huge potential, especially here in Michigan," stresses MAC's Whetstone. "We believe it plays a vital role, especially in light of some recent consumer focus groups and surveys, conducted by an outside group on behalf of MAC, indicating that this is one of the top — if not the top — factors in deciding whether or not to purchase Michigan apples."

Riveridge's Armock agrees, noting, "There's a real movement by consumers to purchase produce grown relatively close to their homes."

MAC is taking advantage of this emerging trend by developing an entirely new marketing campaign centered on the locally grown concept. The program, which is set to roll out this fall, will target the metro Detroit area and include a logo, as well as new POP materials. Whetstone adds. "This is hugely popular with Michigan consumers, especial-

## **Michigan's Top Commodities By Acre**

1. Apples — 44,189
2. Potatoes — 42,267
3. Cucumbers and Pickles — 40,829
4. Red Tart Cherries — 37,799
5. Snap Beans — 19,414
6. Grapes — 14,701
7. Asparagus — 12,127
8. Sweet Corn — 9,499
9. Squash — 7,513
10. Pumpkins — 6,848

*Source: Michigan Department of Agriculture.*

ly in these challenging economic times."

The organization hopes the program will assist retailers in educating consumers about where their produce is grown. "Recent consumer surveys reveal consumers are primed and ready to support local farmers, but need to be able to better and more quickly identify where the produce is grown when they are shopping," notes Whetstone. "A big help would be for retailers to take advantage of our free Locally Grown 11-by-7 POP materials."

In Michigan, locally grown fruits and vegetables are "pretty prevalent," remarks Spartan's Wright. "We literally carry every Michigan-grown product." Wright credits MDA's Michigan Select program as playing a role in reinforcing the importance of buying locally grown produce.

The Select Michigan program encourages retailers and consumers to purchase food grown in Michigan. The program's special logo can be found on a variety of Michigan products sold at supermarkets, farmer's markets and on-farm markets throughout the state. "We support Select Michigan and use signage that highlights the growers and their families — sometimes even with photos," Wright notes. "In fact, many of our growers are third- and fourth-generation family-owned and -operated farms."

Riveridge is also involved in supporting Select Michigan. "We have in-house POS material available for promotions."

MDA's Craig describes the program as strong, very successful and an important vehicle for educating consumers. "Michigan produce is fresher and more nutritious than produce grown in regions further away. When produce takes longer to get to the market, it loses some freshness and nutritional value. However, that's not the case with Michigan."

**pb**

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# Foodservice Portfolio

## ELEVENTH ANNUAL FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

For **distributors and wholesalers**, the information that follows — recipes, tips and techniques, product availability, unique attributes, company contact information and much more — is perfectly designed to be passed down to operators.

For **retailers**, this information is ideal for your own prepared food operations.

**Restaurant operations** will also find it perfectly on the mark for everyday use.

The Eleventh Annual PRODUCE BUSINESS Foodservice Portfolio is filled with fresh ideas for using fresh product. Use the portfolio often and wisely, and get valuable, fresh ideas to help make the foodservice market a growing part of your bottom line.

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### PRODUCE FOR BETTER HEALTH FOUNDATION

DRISCOLL'S

*The Choice of Food Professionals*

Ask professional chefs about great berries and the name that comes to mind immediately is Driscoll's. In fact, a recent survey of foodservice operators named Driscoll's as the berry brand they purchased most often.<sup>1</sup>

Driscoll's berries are sweet, juicy and aromatic with just the right texture and bright color – quality that satisfies the most discriminating restaurateur. Driscoll's breeds its own proprietary berry varieties and the first priority in selecting new varieties is a delightful eating experience.

Look for Driscoll's strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries and add even more excitement with specialty berries, such as Driscoll's famous long-stem strawberries and unique golden raspberries.

**Salmon with Mixed Berry Glaze**



Fresh berries are a simple and elegant addition to this salmon dish. Season salmon fillets with salt and pepper prior to broiling. Just before broiling is complete, brush fillets with a reduction of puréed and strained raspberries, blackberries and brown sugar. Serve with additional warmed purée and fresh berries.

*Menu Trends and Tips*

Driscoll's berries allow versatility limited only by your imagination when planning today's more healthful menus. An assortment of Driscoll's berries adds color and flare to even simple menu ideas. Research<sup>1</sup> shows that although desserts were cited as the number one menu use of fresh berries, operators are also using berries in salads, sauces and smoothies. Whether it's a unique appetizer, dazzling dessert, salad with fresh berries, or a main course with a fruit glaze and fresh berries, the possibilities are endless. Each berry has its own great combination of antioxidants and micronutrients, so an assortment of berries packs a huge nutritional punch.

*Product Availability*

The Driscoll's full line of fresh berries is available year-round. Driscoll's searches the world for the best places to grow great berries. In these carefully chosen locations they partner with the best farmers who share their passion for delighting consumers. Driscoll's world-class food safety program is uniformly enforced wherever Driscoll's berries are grown and is supported by both internal and independent third party audits. Add to that Driscoll's incomparable quality assurance program and you've got:

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- Wash berries lightly immediately before serving.

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<sup>1</sup> May 2009, Technomics Research



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Reader Service # 14



## Roast Cod with French Lentils, Dandy® Celery Brunoise and Lemon Butter Sauce

Roasted fish on a bed of French green lentils has become a modern classic. Here, made with cod, celery in the lentils adds a pleasant bite to their texture and flavor. It also has just the right assertiveness with the cod.

Celery leaves brighten the dish. Their pungent flavor balances with the earthy lentils and mild acid in the beurre blanc sauce. A touch of cream in the sauce brings out its golden color and helps it marry with the other elements in the dish. For the sauce, use a wine with citrus rather than grassy notes.

### SERVES: 4

- ¾ cup French green lentils**
- 1 cup chicken stock or fat-free reduced sodium chicken broth**
- 1 tbs. grapeseed oil**
- ¾ cup Dandy® celery, diced ¼-inch thick**
- ¼ cup carrots, diced ¼-inch thick**
- ¼ cup parsnips diced ¼-inch thick**
- 1 tbs. shallots, minced**
- 1 tbs. grapeseed oil**
- 4 6-oz. pieces cod filet, 1½-inches thick**
- 3 tbs. dry white wine**
- 2 tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- 2 tsp. shallots, chopped**
- 1 tbs. heavy cream**

- 8 tbs. unsalted butter, chilled, diced ¼-inch thick**
- Sea salt and white pepper, freshly ground, to taste**
- 2 tbs. celery leaves, coarsely chopped, for garnish**

In a medium saucepan, combine the lentils, broth, and one cup cold water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover, and cook until the lentils are slightly undercooked. Drain any excess liquid and set the lentils aside; there will be about two-and-a-half cups. This can be done several hours ahead, but do not refrigerate the lentils.

Shortly before serving, in a 9-inch skillet, heat the oil. Sauté the celery, carrots, parsnips and shallots until tender-crisp, about three minutes. Add the cooked lentils; mix to combine and season with salt and pepper. Set the lentils with brunoise vegetables aside.

Preheat the oven to 500°F.

For the fish, divide the tablespoon of oil between two 10-inch ovenproof skillets and set the pans over high heat. Season the fish with salt and pepper. Add two pieces of cod to each pan, skin-side up and cook until they are golden and crusted on the bottom,



about two minutes. Turn and sear the fish on the second side, then place the pans in the oven. Roast until the cod is opaque in the center at the thickest point and ready to flake, about seven minutes.

Meanwhile, for the sauce, in a heavy, medium saucepan, combine the wine, lemon juice and shallots. Boil over high heat until the liquid is reduced to two tablespoons, about four minutes. Add the cream and reduce the heat to low. While whisking vigorously, add two tablespoons of the cold butter. When the butter has melted and emulsified with the liquid, add the remain-

ing butter, a few pieces at a time, whisking until it has blended into the sauce before making the next addition. Strain the sauce into a small saucepan and season with salt and pepper. Keep the sauce warm.

To serve, reheat the lentils in the skillet, adding a splash of broth or water so they do not stick. In each of four wide, shallow plates, spread one-fourth of the lentils to make a bed. Set a piece of roasted cod on top of the lentils. Sprinkle one-fourth of the celery leaves over the lentils. Spoon the Lemon Butter Sauce generously over the fish. Serve immediately.

### Tips and Techniques

- Dandy® products are 100% usable.
- Celery products available year-round.
- Eliminates waste.
- Reduces labor costs.
- Lowers freight and storage costs.
- Select celery with straight, green stalks that are crisp, firm and unblemished.
- Look for leaves that are fresh, well-colored and not wilted.
- Keep celery away from ethylene producing fruits. Celery absorbs odors from other commodities, such as apples and onions, and should not be stored near them.
- Always keep product refrigerated until ready to use. Ideal storage temperatures are 32° to 36°F and 90-98 percent relative humidity.
- Do not store celery uncovered as it will deteriorate quickly.



### Unique Attributes

#### Taste the Difference:

Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc. is the leader in growing and processing celery. Our experience and dedication to continually improving our product is what sets us apart from other celery growers.

Duda Farm Fresh Foods has an extensive celery breeding program with the world's largest facility devoted to celery research. Over 1,200 new celery lines are developed each year to improve quality, texture and taste. The company currently uses a proprietary "sweeter" variety that has been rated superior in consumer taste panels and is available in our Dandy® fresh-cut celery products.

Through years of extensive breeding, consumer and marketplace research, Duda Farm Fresh Foods has the capability to grow celery in different regions of the United States, without compromising the sweet taste people enjoy. Duda Farm Fresh Foods is one of only two companies in the United States that utilizes a unique water-jet-cutting technology that eliminates the use of metal blades, ensuring ends are cut smoother and leaving less strings and pits.

### Product Availability

Dandy® fresh-cut celery is available year-round and is processed in our new state-of-the-art processing facility. Using a proprietary water-jet-cutter, Duda Farm Fresh Foods is one of a select few producers to use this celery-cutting system which extends shelf-life and decreases pitting and strings.

#### Dandy® Fresh-Cut Products Include:

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Reader Service # 63

GRIMMWAY FARMS

# Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred® Carrot and Potato Galette With Herbed Crème Fresh and Jumbo Lump Crab Meat

SERVES: 4-6

**Galette:**

- 3 cups Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred® Carrots
- 2 cups potatoes, shredded
- 3 tbs. clarified butter
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. fresh ground pepper

**For Herbed Crème Fresh:**

- 1 cup crème fresh
- 1 shallot, finely minced
- 2 tbs. chives, finely minced
- 4 sprigs thyme, leaves removed
- ½ lemon, juiced
- Salt and pepper, to taste

**Jumbo Lump Crap Meat:**

- ½ lb. jumbo lump crab meat
- Squeeze of Lemon Juice
- Pinch of paprika

Toss Grimmway Organic ColorShred® Carrots and Shredded Potatoes with two tbs. of clarified butter. Season with salt and pepper.

Heat a heavy non-stick sauté pan over high heat until nearly smoking.

Lightly butter pan with some of the remaining clarified butter.

Add some of the carrot mixture to the pan and shape into pancake.

Cook for one to two minutes on high heat and then reduce heat.

Sauté to golden brown.

When galette starts to shake free from pan, gently turn it over and cook until lightly brown on the other side.

Repeat for each galette.

Keep warm and crispy wrapped in foil in a 425°F oven.

**Prepare Herbed Crème Fraiche:**

Mix together crème fraiche, shallots, chives, thyme, lemon Juice and salt and pepper.

**To Serve:**

Place warm galette on plate. Spread a dollop of crème fraiche on galette.

Top crème fraiche with jumbo lump crab meat. Squeeze a bit of lemon juice on crab and lightly sprinkle with paprika.



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Bag Size	Bags Per Case	Cartons Per Pallet	Case Cube	Carton Dim.	Shelf Life
5 lb.	2	120	.44 cu ft.	14 <sup>7</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 10 x 5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	21 days
5 lb.	4	63	.80 cu ft.	17 x 10 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 8	21 days



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## HMC FARMS — THE LUNCH BUNCH

## Grape Rosemary Focaccia Bread

SERVES: 16

- ¼ cup garlic purée
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 3 cups California seedless grapes, halved
- ¾ cup Parmesan cheese, shredded
- 1 tsp. fresh rosemary, finely chopped
- 1¼ lbs. ready-to-bake pizza dough

Sauté garlic in olive oil. Add grapes and heat thoroughly. Remove pan from heat; add cheese and rosemary; mix well.

Press pizza dough to fit two 12 inch pizza pans. Spread mixture evenly between the two pans.

Bake at 400°F for 10 minutes or until topping and edges of bread brown. Cut each into eight pieces.



### *Tips and Techniques*

- The ideal holding conditions for grapes are 32° to 34°F with 90 to 95 percent relative humidity.
- Avoid storing grapes next to green onions, as their odor will tend to be absorbed by grapes.
- Never store or display grapes where they will come in direct contact with ice or iced products, as this will damage the grapes.
- Stack grape lugs to allow circulation around all sides.

#### **Grapes can:**

- Generate add-on revenue as a take-out item.
- Provide a signature ingredient for sensational salads and entrées; they're always juicy and beautiful, even when heated.
- Plate enhancement: What's better than a plump, colorful cluster of fresh Lunch Bunch grapes?

### *Unique Attributes*

- Perfect as a garnish or fruit requirement for schools
- One of Mother Nature's most convenient snack foods
- Excellent source of vitamin C and high in potassium
- Kids love 'em!

### *Product Availability*

HMC foodservice grapes are available year-round from Chile, Peru, Mexico and the United States. HMC is also a provider of stone fruit and table grapes during the summer season.



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Reader Service # 58

## MANN PACKING

**Broccolini® with Vanilla Butter Sauce**

Developed by Michael McGeeney, executive chef, Omni Austin Hotel

SERVES: 4

- 1 pkg Mann Packing Broccolini®
- 2 oz. olive oil
- 3 shallots, julienned
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 3 tbs. vanilla bean paste
- 1 qt. heavy cream
- 4 oz. butter
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Blanch\* package of Broccolini®. Heat saucepot on medium; add olive oil. Add shallots when hot; sauté until lightly caramelized. Add brown sugar and vanilla paste; mix well. Add heavy cream; turn heat to low. Reduce by one-third.

Remove from heat; add butter a little at a time. Season to taste. Drizzle over Broccolini®

**\*Instructions for blanching:**

Boil two to six cups of water (depending on size of Broccolini® package) in a large saucepan. Once at a boil, place Broccolini® in the water for one to two minutes. Remove the Broccolini® and strain in a colander. Rinse under cold water or immerse in ice water to stop from cooking further. Strain and pat dry with paper towels.

*Tips and Techniques*

Broccolini® is a cross between broccoli and Chinese kale grown exclusively by Mann Packing Company Inc. It has a long, slender stem, similar to asparagus, and is topped with small flowering buds that resemble a cross between broccoli florets and an asparagus tip. Its sweet, delicate flavor with a subtle, peppery taste is milder and sweeter when cooked. When eaten raw, the vegetable has a tender, yet crunchy texture. Developed with natural plant breeding methods, Broccolini® is not genetically modified.

It may be blanched, steamed, sautéed, poached, roasted, fried and grilled. Broccolini® is perfect for large catering events or casual dining. Just blanch and serve along with the chosen entrée. Broccolini pairs well with beef, chicken or fish, holds onto its bright green color perfectly, and stands alone without extra sauces and seasoning.

Broccolini adapts to a wide range of cuisine from Asian to Italian to Classic American. Stir-fry Broccolini® with a selection of other fresh vegetables and add a ginger soy sauce for an Asian-inspired, light meal. Dip Broccolini® in a flour-and-beer batter and deep-fry for a delicious and crunchy appetizer. Sauté with olive oil, yellow onions and capers for a flavorful side dish to accompany a favorite entrée. Grill Broccolini® for a smoky, sweet summertime treat; wrap the flower tip in foil to prevent charring.

Preparation tip: Cook al dente, so Broccolini® retains its brilliant green color and crisp texture.

*Product Availability***DON'T BE FOOLED: ASK FOR THE ORIGINAL BROCCOLINI®**

Culinarians beware; there may be an imposter veggie posing as Broccolini®.

The flavorful and beautiful Broccolini® — a natural hybrid between broccoli and gai lan/Chinese Kale — is a favorite of foodies, with its sweet taste and elegant, brilliant green appearance. Unfortunately new copy cat vegetable varieties that taste *nothing* like Broccolini® are hitting the market. Often called “baby broccoli” these copy cats may look like Broccolini®, but don't be fooled. One variety is 75 percent broccoli and only 25 percent gai lan / Chinese Kale). They taste tough and bitter with no hint of the sweet, peppery taste Broccolini® is known for.

While Broccolini® is sometimes referred to as baby broccoli, the seed variety used to grow it is genetically different than other varieties (Broccolini® is not genetically modified; it is a natural hybrid). And there's more to cultivating this item than just planting a seed. For 10 years, Mann Packing — a third generation family farming business and the exclusive supplier of Broccolini® — has worked to develop hand-cultivation practices to create the long, elegant shoots and the hint of sweet, edible, yellow flowers — that's the gai lan characteristic showing through. Baby broccoli doesn't taste like Broccolini®, just as a Pink Lady apple doesn't taste like a Red Delicious.

Unless you see the Broccolini® name on the tag or package, it is not the original Broccolini® that has become a favorite of so many chefs as well as home cooks.

Broccolini® is available year-round from foodservice distributors, restaurants and grocery stores nationwide.

*Nutrition Facts*

- Good source of vitamin A, folate, iron and potassium
- Excellent source of vitamin C
- 35 calories per 3-oz serving (around five to six stalks)



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## THE PRODUCE EXCHANGE

## Cool Tesoro Roma Tomato and Cucumber Salad

SERVES: 4

- 1 large, regular cucumber
- 4 Tesoro Roma tomatoes
- ½ of a red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- Red wine vinegar
- Rice wine vinegar
- Vegetable oil, to taste

Carefully peel cucumber. Cut in half lengthwise. Remove and discard seeds. Cut both sides of the cucumber into cross sections approximately ¼ - inch in thickness.

Cut stem caps from tomatoes and discard. Cut tomatoes in half. Remove and discard approximately half of the juice and seeds. Cut each tomato half into three equal-sized wedges. Then cut once more across these wedges to form chunks of tomato.

Place cut cucumbers and tomatoes into mixing bowl. Cover with equal portions of red wine vinegar and rice wine vinegar. Add vegetable oil to taste.

Add thinly sliced red onion to taste. When served, garnish with freshly cracked black pepper, and salt to taste.



### Tips and Techniques

- Receive and store Tesoro's in a cool dry place — 55°F is ideal.
- Do not refrigerate.
- Do not spray.

### Unique Attributes

Tesoro Roma tomatoes are a new hybrid developed to be the ultimate food service and fresh-cut tomato. With less gel, Tesoro Romas are ideally suited for efficient slicing, dicing and cutting while still retaining color and texture for a fresh appearance. Tesoro Romas are excellent for a variety of prepared foods, including sandwiches, salads, hamburgers, pizza, salsa, sauces and more. Grown by The Produce Exchange, Tesoro is the newest variety named Intense from Nunhems.

Being hailed as "A revolution in the sandwich world" by ABC news, Tesoro's variety has already received several awards, including the 2008 Fruit Logistica Innovation Award and the 2008 PMA Food-service "Buyers Choice Award."

With a more dense and solid flesh, the Tesoro Roma gives you more. From super-thin slicing to thicker and meatier sauces and purées, Tesoro Romas retain moisture and color while delivering higher output with greater flexibility. Tesoro's are best thing to happen to sandwiches since sliced bread!

#### Benefits:

- Superior slicing
- More meat, less waste
- Attractive color
- Food processing versatility

### Product Availability

The Produce Exchange provides the highest quality tomatoes and dry vegetables to its customers. The Produce Exchange was founded with one goal in mind: to transform the unpredictable nature of the fresh produce industry to an exceptional level of reliability. To achieve this, we've revamped the produce business model allowing us to bring unbridled success to the entire supply chain.

We carefully select varieties and develop growing protocols to achieve the quality you desire. We work with independent farmers in ideal microclimates to provide reliable and quality products year-round, order-to-order. Our dedication and hard work assures attention to detail and results in your success.



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***The New Tesoro Roma***  
*Winner 2008 Fruit Logistica Innovation Award and 2008 FMA Foodservice "Buyers Choice Award."*



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Reader Service # 7

# Promotion Ideas for Foodservice Operators

- Indicate how many cups of fruits and vegetables your menu items have, such as: "Contains 1 cup of fruits and veggies."
- Add a place on your salad bar for "new and different" fruits and vegetables for your customers to try.
- Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of phytonutrients that are responsible for the protective effect seen with these foods. The phytonutrients in foods are associated with their pigments. By offering fruits and vegetables in a wide assortment of colors to your customers, you are helping them to get the phytonutrients they need to feel good and prevent disease.

Feature a specific color of fruit or vegetable each day of the week:

**Monday:** RED—such as tomatoes, strawberries, watermelon, apples & grapes

**Tuesday:** BLUE/PURPLE—such as blueberries, purple cabbage, eggplant & blue potatoes

**Wednesday:** YELLOW/ORANGE—such as peaches, carrots, oranges, apricots & sweet corn

**Thursday:** GREEN—such as artichokes, asparagus, avocados, broccoli, lettuces, grapes & pears

**Friday:** WHITE/TAN—such as bananas, potatoes, mushrooms, onions, garlic & cauliflower

## Participation for Families and Kids

- Make eating fruits and veggies fun. Decorate dishes with faces or figures made from fruits and veggies.
- Create a kid's coloring and activity sheet that doubles as a placemat and incorporates the Fruits & Veggie—More Matters message.
- Give sets of stickers and cards to kids that they can use to track their fruit and veggie consumption at home.
- Add fruits and veggies to your kid's menu--100% juice (boxes), fresh fruit, applesauce, canned fruit cocktail, and raisin boxes.

## Get Your Staff Involved

- Offer tastings of fruit and vegetable dishes.
- Encourage staff to wear Fruit & Veggie—More Matters buttons
- Run a contest to reward those who sell the most fruit and vegetable menu items.



Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) at 302-235-2329; fax to 302-235-5555; or write to 5341 Limestone Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.

Learn more about PBH at [www.pbhfoundation.org](http://www.pbhfoundation.org)

Learn more about Fruits & Veggies—More Matters at [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org)



Produce for Better Health  
Foundation



# Promotion Ideas for Foodservice Operators

## Generate Publicity

- Consider partnering with a local supermarket or shopping mall to create a fruit and veggie recipe that will be featured in your restaurant.
- Sponsor a nutrition event and invite your local media.
- Participate in the Fruit & Veggie—More Matters Excellence Awards to share your efforts and successes with others.

## Celebrate National Fruits & Veggies—More Matters Month in September

- Offer brochures or fact sheets, put out table tents, build fruit and vegetable displays, and decorate your facilities with Fruits & Veggies—More Matters posters, balloons, and/or fruit and vegetable crepe ornaments. You can order Fruit & Veggie—More Matters materials at [www.pbhfoundation.org](http://www.pbhfoundation.org)

## Ideas for Licensed FVMM Foodservice Members

(Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation for more information on licensing)

- Print the Fruit & Veggies—More Matters logo and message on tray liners or napkins.
- Put the Fruit & Veggies—More Matters logo in the window of your establishment.
- Put the Fruit & Veggies—More Matters logo next to menu items that meet the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters recipe criteria.



About Produce for Better Health Foundation

Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) consumer education foundation whose purpose is to motivate more people to eat more fruits and vegetables to improve public health. PBH is a member and co-chair of the National Fruit & Vegetable Alliance, consisting of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and industry working in collaboration to expand the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® health initiative. Fruits & Veggies—More Matters is the nation's largest public-private, fruit and vegetable, nutrition education initiative with Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Coordinators in each state, territory, and the military.

Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) at 302-235-2329; fax to 302-235-5555; or write to 5341 Limestone Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.

Learn more about PBH at [www.pbhfoundation.org](http://www.pbhfoundation.org)

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Produce for Better Health Foundation



# Your Call-to-Action: Be a PBH Donor

**PBH is leading the effort** to a healthier America by promoting increased fruit and vegetable consumption . . . working alongside government agencies, non-profit organizations, and members of the fruit and vegetable industry.

**PBH donors are 600 strong and counting;** together we are dedicated to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, in all forms, and supporting the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® national public health initiative.

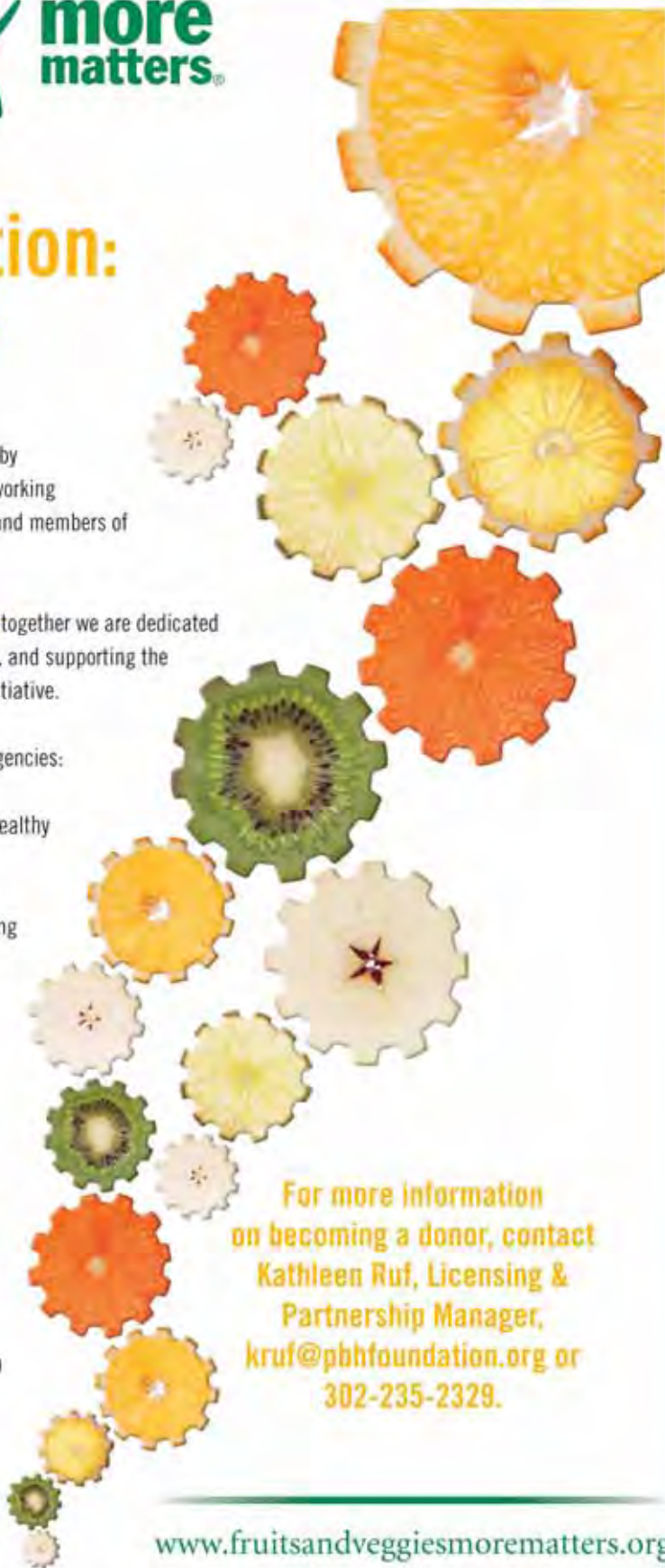
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- Insurance Companies who want to see the number of nutrition-related diseases reduced.
- Government Agencies who want to see a healthier America.
- Foodservice operators who want to cater to guests' demands for healthier menu items.

**Be part of this growing movement** to improve the health of all Americans. Encourage your company to support our efforts to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables by joining PBH today!



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# A Look At Traceability

Part I of II: Are we ready to make use of the tools available to meet the milestones?

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

**Produce traceability is a work in progress. Standards have been set, but the actual rules of engagement have largely been left up to the players — sellers and buyers along with a host of vendors of software, consulting, systems and hardware.**

Heading into July, the deadline for Milestone 3 of the much talked-about Produce Traceability Initiative, or PTI, is a mere 90 days away. Milestone 3 specifies that brand owners, such as growers, shippers, packers and processors, must provide GTINs — or case-level Global Trade Identification Numbers — to their buyers, making this move the first defined interaction between different parts of the supply chain. Milestone 3 is not case traceability; it is, rather, case identification of the product and producer, a critical step in the long, arduous journey of traceability, but not the whole race.

As of deadline, the Best Practices information for this process was still being developed. Hopes

are high and commitment is strong; many questions remain and trepidations are still considerable. Milestone 3 represents a benchmark of how well and how smoothly buyers and sellers will cooperate to achieve clear traceability of produce at the case level by the end of 2012. From then on, there will be a steady drumbeat to develop the technology to make traceability of the produce supply chain from field to fork possible, practical and fully visible.

## GETTING STARTED

For PTI, getting started means obtaining a unique company identifier or prefix using the GS1 standard. This is available by application online at [www.GS1US.org](http://www.GS1US.org). Application fee and annual renewal costs are based on overall company revenues. The number of digits in available prefixes varies, and this number determines the number of digits that can be used to identify individual products and packing configurations in a GTIN code.

“The GS1 standard was chosen for PTI because it is used and accepted as a global standard in more than 145 countries and over two million companies,” explains Gary Fleming, vice president of industry technology and standards for the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association (PMA).

Don Walborn, sales strategist at Agware, a Franwell Inc. company producing agricultural software, in Lakeland, FL, remarks, “Most of the current discussion is about the tools of traceability — barcodes, RFID, technology — but they only support and make possible the objective, which is providing for a quick, efficient and accurate audit trail that assures, if needed, a way to identify every transaction that has occurred to a specific product or group of compromised products. Only when these transactions are identified can the determination be made as to the nature and scope of the event.”

“For agriculture, changing the mindset about traceability and supply chain visibility may be a bigger issue than the expense, the software and hardware,” admits Dave Donat, president of software provider, Produce Pro Inc., based in



Milestone 3 of the PTI requires brand owners to provide case-level GTINs to their buyers by the third quarter of 2009.

Woodridge, IL.

Walborn agrees, noting, "People don't have to do everything at once. Think ahead, but start with PTI. The first steps are set in place ways to share data one step up and one step back in a transparent way both can handle."

Elliott Grant, chief marketing officer of Redwood City, CA-based YottaMark Inc., producer of HarvestMark software, points out, "Currently, the onus of implementing this segment of traceability is on the grower/shipper. They're working on putting a structure in place to allow data sharing and synchronization. If they can incorporate the GTIN and date-specific lot number as barcodes, it helps protect the producer and there's an incentive to make the system as precise as possible. In a sense, it can mean you have the ability to prove a negative — my product was not involved in this compromising event — a business advantage."

"Start early by adding the lot number as a barcode to the case and pallet," recommends John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software, headquartered in Boise, ID.

In the end, a process diagram of traceability is fairly straight-forward and simple: enable all the players to accurately and consistently identify and describe products in a

number format that can be used electronically, shared from link to link in the supply chain and made visible and transparent when needed.

**"Increasingly, we recommend to shed packers and shippers to avoid blending whenever possible and create more distinct lot breaks."**

**— Ray Connelly  
Famous Software**


The challenges come in implementation as long time produce supply chain practices — field packing, repacking and co-mingling, for example — demand careful review and creative approaches to maintaining the integrity of the data.

## DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

Handling and coding product that is mixed lot, co-mingled or repacked presents significant challenges and is driving changes in packing practices. In theory, the process diagram continues as usual: GTINs and lot numbers of several products become represented in a new GTIN and lot number in a many-to-one concept. The integrity of the data is preserved in the new number. In the case of a recall, the co-mingled code pulls in everything making up that product.

Henri Morris, president and CEO of Houston, TX-based Edible Software, reports, "Our program generally takes over at the packing shed. Often, products such as avocados, melons, potatoes and tomatoes are commodities that are co-mingled in some way. In a co-mingled lot, you can narrow, but not pinpoint a single lot."

"Increasingly, we recommend to shed packers and shippers to avoid blending whenever possible and create more distinct lot breaks," notes Ray Connelly, manager of strategic accounts for Famous Software LLC, headquartered in Fresno, CA. "It's one reason why we work with clients to use three modules of implementation — field, shed and second handler or distributor who has to receive codes."




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Reader Service # 37

## Traceability: ARE YOU READY?

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Reader Service # 52

## Questions to Consider

**T**here's no single solution for the entire produce industry so careful thinking about both current situations and needs, along with future plans and possibilities, has to be the foundation. There's a wide range of services and features available through software providers. Consultants simply conforming to the milestones of PTI work in a step-by-step path to traceability may not provide some of the future benefits software suppliers envision.

These are just the start of a list of possible questions to ask before signing on with any provider.

- Does my company need an outside provider or can we do it ourselves? Do we have the necessary expertise?
- What are my customers asking for or demanding?
- If I'm a small operation, how can I manage the process less expensively?
- Do my harvest and packing practices dictate my choices?
- What happens if my product is repacked or co-mingled?
- What about cross-docking?
- Is it possible, or even likely, that any of my international customers might demand a different standard of traceability?
- Can my investment and efforts in traceability serve other objectives besides food safety?

Will Pape, executive vice president of business development for TraceGains Inc., based in Longmont, CO, uses an analogy — The Cone of Traceability — to illustrate the concept. "The more you move to the narrow top of the cone, fewer distinct and unique lots are involved. There's better identification, less risk and better protection."

Pape was a co-founder of VeriFone, a developer of electronic credit card transaction protocols and the transmittal network that went along with it, providing him with serious experience in data management software that must interface between many different systems.

number of cases shipped; it is possible to start assigning GTIN and lot numbers and managing a database for under \$5,000-a-year. Features such as tracking shipments or co-mingled lots can be added as needed. We use a Web site for data entry and it can interface with standard ERP [Enterprise Resource Planning] systems."

Santa Clara, CA-based Redline Solutions

## SUBSCRIPTIONS AND STARTER KITS

Most software developers and vendors recognize the cost concerns of small operations and have worked to develop techniques to get started. Turnkey solutions are becoming more readily available.

The TraceGains approach is a Web-based service, requiring no software and meeting GS1-128 label standards. Pape details the software, "It lets you certify that product has left an operation with full compliance of all production and safety standards and also can be used to clear product of involvement in a category recall.

Silver Creek also offers a hosted service for less than \$300-a-month per user. Carpenter reports, "Our program uses well-tested, quality, off-the-shelf modules adapted to the needs of produce cost effectively."

Mike Dodson, president of Fresno, CA-based Lotpath, began offering a hosted service built for external traceability on the Internet in 2007. He comments, "Organizations can subscribe with fees based on the

**Most software developers and vendors recognize the cost concerns of small operations and have worked to develop techniques to get started.**

has assembled a starter kit for PTI. Todd Baggett, president and CEO, expresses, "Everything to get started to meet PTI milestones is included with the software — a label printer and supplies, labels and technical support — all for about \$3,500.

"In addition to a program to support PTI, FoodLogIQ makes use of Web 2.0 technology, rather similar to Facebook," explains Kerry Farrell, vice president of sales and marketing for the Durham, NC firm. "We're working with retailers, the state of North Carolina, the 40-growers-strong Eastern Carolina Organics Co-op and some individual growers to create a GS1-compliant community focusing on locally grown product and

meeting the requirements of PTI. The retailer creates the community and determines supplier compliance." Farrell continues, "Growers sign up and can upload audits, certificates and labels to a portal. The system can print labels, meeting the standards for GTIN, lot number time/date stamping. It is also the vehicle for advance ship notices. Small growers can start with this for about \$30 a month."

**"Picture the day when grower and supply chain partners tackle what we estimate is now a built-in 25 percent shrink factor."**

**— Anthony Trotta  
Grow My Profits LLC**

## NICHES IN SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

With traceability becoming the wave of the future, more and more software developers, service providers and vendors are offering products designed to help the produce industry understand and get on board with PTI. Few are new to the industry and many of the principals grew up in agriculture. In traceability, they find they can marry a love of agriculture with an expertise in software and technology. For some, traceability products grew out of accounting and ERP software and practices. Virtually all urge their clients and customers to look well beyond the important concepts of food safety and the ability to track back the journey of a product to its origin. Rather, these companies seek to enhance supply chain profitability, return on investment (ROI), offer flexibility to adapt to changing standards and consumer connection.

Some providers focus on the consulting side of the business, aiding clients in developing strategies to implement PTI and then move beyond it. "Our goal is to help clients put together solutions that specifically fit their needs," says Anthony Trotta, CEO of Grow My Profits LLC, a Lees Summit, MO-based consulting practice with extensive experience in agriculture. "PTI is just the start. We need to get the supply side to bet-

ter understand what a positive move this is. The supply side has the most to gain by making the whole supply chain more visible. Picture the day when grower and supply chain partners tackle what we estimate is now a built-in 25 percent shrink factor."

Charles Shafae's dProduceMan Software, headquartered in Half Moon Bay, CA, uses a more nuts and bolts approach, employing the company's well-established accounting software program for agriculture and adapting it to the needs of PTI and later traceability needs. "We begin at point of harvest and move through the shed, producing lot numbers with descriptions, grower ID, locations and ship/receive dates," he details. "We've been doing this since 1980."

Other suppliers have followed a similar path. For the last couple of decades, they have serviced grower/shippers, distributors and processors with accounting, inventory and ERP software. None of them think PTI implementation is particularly complicated, perhaps because they are thinking in terms of logical software architecture. Each company offers programs plus individual features that various clients may want or need.

## LOOKING AHEAD

For everyone in fresh produce that ships or receives, the technology is available, scal-

able by size and basically affordable for players large to small. Agware's Walborn believes, "Most agricultural software packages today are fairly well-positioned to function in a true traceability environment."

Connelly of Famous Software agrees, remarking, "We have the technology; it's the implementation that's individual. The key is how we work to mitigate risk and control legal liability."

Beyond future milestones, software and technology, focus today still comes back to getting the cases and the numbers put together. That tends to mean some kind of label. Because large chunks of the industry still field pack, figuring the best way to accurately match a label to the product is challenging. Service providers generally advise clients to do as little labeling in the field as possible, as the combination of printers and field packing can be a risky business. Some producers print labels in advance and take them to the field. Others label back at a cold storage. The ideal solution remains to be seen.

In Part II of our look at PTI and full traceability, we will explore making use of the technologies, hardware and approaches to implementing a full product traceability system that follows various product through to the consumer. **pb**

**THANK YOU!**

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# New York State Vegetables Offer Ample Opportunities

*From corn and cabbage to onions and potatoes, summertime in New York means one thing: local vegetables.*

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

**Fertile soil. Adequate rains. Temperate climate. These natural attributes are among the reasons why New York ranks fifth in the nation in vegetable production, according to the USDA NASS New York Field Office's (NYFO) Vegetable Report, released in January, 2009.**

Crop diversity is another profitable characteristic. Ed Mandel, a Johnstown, NY-based regional produce buyer for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., headquartered in Bentonville, AR, says, "Customers can't believe all the types of produce we source locally, and we are increasing this volume and variety. For example, we've recently connected with a New York grower of greenhouse tomatoes on-the-vine that we now carry."

Add to this that some 40 percent of the U.S. population lives within a day or less drive away from New York's vegetable crop growers and you've got a recipe for successful marketing and promotion that put \$468 million into the state's coffers in 2008.

## FAMILY FARMS

New York is not a one-size-fits-all state when it comes to farms. Jessica Chittenden, director of communications for the New York State (NYS) Department of Agriculture & Markets, headquartered in Albany, NY, shares, "We have farms of all sizes and commodities. The vast majority of them, probably 95 percent or more, are family owned and operated. While roughly half of our 34,000 farms report earnings of less than \$10,000 annually, and could be considered small farms or hobby farms, they are the fastest growing farm size sector of the industry. The remaining 17,000 farms make up the majority of the state's agricultural production."

Robin Root and his brother began Albion, NY-based Root Bros. Farm in 1970, following in the footsteps of their father. "When we started, I thought if we could get up to 1,500 acres that would be huge. Today, we farm 55,000 acres and have



Photo courtesy of Jen Munkvold

**Chef Dan Barber of Blue Hill at Stone Barns bases his menu on what's local and in season.**

diversified into field corn, soybeans and wheat as rotation crops in order to minimize disease and insect pressures.

Eleven-thousand-acre Torrey Farms, in Elba, NY, is run by the family's 11th generation farmer, reveals vice president, Maureen Torrey Marshall. "We're starting on our 12th," she asserts proudly.

Major investments are also a way of life. Mike Riner, a sales associate at Cy Farms LLC., based in Elba, NY, relates, "We just bought two new cabbage harvesters this season, each costing \$540,000." Three years ago, Cy Farms installed a new cooling facility with an integrated loading dock to reduce the possibility of a cold chain break. "Salad greens are highly perishable and the capability of sourcing greens regionally is advantageous in the eyes of retail buyers," Riner reasons.

Clearly, food safety is a top priority to New York growers. Laurie Gregori, sales manager at Kent, NY-based Lynn-Ette & Sons Inc., explains, "Most retailers won't accept product from a farm that doesn't have a third party audit and traceability, so this is a marketing advantage for us."

In January, the NYS Department of Agriculture



announced the New York State Good Agricultural Practices Certification Assistance Program, a new program that offers financial support for growers and handlers of fresh produce to obtain third-party Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) audits to verify effective food safety practices. The department reimburses up to \$750 per eligible applicant, using USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funds provided through the 2008 Federal Farm Bill.

**“We have farms of all sizes and commodities. The vast majority of them, probably 95 percent or more, are family owned and operated.”**

**— Jessica Chittenden  
New York State  
Department of  
Agriculture & Markets**

## TOP CROPS

New York's growing season is at its peak for about four months during the heart of the summer. However, harvests start as early as May with lettuce, beet greens and asparagus and end as late as November with crops such as broccoli, carrots and mustard greens. Some vegetables, such as cabbage, are available nearly year-round.

Chittenden of NYS Department of the Agriculture & Markets reports, “New York ranks second in the nation for cabbage and fifth for onions.” Two of the state's five marketing orders are for research and development of cabbage and onion.

**Cabbage:** Green cabbage, red cabbage and Savoy cabbage are all grown in New York. Riner of Cy Farms reveals some people believe New York grows the finest quality cabbage in terms of consistent flavor and storability. “We're fortunate here in Western New York that we sit between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and get timely rains. There's no need to irrigate crops.”

New York cabbage typically sells east of the Mississippi River. However, there is an exception to every rule, and Riner adds, “We have one customer west of the river — a

# New Program Helps Sell Potatoes



**M**any retailers have long merchandised individual varieties of apples by use, signing some as good for pie-making and others for eating out-of-hand. A new program spearheaded by John Mishanec, an Albany, NY-based vegetable IPM extension area educator for Cornell University, headquartered in Albany, NY, aims to put information into retailers' hands to mimic this merchandizing method for the state's many unique varieties of potatoes.

This first-of-its kind, promotional program is key for New York's fresh-market potato growers, says Mishanec, who adds that Railex's run from Pullman, WA, to Rotterdam, NY, has the potential to populate the East Coast with cheaper and better-known varieties of West Coast potatoes, thus offering stiff competition for New York potato growers.

However, “Potatoes are localized in how they grow. West Coast varieties don't do well in the East,” Mishanec points out.

Cornell University's potato breeding program, one of 10 to 12 such breeding programs for potatoes in the nation, has developed several new varieties that grow well in the state and are suited for the fresh market. These include white-, red-, yellow- and blue-skinned potatoes.

“The first goal was to gather culinary information on a list we narrowed to 17 varieties of potato varieties grown in New

York,” says Mishanec, who received a Food and Agricultural Industry Development (FAID) grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets in 2006 for the project.

Mishanec accomplished this by trialing the potatoes through chef-instructors and their students at three culinary schools in the state. He then graduated to foodservice, where he distributed 10 pounds each of six varieties of potatoes to some 60 white-tablecloth restaurants in the state. Input from the various culinary schools and selected chefs were used to rate the potato varieties as to what type of preparation they were best suited. This led to the development of the ‘New York Potato Culinary Usage Guide,’ which debuted in 2008.

Mishanec says, “Consumers, whether they are the public, produce buyers or chefs will now be able to know how a specific potato variety will perform. Growers will find this especially useful, as they will have an extra marketing tool to be able to sell their potatoes by culinary use.”

The next step — putting this information to use at retail — is near. “Rochester, NY-based Wegmans is the first major retailer to approach us,” reveals Mishanec. “The company is interested in incorporating the usage information into signs above displays of the various types of New York-grown potatoes they sell.”

**pb**

foodservice customer who buys bulk 1,000-pound totes for making coleslaw.”

As for fresh market cabbage for retail, “We fill the market at the right time, or about mid-July. However, we don't want to get ahead of Virginia,” explains Root of Root Bros. Farms.

There's still some competition, adds Gregori. “New Jersey comes into the mar-

ket ahead of us, but when there's an overlap and more volume, prices can drop. We also compete somewhat with Canada.”

**Onions:** It's the black dirt or muck soils in Western New York, as well as Orange County west of New York City, that is fertile growing ground for onions, especially yellow onions.

Andrew Gurda, owner/manager for A.

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Curda Produce Co. Inc., based in Middleton, NY, says, "We start harvest around the first of September and will have onions out of storage into the beginning of May."

According to Ron Myruski, senior sales manager at Raymond Myruski LLC, headquartered in Goshen, NY, states that compete with New York on onions include Michigan, Ohio and to a certain extent, Canada. "Yet, what our onions are known for is their pungent flavor that holds up during cooking."

It is indeed the high-sugar/low-water content of the state's onions that led a consortium of 13 growers in Oswego County to form New York Bold LLC in 2001, and then partner with Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc., headquartered in Greencastle, PA, in 2007, to broaden its marketing efforts. This flavor attribute is marketed with the catchphrases, "Onions with Attitude" and "America's Cooking Onion."

Judy Queale-Dunsmoor, president of sales and marketing for New York Bold, reveals, "We grow a baby bold, which is a smaller onion that can be cooked whole or purchased by customers who only want a little bit of onion. It is packed in a 2-pound bag. Then, there's the medium-sized bold that is packed in 2- and 3-pound bags. Finally, there's a jumbo bold that is typically sold PLU-stickered in bulk. We also offer custom sizing and packaging."

Queale-Dunsmoor adds, "The buzz words today are 'buy local.' What sets us apart from our competition is that our label details where the onions are grown, not just where they are packed. Consumers today are more interested than ever in knowing this."

In general, the state's onion growers pack product into two different types of bags — an upright bag with colorful recipes and a standard mesh bag. Myruski says, "Many retailers are changing back to the standard mesh. This is due to cost, and the fact that consumers can see the product inside better. There is also less plastic involved and better breathability for the onions."

**Sweet Corn:** Rich organic soil "makes for sweet corn. We grow the super sweet varieties, which is generally available from July 1 through October," reveals Curda. "However, this really cuts it close for Fourth of July promotions."

**Potatoes:** New York ranks 11th nationally in potato production, according to a USDA NASS NYFO report, *New York Potato Production Up, Potato Stocks Down*, published on December 16, 2008.

Robert Rapasadi, vice president and field representative of Isadore A. Rapasadi & Sons Inc., based in Canastota, NY, says, "New York is known for its white potatoes. Yukon

## Top 10 Vegetables By Volume

Vegetable	Volume (pounds)
1. Cabbage	5,841,000
2. Onions	4,141,000
3. Sweet Corn	2,863,000
4. Pumpkins	1,062,000
5. Squash	760,000
6. Tomatoes	513,000
7. Cucumber	468,000
8. Snap Beans	428,000
9. Bell Peppers	260,000
10. Eggplant	113,000

Source: USDA NASS NY FO

gold has moved to the forefront and has grown over the last 20 years. We also grow red potatoes." Availability is from early August to May. We sell from Maine to Florida, although we also compete with Maine, and Canada is a big player, too."

### MARKETING PROGRAMS

Pride of New York is the state's marketing and promotional program. The initiative spurs interest and demand for New York grown food and agricultural products. It assists farmers by marketing their products via the on-pack Pride of New York logo and encouraging retailers, restaurants and distributors to highlight the state's products they use and sell by displaying this logo.

**Retail:** Customers in New York look forward to Wal-Mart's annual Pride of New York Harvest Festival. "We typically run this promotion the last week of July or the first week of August," Wal-Mart's Mandel says. "Last year, we held it at our new store in Albany and invited eight to nine local growers to showcase their produce and hand out information about the items they grow."

This isn't the only time Wal-Mart features locally grown produce, Mandel adds. "The key for us is to let customers know we

have locally grown produce in-store and we do this by placing the Pride of New York logo on all signage for these products.”

Signage is also important at ShopRite Supermarkets, based in Edison, NJ. Dan McCleerey, merchandising manager for produce and floral, explains, “We not only let customers know the product is grown in New York, but where in New York. We have a wipe board where we list what’s available that day and where it’s from. It makes a huge impact.”

According to Mandel, “More and more customers of organic produce are asking for locally grown fruits and vegetables. When we offer these types of products, both the number of customers that visit the stores and the sales go up. Customers want to support the local community.”

Over the past five years, the Pride of New York’s retail program has grown. What began as one or two participating retailers has increased to 13 major retailers representing over 450 stores from Buffalo to Long Island in 2008. Phil Bibbo, who manages the Pride of New York Program, reports, “Locally grown produce sold in stores that utilized the Pride of New York program to some extent — be it point-of-sale materials or for sourcing — saw an increase in sales of state

**“We not only let customers know the product is grown in New York, but where in New York. We have a wipe board where we list what’s available that day and where it’s from. It makes a huge impact.”**

**— Dan McCleerey  
ShopRite Supermarkets**

grown product of 20 to 48 percent.”

**Foodservice:** New York-grown produce is something Dan Barber, chef/owner of Blue Hill in New York City and Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills, NY, uses

abundantly on his menus. “January through March, around 30 percent of the food on our menus comes from producers within a 250-mile radius. That percentage swells to about 90 percent during the summer.” It’s no surprise Barber was chosen as one of *Time* magazine’s Top 100 people for 2009.

At Blue Hill at Stone Barns, where the tagline is appropriately, “Know Thy Farmer,” traditional menus are non-existent. Instead, Barber and his staff create multi-course ‘farmer’s feasts’ unique to each table. Barber explains, “What we serve depends on the season and the week. This new system gives us the flexibility to use our ingredients efficiently and to their best advantage. This way, we get produce that’s chosen for our locality and picked at the optimal time. The truth is local ingredients offer a flavor and a personal story better than any seasoning I could provide.”

Restaurateur members of the Pride of New York can use the program’s logo on their menus to highlight the use of local foods. They are also eligible to apply for cooperative advertising funding, up to \$5,000, to promote the use of specialty crops, such as local fruits and vegetables, in addition to maple and honey products, on their menus. **pb**

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Reader Service #36

# Sustainability In San Joaquin

*Though most companies in the San Joaquin Valley are adopting sustainability measures, controversy continues to arise when some try to promote sustainability.*

BY MIKE DUFF

**The San Joaquin Valley is a region of abundant cultivation that makes its way to food retailers across the United States and internationally, and one that is determined to apply sustainability principles to improve the products it offers and maintain the viability of the land.**

Yet, sustainability is only one consideration on the minds of growers, packers and shippers operating out of the valley, a growing region confronting transformative issues that already have put some operations out of business.

Sustainability has made growing in the region more environmentally friendly and even more efficient, as growers and the rest of the distribution network more closely associate stewardship of land and business. The issue has become more important as economic, social and regulatory developments put pressure on players in the distribution system from the ground up. At the same time, a question arises within the industry about if and how growers, packers and shippers ought to be presenting their environmental stewardship efforts to the public.

## THE WAY OF THE FUTURE

Based in Parlier, CA, FreshSense has been promoting environmental issues as an integral part of its go-to-market strategy. The company provides consumer research, marketing strategies, promotion and quality standards and practices for three brands — Ripe'n Ready, Treehouse Kids and Zeal, a

label covering sustainable tree fruit and citrus. Fowler Packing Co. Inc. and Sunwest Fruit Co. Inc., based in Fowler, CA, and Parlier, CA, respectively, are the FreshSense grower members that produce Zeal tree fruit under standards meant to guarantee it lives up to consumer expectations for a brand that makes sustainability its basis of differentiation.

To be certified to the standards established for the Zeal brand, tree fruit and citrus must meet strict requirements involving a range of farm inputs, which reach far beyond simple pesticide use, including integrated pest management, wildlife management, soil, water and air quality, pesticide and fertilizer storage, irrigation, post-harvest practices and employee training. Zeal fruit is even packed in an uncoated, corrugated material produced with wood products certified by the Sustainable Forests Initiative.

In April, Zeal was recognized at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 11th annual Environmental Awards ceremony by Regional Administrator, Laura Yoshii, for promoting sustainable farming practices and increasing consumer awareness of sustainability. Blair Richardson, CEO of FreshSense, notes it is the only initiative emerging from a Central California business to garner such a distinction. While the recognition is welcome, Richardson adds FreshSense has no desire to rest on its laurels. "We're looking well into the future and considering what to do next as agriculture is getting to be more and more about sourcing. How we are treating the environment is an issue."

Richardson explains the Zeal brand is meant to catch the attention of consumers, but also allows retailers to recognize suppliers that are truly committed to agricultural sustainability. "We're making the effort because we believe it is the right thing to do on many different levels," he says. "Consumers expect that we will be good stewards of the land. We wanted to bring to light what we are doing."

The challenge comes in differentiating product so retailers can position it relative to their own customer demographics and demands. "You can only do so much with a piece of fruit," Richardson says. "To survive, you have to provide consistent, high-quality products and services to retailers. The next



Before harvest, the San Joaquin Valley is awash in color of bright, blooming nectarine trees.

E. Shaunn Alderman

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step is to reach into the retail channel and replace what the retailer no longer has the marketing and promotional support to do — what the retailer once did.”

### SUSTAINABILITY AS A MARKETING TOOL?

Yet, not all San Joaquin Valley operators think that marketing sustainability is the best idea. Among them is Steve Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development at The HMC Group Marketing Inc., a vertically integrated tree fruit operation, based in Kingsburg, CA. The company offers the labels HMC, Chelsea Farms, Traver Ranch, Grape Escape and the Lunch Bunch. Just about its entire California operation is located in the San Joaquin Valley, within 40 miles of its headquarters.

Kenfield characterized sustainability as an issue that has “touched everybody,” yet it isn’t necessarily an issue that drives sales, even for those who pursue it diligently. “I don’t think it’s a marketing point of differentiation. We’re active in that area, but the bottom line is sustainability is a matter of staying in business. It’s something that, like food safety, leaders do as a matter of course, rather than brand, and try to get a premium for it.”

## Help From UC Davis

**S**an Joaquin Valley growers have helped in adopting sustainable practices whether for economic, sales or social reasons. The University of California Davis has developed major programs aimed at researching, promoting and applying sustainable agriculture practices. Scientists affiliated with the university travel through the Valley conducting a variety of projects. One such endeavor investigates the interaction of bees and almond trees in an effort to help avert hive collapse disorder and aid growers in ensuring effective pollination.

Professional organizations also participate in UC Davis sustainability programs, among them the Sacramento, CA-based California Dried Plum Board (CDPB). Funded by grower and processor assessments, the Board researches better and more efficient ways to grow and handle dried plums and has worked with the university on projects

including integrated pest management that have led to improved practices.

Rich Peterson, executive director of the CDPB, hopes to find alternatives for traditional spraying procedures through monitoring and the use of beneficial insects. “We’re trying to find beneficial aphids to get rid of ones that are pests and setting up monitoring procedures that allow growers to skip sprays if they are not needed,” he says. “It’s expensive, and farmers don’t want to spend the time and money if it’s unnecessary.”

Peterson relates UC Davis not only provides expertise, but facilities offering California growers low cost access to university labs. UC Davis programs also include development and testing of new fruit varieties, which already produced three new alternatives to the traditional French plum last year. **pb**

Jon P. Zaninovich, vice president of Delano, CA-based Jasmine Vineyards Inc., which grows table grapes and almonds in

addition to wine production, took a similar point of view. “In our vineyards, we’ve practiced sustainability,” he reports. “For us, it’s

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Reader Service # 5



# WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY?

PMA President and CEO Bryan Silbermann's annual State of the Industry Address is always a highlight of Fresh Summit. But in these uncertain times, his insightful analysis is more important than ever. Silbermann will discuss how current economic conditions will continue to impact the industry and he'll explore the unique opportunities that this unprecedented global economy presents.

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been more of business development effort as we're trying to grow top-quality fruit and to keep the vines viable. Marketing is something people want to put on top. They're jumping on the bandwagon just to sell fruit."

Conventional growers have a credibility challenge to overcome if they want to market sustainability, as many consumers who are most concerned about the issue already have identified the product designations that they believe best address their concerns. Bill Schene, a sales associate at Valliwide Marketing Inc., headquartered in Reedley, CA, which moves both organic and conventional stone fruit and grapes, notes a couple of companies had tried promoting sustainability, but that the issue has been caught up with organics to the extent that people who want to ensure they're purchasing sustainable produce turn to organics first. Whether because consumers trust the claims natural growers make more or simply because they can conveniently buy their established products in local stores, the organic presence makes it tough for a conventional producer to break through with a sustainability message.

## AN INTEGRAL ISSUE

Adopting sustainability initiatives is another matter. From a practical point of view, enhancing sustainability makes sense as it can provide cost savings in some cases and is almost inevitable, given the legislative and regulatory climate both nationally and — for San Joaquin growers — locally. For example, insect fumigation is tightly controlled, boosting its expense, which makes minimizing pesticide application in a grower's interest. "California is pretty tough, just in our laws and what you can and can't apply to a farm here, making it very expensive," admits Schene. "A lot of farmers are practicing everything they can."

For Los Angeles, CA-based The Giumarra Bros. Co. Inc., sustainability is an integral issue affecting various levels of the operation, reports Hillary Brick, vice president of marketing. The company's Reedley tree fruit division uses integrated pest management to ensure nature is jointly working for the same purposes. Giumarra is using good bugs to control bad, applying fungicides in precise applications and mounting mating disruption dispensers on trees to lure the female Oriental Fruit Moth and keep the worm it would eventually produce out of the company's fruit. "This one IPM tool alone has eliminated the need for an organophosphate pesticide application," she explains. "This dispenser provides 90 days of protection, enough to protect the fruit until harvest."

# Addressing Sustainability Issue

**S**ustainability is an important issue in the San Joaquin Valley growing area, but the term can fairly be applied to something other than the environment. The survival of the valley is involved in more ways than one. As PRODUCE BUSINESS details this month, San Joaquin Valley growers are intent on being effective stewards of the land they cultivate and the entire produce infrastructure is backing their efforts with additional help coming from local institutions, such as the University of California at Davis.

Yet, not every institution in California is as concerned with the health of the agricultural community and not every environmental debate is taking the concerns of the produce industry to heart. In our September "Green" issue, PRODUCE BUSINESS will look at the broader issues of environment, regulation and other challenges that are impacting the San Joaquin Valley growing area and how sustainability, for many, is translating into a fight for survival.

The company also uses drip irrigation to efficiently manage water resources. "By delivering only the necessary amounts of water and nutrients to our crops, we are able to conserve our resources," Brick adds. "Responsible choices and application of soil additives are an important part of a sustainable program and are essential for a successful, long-term program. Crop rotation is also part of our program."

Further along the processing stream, Giumarra uses recyclable packaging for most of its products. Plans call for increasing the proportion of recycled packaging as viable materials enter the market. "Our goal is to pack all of our products in recyclable containers as they become available," Brick discloses. "We're also beginning to use compostable packaging for items such as bags and clamshells."

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Don Goforth, director of marketing for the Reedley, CA-based Family Tree Farms Marketing LLC, believes, ultimately, sustainability has become a business practice retailers — reflecting consumer attitudes — expect growers, packers and shippers to adopt and develop in concert with the evolution of the market. The expectation is particularly pronounced as it applies to producers who are focusing on better product.

"We have taken a position that we're

**PRODUCE BUSINESS is also inviting the produce industry to enter the debate by encouraging readers to contribute advice by sending an email to [forum@producebusiness.com](mailto:forum@producebusiness.com).**

The developments that are weighing in the San Joaquin Valley have their equivalents throughout North America and, even in those cases when circumstances might not be exactly similar, what occurs in one geographic location eventually will be felt across the map. New ideas are needed and concerns addressed can initiate a debate that draws in consumers, regulators and politicians who otherwise will make decisions affecting the industry without its input.

Other considerations are more difficult to address. Whether it's water, labor, credit or changing demands from retailers and consumers, the evolving issues are squeezing the life out of many valley operators. Some already have succumbed to the pressures, and the worry is that others may follow even within the year. **pb**

going to grow the best product and that has aligned us with the best retailers," Goforth notes. "When you are dealing with those people, issues such as food safety and sustainability are non-negotiables."

In fact, Goforth relates issues such as sustainability are routinely addressed in large measure to ensure problems never occur. Yet, as is true of many involved in the San Joaquin Valley growing area and various issues affecting it, Goforth is concerned the agricultural industry there doesn't receive the credit it deserves for constructive initiatives.

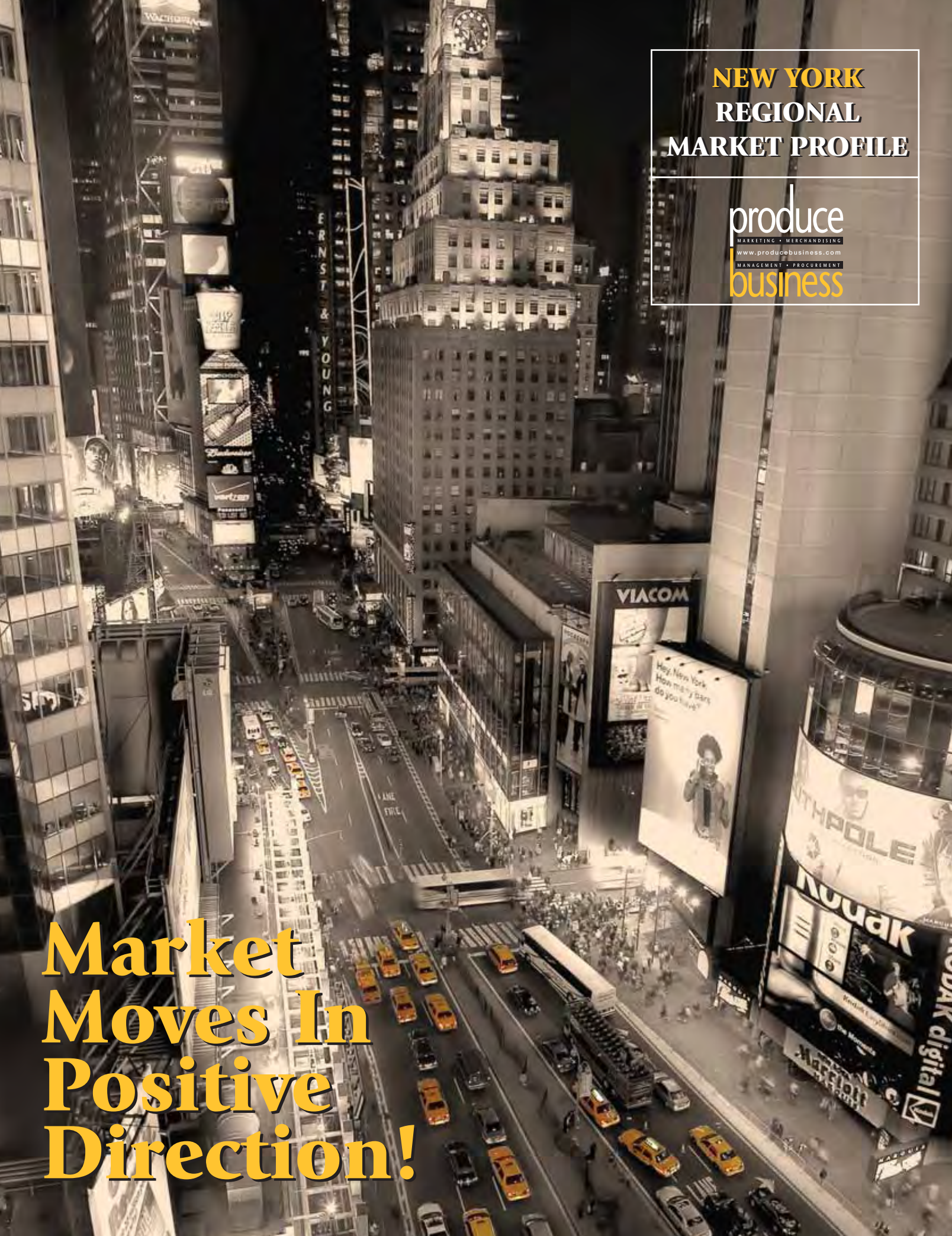
Take land use issues, for example. "You will not find a better steward of the soil than a farmer," Goforth argues. "When it comes to chemicals and pesticides, we are involved in absolutely minimal use. We are extensively involved in mating-disruption pheromones and non-chemical applications for pest control. It costs a lot of money to do that, but it's the right thing to do."

So, even in the case of an issue that San Joaquin growers, packers and shippers have been working hard to address, some disputes remain unresolved and any pesticide use — no matter how necessary to maintain yields and hold down price — is going to draw someone's ire. Yet, at least valley operators can point to progress made and draw satisfaction from taking the steps necessary to ensure the health of their businesses. **pb**

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# NEW YORK Leads The Way

*The economy may be facing challenges, but business in the Big Apple is still looking up.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN



**T**imes have changed for those in the produce business over the course of the past year. "Business has been rough in the last few months," admits Joe Palumbo, president of the New York Produce Trade Association and CEO of Top Banana LLC, merchants on the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, located in the Bronx, NY. "We're in uncharted waters here. We don't know where this is going. We'll get out of it, but everybody is trying to ride out the storm."



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Louie Langone, Robt. T Cochran & Co. Inc.



Ian Zimmerman, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Jim Maguire, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Jeff Schwartz, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.

Some businesses, such as Target Interstate Systems Inc., with offices at the Hunts Point Market, are hurting more than others. "The slowdown in the economy has made it more difficult for our trucks to get loads back to the produce growing areas, especially to the West Coast," says Paul Kazan, president. "We've also seen about a 15 percent drop in

demand for trucks since early Fall." Palumbo thinks many consumers are buying less produce and using as much as possible of what they buy, so less spoils in their refrigerators or otherwise goes to waste. Businesses here are doubling their efforts and tightening their belts in an effort to remain strong. For some, "You just push as

much stuff as you can," relates Louis Venuti, a sales associate at Ven-Co Produce Inc., merchants at the Hunts Point Market. Produce is poised to do better during hard times than other commodities, such as steel, for example, which saw prices drop off over 50 percent in the last year. "Our theory is that people have to eat in good times or bad. But what they eat and how often they eat changes," explains Myra Gordon, executive administrative director for the Hunts Point Terminal Cooperative Association Inc. based in the Bronx. She and others believe that with so many people "trading down," more expensive items are bound to suffer, while less expensive staples rally.

"I see signs of improvement. It's getting better. But buyers still want more necessities than luxuries," reports Paul Auerbach, president of South Hackensack, NJ-based Maurice A. Auerbach Inc., purveyors of bulk and packaged produce including garlic, asparagus, horseradish, pearl onions, frisee, radicchio, rhubarb and baby potatoes.

Regarding consumers' behavior of "trading down," Palumbo says, "You can eat potatoes — you don't have to have shiitake mushrooms."

Mario Andreani, general manager of S. Katzman Produce Inc., a merchant at the





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Paul Auerbach, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Josh Auerbach, Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.



Jim Renella, J. Renella Produce Inc.

Hunts Point Market, believes budgets are the bottom line these days. "I don't think it's commodity-driven. I think it's price-driven," he explains.

Some items are naturally going to stand

Terminal Produce Cooperative Association, which represents the markets' vendors, and co-owner of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., located at the Hunts Point Market.

Smaller margins are affecting some businesses. "I see the price levels on high-end goods lower than last year," explains Auerbach. Meanwhile, "The cost of operating the business hasn't changed."

But while some margins are down, New Yorkers still need produce. D'Arrigo reports, "Our market is pumping out the same amount as we did last year at this time."

Business is just fine at Robt. T. Cochran & Co. Inc., produce commission merchants based at the Hunts Point Market. "You would think that the basics — potatoes and turnips

and things — would sell really well," says Richard Cochran, president. Actually, he has seen very little change. "We keep rocking along, and I haven't heard of any layoffs at the market. In fact, we just hired a guy."

Some are even more optimistic. "I've heard in tough economic times, terminal markets thrive. We'll see if that holds true," relates Jimmy Margiotta, president of J Margiotta Co. LLC, a wholesaler located at the Hunts Point Market.

D'Arrigo notes, however, the economy has some effect on business. "Certain retail price points won't work as well as before and consumers will buy more carefully. The refrigerator shrink factor will have an effect — they won't want to overbuy and throw away."

**"DESPITE THE RECESSION, MOST PEOPLE STILL HAVE JOBS AND THEY STILL MAKE MONEY AND THEY STILL LIKE TO EAT WELL."**

JOHN GARCIA  
KRISP-PAK SALES CORP.

out as a good buy for the buck. "Bananas move well," declares Palumbo. "They're not as cheap as they were, but they're still one of the best values per pound."

Additionally, Gordon expects buying only seasonal merchandise will become more popular. "Unless they're economically priced, they won't move quantity," she explains. "People are not going to buy corn in the winter." She also believes this summer, more people will take a stab at growing items, such as tomatoes, in their yards or on their terraces.

But these are extreme cases. "Despite the recession, most people still have jobs and they still make money and they still like to eat well," says John Garcia, president of Krisp-Pak Sales Corp., a wholesale merchant at the Hunts Point Market.

Many at Hunts Point are not overly concerned. "I happen to think we're fairly untouched by the economy," says Matthew D'Arrigo, co-president of the Hunts Point

## PEANUTS, CRACKER JACK AND ... FRUIT SALAD?

Baseball fans enjoying the new Yankee Stadium this year can get their fill of healthful, tasty treats at Melissa's fruit cart, where items such as Pixie tangerines, bananas, apples, pears, oranges, dried corn, dried organic raisins and fresh-cut fruit salads are turning out to be a big hit. "They are looking at the possibility of adding a second stand, maybe next season," reveals Bill Schneider, director of marketing for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc..

The Los Angeles-based company pitched its idea for a fresh farmer's market concept to the Yankees last year prior to the stadium's opening. The result was a home run, so to speak. Today, the cart stands in a heavily trafficked area, just across from the press elevator, so naturally "it gets a lot of press," Schneider reports.

But even without the media, the stand was bound to be a success. "It gives fans an option to get away from just hot dogs and nachos. I'm sure there are families who want healthy choices for their kids," says Schneider. Some folks simply enjoy fresh fruit. "Pixie tangerines were a big hit because they're so sweet and delicious," he remarks.

Fruit carts such as these are poised to pop up at stadiums around the country. "It's a growing trend. A lot of ballparks are going to have more healthful choices," predicts Schneider. Indeed, the Mets offer Melissa's produce at some of their stands in the new Citi Field stadium, and Melissa's is in talks with the Dallas Cowboys and Madison Square Garden to provide treats for their venues as well. "It's a brand new opportunity for us," says Schneider. "I just hope they keep calling." **pb**





Nicole Duarte, with parents, Omar and Ileana Duarte, Cuba Tropical Inc.



Stu Freed, E. Armata Inc.



Jeff Ornstein and Peter Kroner, Eli & Ali's Loves Tomatoes

Consumers are not the only people concerned about shrink. "I don't see a lot of accounts wanting to keep big inventories," explains Auerbach of Auerbach Inc., who

says his customers are trying harder than ever to buy just the right amount of produce at a time. "They want to eliminate both shorts and longs."

*"CERTAIN RETAIL PRICE POINTS WON'T WORK AS WELL AS BEFORE AND CONSUMERS WILL BUY MORE CAREFULLY. THE REFRIGERATOR SHRINK FACTOR WILL HAVE AN EFFECT — THEY WON'T WANT TO OVERBUY AND THROW AWAY."*

MATTHEW D'ARRIGO  
D'ARRIGO BROS. CO.

The bigger problem, most merchants will tell you, is their customers are less likely to pay on time and some may even go out of business, which means they never pay at all. "Package-count wise, we're doing okay. But you must keep an eye on accounts receivable," explains Ciro Porricelli, co-owner and vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, wholesale merchants at the Market.

In some cases, business growth has slowed, but not stopped. "We're not pushing any new items or new branding because the economy is not there yet," reports Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., importers, distributors and wholesalers of dried fruit, nuts and fresh produce at the Hunts Point Market. "Retailers are lowering their margins to make items more attractive to customers."

The good news is people really do need to eat. "In general, the industry hasn't been as affected as other industries. We're in a fortunate niche," admits Auerbach. "Business has changed, but at my company we're still doing very well."

"We're such a fast-moving industry —

## THE WATERMELON GUY

There was a time at Hunts Point when one man sold onions, another sold potatoes and yet another sold nothing but apples. Today, most houses carry a full line of produce. Many acquired new items when they bought out the competition, and nearly all benefit from the diversification — when one item doesn't do so well, the company can still thrive. But one man still does things the old-fashioned way. Jim Renella, owner of J. Renella Produce Inc., specializes in just one item — Border brand Banner seedless watermelons.

It's a small operation — one unit, a couple of guys to load and unload melons, and Renella at the booth selling to customers who pay only in cash. "It's nice and easy over here," says Renella.

With just one product, you can bet Renella knows watermelons — and his customers — very well. He isn't tempted to branch out with other products. "They don't want a real big melon. They don't want a real small one. Just in-between," he says. And all of them are seedless. "We used to sell just seeded at one time. Now we don't sell them at all," he relates.

The economy hasn't hurt the seedless watermelon business a bit. "I can't complain. The only thing that might hurt us is bad weather," remarks Renella. "The way the economy is now, we have an item that's low in price and it's good for you. Everybody's looking for good value now. We're on the right end of it."

pb

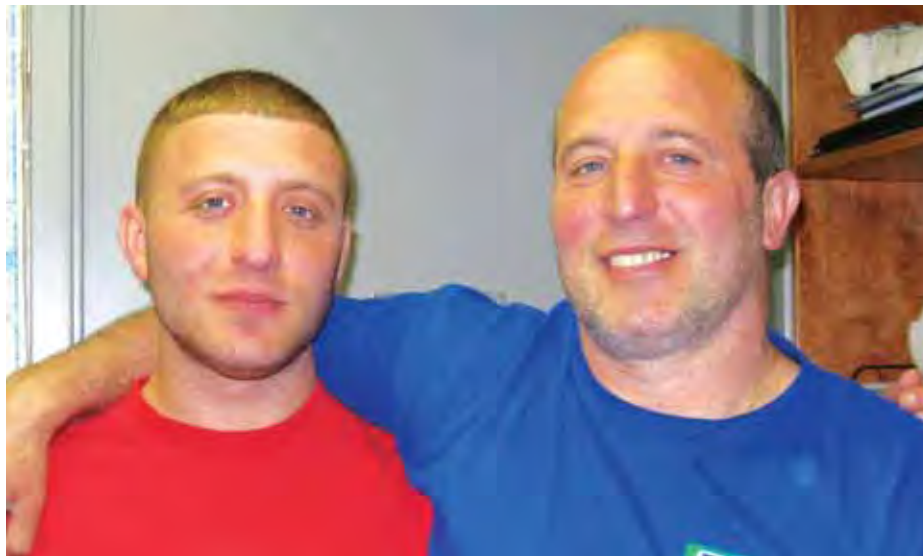
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Anthony Romano with his father, Peter Romano, Fairway Market

we're always adjusting," D'Arrigo Bros' D'Arrigo reminds us. "Our industry is the most prepared to handle a recession. We're the most resilient industry out there."

That's good news for New York, which gets about 60 percent of its produce through the Hunts Point Terminal Market. "There are literally thousands and thousands of jobs that rely on this market," notes D'Arrigo.

**RESTAURANT BUSINESS LAGS**

New York's restaurants took a far bigger hit from the economic downturn than its retailers. "The restaurants are having a rough time in Manhattan. People are staying home more and cooking; there's no doubt about it," discloses Peter Alphas, president of The Alphas Company of New York Inc., headquartered at the Hunts Point Market.

As a result, companies that sell to restaurants are highly affected. "Things are quiet. People aren't going to eat at fancy restaurants

as much," says René Gosselin, operations manager for Coosemans New York Inc., the Hunts Point Market arm of Coosemans Worldwide Inc.

"Our foodservice clients were a big portion of our drop in volume," agrees Kazan of Target Interstate Systems. "I think this reflects the impact the economy is having on the business of restaurants, clubs and hotels."

According to Garcia of Krisp-Pak, "A couple of guys that buy from us supply Korean restaurants. One of them that used to supply 50 restaurants now supplies 30."

Even restaurants that aren't closing are more likely to buy less and buy cheaper than before. "They might cut back or use alternatives," says Gosselin.

The only sector that seems to be thriving is quick-service. "Value restaurants are doing better than higher-end places," says Alphas.

Retail foodservice is picking up some of the slack. "It's a shift of tide — take it away

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**DEMAND FOR ORGANICS STILL RISING**

Despite consumer price-consciousness, some supermarkets — especially those that are upscale — are buying more organic produce than ever. "We're moving a lot of organic," reveals Peter Kroner, director of corporate development for Brooklyn, NY-based Eli & Ali's Loves Tomatoes, a company specializing in upscale and organic produce. "Our organics business is up incrementally over the last year."

The trend isn't for everyone. "I've noticed that most of the chains are going green, so people are investing more money in the organic lines, but it's costly," notes Ileana Duarte, who works for the Bronx, NY-based Cuba Tropical Inc., merchants who sell primarily to independent, ethnic grocery stores.

But while stores specializing in ethnic foods currently seem less likely to seek out organic produce, they may be headed in that direction if Canadian markets are any indication. "There's a market for organic, ethnic produce in Canada," notes Nicole Duarte, a sales associate — and daughter of Ileana — for Cuba Tropical. "I don't think there's necessarily that big a market for it here, yet."

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Paul Manfre and Lenore Rios, Top-Katz Brokers LLC



Troy Mesa, Grower Direct Marketing, and Matthew D'Arrigo, D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of NY

from the restaurants and bring it more to prepared foods," notes Andreani of S. Katzman Produce, which owns upscale specialty food stores in New York and New Jersey.

"It's difficult times. Only the strong will survive," admits Michael Muzyk, president of Bronx, NY-based Baldor Specialty Foods Inc. In addition to foodservice, Baldor distributes some items to upscale supermarkets. Last year, when business was booming, the company expanded its offerings and invested in a brand-new, larger facility located just across the street from the Hunts Point Market. Now Baldor is slimming down — at least for the time being.

Despite this year's setbacks, Muzyk remains upbeat. "We're thinking, 'How do we reinvent ourselves?' We know one thing: With people eating more at home, we have to have a larger presence in retail." With that in mind, Baldor is putting more effort into keeping retailers informed about their product variety, from organics to fresh-cuts to custom labeling.

"You don't stand still in business. You go forward or backward," Muzyk remarks, and he's making plans to go forward.

Baldor's investment in a state-of-the-art fresh-cut produce area seems to be paying off as restaurants look to save money on

labor. Muzyk notes his customers appreciate the produce is cut in-house at Baldor, giving them more shelf-life than something cut in California and then shipped to the East Coast. "The clock starts ticking the moment you start cutting," he explains.

Many of Baldor's restaurant customers are

*"WE'RE THINKING HOW DO WE REINVENT OURSELVES? WE KNOW ONE THING: WITH PEOPLE EATING MORE AT HOME, WE HAVE TO HAVE A LARGER PRESENCE IN RETAIL."*

MICHAEL MUZYK  
BALDOR SPECIALTY FOOD INC.

tightening their belts in other ways, Muzyk reports. Meanwhile, upscale items continue to sell, though not as briskly as before. "I think New York City is unique. We will always have The Four Seasons Hotel and Per Se," he says, referring to some of the city's most elite — and most expensive — restaurants.

Other wholesalers agree. According to Garcia of Krisp-Pak, one of his customers who supplies restaurants owned by celebrity chef Mario Batali is still buying as much produce as ever. "I guess I heard that on Long Island, in the suburbs, it's a little slower," says Garcia. "But in Manhattan, there are more tourists, more business people with money who don't like to cook."

"People who have money still have money," notes Gosselin of Coosemans. "If they had \$50 million and they lost a million, they still have money. It's the middle-class who go out less or might go to McDonald's

## HELPING THE HUNGRY

This spring, Myra Gordon, executive administrative director for the Hunts Point Terminal Cooperative Association Inc., was honored by City Harvest, on behalf of the Hunts Point Market, with the "Heart of the City" award for her continued dedication to the success of their food program. For more than 25 years, City Harvest has fed hungry individuals and families by "rescuing" food that would otherwise go to waste. This year, increasing numbers of New York's most vulnerable citizens were in need of emergency food — many for the first time. Gordon's work coordinating the efforts of the organization with merchants on the market has been especially valuable.

"Myra and the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association have demonstrated extraordinary commitment to helping City Harvest feed New York's hungry," notes Jilly Stephens, executive director of City Harvest, in a letter. "A driving force behind the success of the produce donation program with City Harvest has been Myra Gordon. In fact, with her leadership, Hunts Point has donated over 16.2 million pounds of food."

Gordon spoke modestly about the award. "I'm not the one doing the giving," she said. "I work behind the scenes as a facilitator." But one thing she has donated is her time. "The way I was raised, you have to give back," she explains. "When you're fortunate enough to have the basics in life — to be able to put food on your table and have a roof over your head — you have to give back."

pb



Ralph Comunale, E. Armata Inc.

"Food safety is huge," admits Muzyk. Baldor even holds regular mock recalls to keep employees on their toes. "Food safety isn't about passing an audit. It's everyday. You can't turn a blind eye to it just to save a dime."

**WILL RETAIL PICK UP THE SLACK?**

If consumers are eating out less, they must be eating at home more, which is why retailers are poised to pick up some extra business this year. D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros.

has noticed the difference in his customers' buying habits. "The foodservice customers are a little bit off, but our retail is enhanced," he explains.

Ralph Comunale, a sales associate at E. Armata Inc., merchants at the Hunts Point Market, concurs, noting, "Business is better. It's picking up. It seems more people are staying home and eating."

And while a few luxury items have seen a drop in demand, "Some items are doing better," reveals Porricelli of Jerry Porricelli Produce. "Right now, cilantro is moving better.



Howard Ginsberg, A.J. Trucco Inc.



John Stewart, A.J. Trucco Inc.

instead of Olive Garden."

But most consumers have not lost interest in quality, which is still a part of the value they now seek out more frequently. This is why Muzyk plans to offer more tree-ripened fruit and other high-quality items, such as "a melon that tastes like a melon — instead of a cucumber," he says.

When in season, Baldor relies on local produce for quality and freshness, and also because customers like that it's better for the environment.

The quality that produce buyers look for also includes food safety, which is why both Baldor and Coosemans are HACCP-certified.

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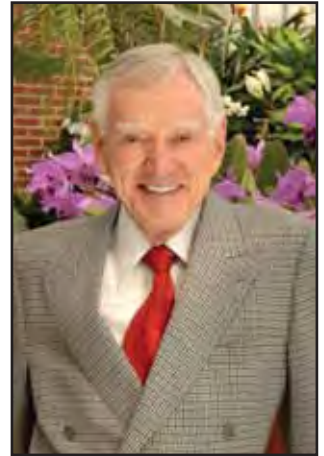




## DAVID MURDOCK'S LONGEVITY LIST

To live a long and vital life turn to the produce aisle. At 86 years old, I attribute my good health to plenty of fruit and vegetables. Even though I own Dole Food Company, I do my own grocery shopping. My list for longevity includes:

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## WEATHERING THE STORM

Despite current struggles, New Yorkers remain optimistic about the future of their companies. While Paul Kazan, president of Target Interstate Systems Inc., admits to a drop in business, in the same breath he reveals, "Despite all the doom and gloom, we are actually doing extremely well right now. We've been able to maintain our current volume, which is critical, and business is starting to pick up. Although this downturn in the economy is far from typical, it is a necessary cycle in order to weed out underperforming companies, and of course, competitors. It's the Darwinism of business, survival of the fittest."

The recession has forced Target and other businesses to think on their feet. In some cases, it knocked out the weaker competition, so those who survive are ready to come back at full-force when the economy turns around. "In our case, we eliminated some of our underperforming branches and unfortunately, I had to cut some staff to reflect the changes in business. However, we are now in a stronger position than before the slowdown in the economy began," says Kazan. He admits to another added benefit. His son, Evan, who works in a branch office, is coming to New York to work alongside him. "I love the whole idea of working with my son."

Some businesses are using the recession as a reminder of how they should always run. "Operations should always be lean," says Peter Alphas, president of The Alphas Company, of New York Inc.

The economy also forced Target and others to spread out their customer base, so if one customer goes out of business or slows down their orders there are others to fill in the gaps.

Mario Andreani, general manager of S. Katzman Produce Inc., also used the term "survival of the fittest." "As you slow down, you notice the fat and you trim it. I'm getting in shape," he says. "Now's the time to sit back and ask, 'How can I do it better?' We're focusing on service, on opening more doors and being more aggressive."

At Eli & Ali's, Peter Kroner, director of corporate development, notes, "We've worked on creating further efficiencies, cut the fat, regrouped and we're as strong as ever." The company, which has carved out a niche for itself in New York by providing upscale and organic produce most often flown to New York from growing regions, has built a customer base that relies on them for year-round availability of these items. To keep these customers happy and build its base even further, "Our business has improved in our ability to deliver superior product on a very timely basis." **pb**

There's a real demand for it. If it's on a cooking show, people have to have it." This lift in fresh herbs is a clear sign people are cooking at home more frequently.

"I think eating patterns and buying habits change from the culture and the media. Look at all the cooking magazines and the cooking shows," notes Garcia. "Bobby Flay and all

these other guys influence people by what they buy, and they all say 'Go out and buy fresh and buy good.' They tell people to buy the crisp lettuces and the firm tomatoes. The supermarkets have responded very aggressively and very positively."

While one might think wholesalers are suffering from the economy, it's actually quite the opposite as retailers continue to buy items such as kiwifruit, chestnuts and imported grapes. "For us, sales are almost the same," reveals Pacia of A.J. Trucco. "In fact,

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Reader Service # 80



## NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE

we sold a lot more nuts and dried fruits than we usually do during the first part of the year."

Some theorize that many consumers are trying to duplicate experiences they've at had restaurants. "Sometimes, when you go to a restaurant, they'll say, 'This is made with sage. This is made with rosemary,' so diners then want to go home and use it in their own cooking," explains Porricelli.

At Bronx, NY-based Cuba Tropical Inc., a wholesaler who carries a full line of tropical

produce as well as ethnic groceries, "Retail is still very healthy," says Ileana Duarte.

For many consumers, giving up fresh produce is a last resort they never have to make. "Vegetables are a necessity," notes D'Arrigo. "The best buy out there for you is produce because it's so nutritious."

Palumbo of Top Banana concurs. When it comes to bang-for-the-buck, "Produce is a steal."

Still, some consumers are finding ways to cut back. "I think people are making more

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trips to the supermarket. They don't want to see the big bills. They shop when they need to as they need it," says Pacia of A.J. Trucco. "That way, they control their budget. There's no waste."

"When you buy for more than two or three days, there's waste," agrees Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco.

"Expensive items sell a little less, but they're still selling, especially items that are off-season," notes Pacia.

Stu Freed, a buyer with E. Armata Inc. agrees. "The hot-ticket items, they've backed up a little bit. But to tell you the truth, prices



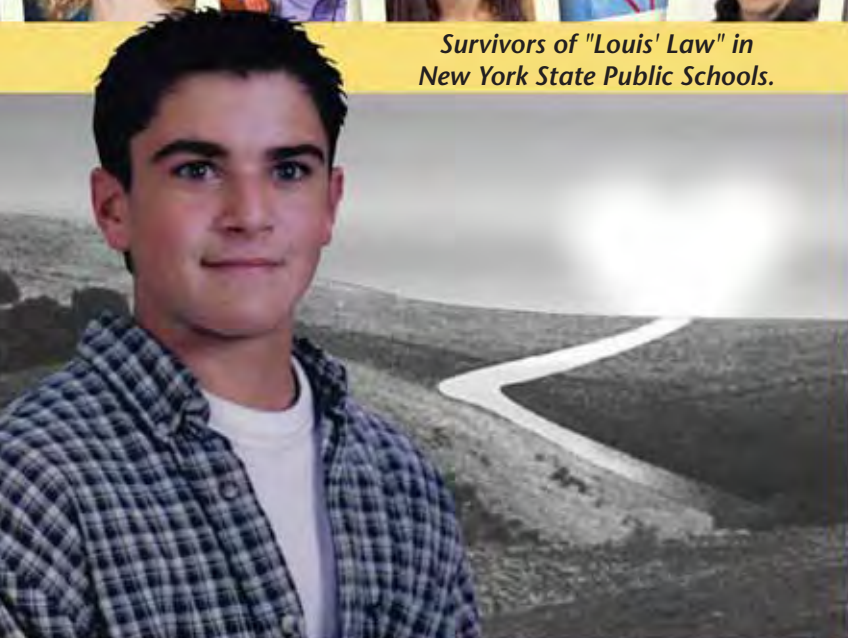
John L. Garcia, Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.



Ronnie Cohen, Vision Import Group LLC



Survivors of "Louis' Law" in New York State Public Schools.



The Louis J. Acompora Foundation would like to thank our friends in the Produce Industry who have supported the Foundation and have helped us continue our mission across the country. Without the support of this industry our voice would not be heard

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# What would you do if you found that your children were not safe?

**O**n March 25, 2000 our son Louis passed away on a lacrosse field from a syndrome known as Commotio Cordis. Louis was an exceptional young man. He was an honor role student, a member of the National Honor Society and had won the scholastic athlete of the year award in his middle school. He was co-captain and the goalie of his school's freshman lacrosse team. Most importantly, he had a passion for living and was loved by his family, friends and community.

The syndrome that took Louis' life, Commotio Cordis, occurs when a blunt force trauma interrupts the rhythm of an otherwise normal healthy heart. It is also important to note that Louis was wearing a chest protector. It has come to our attention that had an automated external defibrillator (AED) been available to Louis on the field that day he would very much be alive today. The Foundation's mission and focus is committed to seeing an improvement in sports safety with a special focus on the placement of AEDs for all schools.

The Foundation aims to form awareness and education of Commotio Cordis and fully supports public access defibrillation legislation. New York State is the first state to mandate that all public schools have an AED program. This law is known as "Louis' Law."

New York has seen firsthand the importance of Louis' Law. Already 44 lives have been saved in New York State Public School districts because there was an Automated External Defibrillator on sight. School districts across the state, with the assistance of the foundation, have supported the training of staff in the use of these life saving devices.

Pennsylvania, Maryland, Texas and just recently Connecticut have passed laws mandating placement of AEDs in schools. These devices have been credited with saving the lives of students, teachers, coaches, parents and spectators, alike. All of our correctional facilities, all airlines, and all federal buildings have AEDs. Now...let's protect our children.

The Louis J. Acompora Memorial Foundation provides public education through manuals and workshops to increase the chances of survival in the instance of Commotio Cordis or any sudden cardiac arrest situation. The Foundation also provides, free of charge, the "AED's in the Schools" kit designed to help schools strengthen their "Chain of Survival" through the implementation of CPR and defibrillation programs.

Training to provide the "links" can take as little as 4 hours. Since schools contain many adults, including teachers, administrators, parents and adult visitors, and one in every one thousand of a population suffers from cardiac arrest, schools are a logical place to have programs such as this to save lives. Schools also have events such as athletic competitions, theatrical productions and ceremonies that attract large numbers of adults.

To have a chance at protecting someone from sudden cardiac arrest, there must be immediate access to an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). AEDs are portable and simple to use in the Chain of Survival established by the American Heart Association.

Can you make a difference in your community? Grassroots movements can make change, this is a lifesaving effort and you can become part of it. Go to your school, athletic organization and ask if they have AED and if not ask why!! You can make change in your community and lives will be saved.

Please visit [www.LA12.org](http://www.LA12.org) for more information



John Garcia, Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.



Richard Cochran, Robt T. Cochran Co. Inc.



Jason Gelbaum, Top-Katz Brokers LLC

have been reasonable.”

“People aren’t suddenly going to lose their taste for the items they like, but items probably won’t do as well when they’re high-priced,” explains D’Arrigo.

Palumbo of Top Banana relates independent stores and small chains will often stop carrying an item if the price is deemed too high for their customers, even if that item is considered a staple. “They don’t have to have certain items if the price gets too high. Every item has its limitations,” he says.

But at some stores, even the highest-

priced items appear to be immune to this theory. At Greenvale, NY-based Grace’s Marketplace, an upscale family-owned supermarket with a sister store in Manhattan, the first cherries of the season were both beautiful and expensive. They sold out, says Dominick Doria, the store’s produce manager.

“Cherries are the highest priced thing in the produce business,” notes D’Arrigo of D’Arrigo Bros. But even during tough times, “They fly out the door.”

Auerbach of Auerbach Inc. notes specialty potatoes continue to gain popularity. “A lot



Louis Venuti, Ven-Co Produce Inc.

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of our baby potato items are doing very well, both in retail and foodservice,” he reports. “Our numbers also continue to grow on our asparagus and French bean programs.”

Among the new higher-priced items, pomegranate arils have been selling well despite the economy, according to Shaleen Heffernan, a sales associate with Agrexco (USA) LTD., based in Jamaica, NY. “It’s selling on all levels. It is a pricier commodity, but I believe the consumer is really starting to pay attention to what’s going into our bodies. This is a completely whole food in and of itself.”

One thing wholesalers have noticed is their customers are pickier than usual. “Everybody is really, really fussy. There’s no market for ‘just fair’ produce,” relates Alphas of The Alphas Co.

As the weather warms, the produce business in New York will most likely pick up, as it does every year. “We’re looking forward to a good summer,” says Alphas. “Believe it or not, a lot of stores here gain 20 to 30 percent in sales when they display outside on the stand,” he says. When holidays such as the Fourth of July come along, nice weather can mean extra sales for barbecues and cookouts.

“It’s a very dynamic time of year,” says

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## BENEFITING FROM THE WHOLESALE MARKET



Grace's Marketplace relies on the Hunts Point Terminal Market for product availability.

An estimated 3 billion pounds of produce move through the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, based in the Bronx, NY, each year, feeding folks all over the tri-state area by supplying restaurants and retailers big and small.

Although most large supermarket chains rely heavily on direct shipments from growing regions, a smart retailer knows to buy produce from the market as much as possible. "Any good retailer uses the market," says Joe Palumbo, CEO of Top Banana LLC. "Years ago, they all did it the right way — every major chain walked the market."

Today, more chains are returning to the market, according to some merchants. "I think the market is changing," notes Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., "It's getting more attractive to those who want bargains and quality. You find everything here. This market has items you can't find everywhere else."

Independent stores know this well. "You can get everything grown in the world in one place," explains Paul Manfre, a sales associate for Top-Katz Brokers LLC, representatives of growers at the Hunts Point Market. "Where else can you get a few boxes of lettuce, a few boxes of romaine and get just as much variety as a bigger store carries?"

Ciro Porricelli, co-owner of Jerry Porricelli Produce tells us that many of his customers are immigrants from Korea who own independent grocery stores. "They're just looking for good stuff," he remarks. "Some of

them can't go direct because they can't buy enough to fill the truck."

Dominick Doria, produce manager at the Greenvale, NY-based Grace's Marketplace, an upscale family-owned supermarket with a sister store in Manhattan, appreciates his small business is able to procure all kinds of fresh produce from around the world at the Hunts Point Market. "That's our main supplier," he reveals.

Peter Levantino, a broker on the market and vice president for Oakdale, NY-based Giunta's Meat Farms., an independent, family-owned and -operated supermarket chain with six stores on Long Island, buys about 40 percent of the stores' produce from merchants at Hunts Point. "I need a diverse amount of items. We try to have every item for all ethnic backgrounds," notes Levantino.

Hunts Point merchants reliably carry every kind of produce a buyer could need. "How many times have I heard a shipper say, 'Oh, tomatoes? No one has them, and we have them at Hunts Point,'" details John Garcia, president of Krisp-Pak Sales Corp. "Our customers have to have them, so we have to have them. We do whatever we have to do to get them to the customer."

Grace's Marketplace is one of those stores that rely on Hunts Point for product availability. "We had the first cherries of the season last week. At Grace's, we have to have the first and the last, as long as they're good," explains Doria.

"There are certain deals in the market they handle exclusively," adds Levantino.

"Certain houses handle certain brands you can get from them all the time that you can get direct only most of the time."

The wholesalers also offer top service with little hassle. For example, Doria explains when a customer is unsatisfied with a product, he can simply bring it back to the merchant that day.

Merchants here understand that time is of the essence for their customers. "They trust me and know they'll be in and out of here quickly," relates Louis Venuti, a sales associate with Ven-Co Produce Co. Inc. Venuti makes it a priority to save customers time, getting their trucks loaded as quickly as possible once an order is in.

Then there is the benefit of having face-to-face relationships. "Part of it is trust," declares Sal Biondo, produce buyer for Market Basket, a gourmet food emporium headquartered in Franklin Lakes, NJ. Biondo has been shopping at Hunts Point since the market opened over 40 years ago. "You deal with the same people all the time and they're not going to burn you."

Because merchants here often buy from growers and shippers who have too much product on their hands, Hunts Point offers top-quality produce at bargain prices. "You're going to find bargains at the market. You're going to find the best stuff for the best price," says Biondo.

"We can see an influx coming," explains Matthew D'Arrigo, co-owner of D'Arrigo Bros Co. of New York Inc. For example, one week in May, "This market was awash in strawberries. If they had bought direct they would have lost thousands."

"We are so competitive," says Joel Fierman, president, Joseph Fierman & Son Inc. "We practically give stuff away here."

As a result, stores that shop here are able to thrive even during hard times. "The independently owned stores that search Hunts Point for bargains are still going strong," says Palumbo of Top Banana. "They're opening stores left and right. They must be doing something right."

Some retailers who buy primarily direct from farms are beginning to turn back to Hunts Point in search of better deals. "They're leaving a little room — taking away what they bought direct and buying off the market as a business plan," notes D'Arrigo.

"When business got slow, more people who bought FOB said, 'Why am I buying this when the Market's got quality and it's cheaper?'" adds Peter Alphas, president of The Alphas Company of New York Inc., mer-

chants at the Hunts Point Market.

Although most will never know it, consumers benefit from these bargains, as well. "In these economic times, this market means even more because those little stores will come here and find a deal and pass that on to their customers," explains Jimmy Margiotta, president of J Margiotta Co. LLC.

Another large segment of buyers at Hunts Point are chefs, who relish the opportunity to see the produce for themselves before they commit to buying it and being involved in the entire process. "We have restaurant owners that frequently come down themselves and they're a good group because those people really want to hand-select it," says Garcia of Krisp-Pak Sales Corp. "They want to pick out which box of green leaf or red leaf they buy. This is a very hands-on industry — it's not like nuts and bolts and shoes."

In addition to chefs, many retailers are rediscovering the advantages of "walking the market." "A lot of customers are coming down themselves instead of sending a buyer," notices Jim Renella, owner of J. Renella Produce Inc., a watermelon wholesaler at the Market.

This is a reverse in trend as, until recently, more and more owners did their business over the phone or through hired buyers. "I see the owners coming down now. I guess it's the economy. They've got to sharpen up. They're watching the bottom line. They have to."

Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco Inc., agrees. "You can't negotiate with a fax," he notes. "They're looking for bargains."

Giunta's Levantino, who shops at the market four days a week, needs no convincing. "I can see the stuff with my own eyes, check the sizes, the quality, the taste," he explains.

Despite all these advantages the market offers to retailers and restaurants, it may be the city itself that benefits most from the market. "It's an economic engine for this city," says Garcia. He notes many buyers start small at Hunts Point, procuring produce for a truck or even a pushcart and working their way up until they own several stores. "They buy homes, they buy cars, they take care of their families, they send their kids to school, they pay taxes," he says. "This industry has taken people who could barely speak English and made them citizens, made them business people." **pb**

D'Arrigo. "There's lots of selection, lots of new items coming in."

**A MARKET FOR EVERYTHING**

Local produce remains in demand with New Yorkers looking for fresh, high-quality products, and wholesalers are more than aware of its importance. "The Hunts Point Market sells more local produce than all those farmer's markets put together by far," notes D'Arrigo.

Things are looking up for imported pro-

duce this year, as well. "You've got a stronger dollar than last year, so you're going to see more imports," D'Arrigo predicts.

"I think importing is going to be very big next year," agrees Margiotta of J Margiotta Co.

"Imports are going well," says Ronnie Cohen, sales manager for River Edge, NJ-based Vision Import Group LLC, a company that imports items including limes, lemons, mangos, pineapples and clementines. "The stronger dollar is definitely an advantage."

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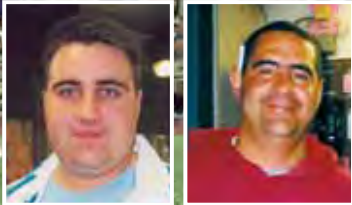
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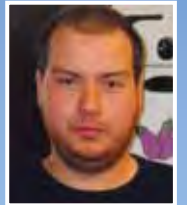
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Cuba Tropical imports about 50 percent of its tropical produce itself and also buys some from merchants at the Hunts Point Market. Imported items such as plantains, avocados, yucca and mangos are staples for its customers, many of which are independent, ethnic grocery stores, according to Nicole Duarte.

Demand for items grown around the world continues to increase in the New York area due to an influx of immigrants. "Our population is getting more diversified,"

notes Cohen.

Meanwhile, items once considered "specialty" are now becoming mainstream. "Everybody is using mangos. It has the highest growth potential as a commodity," notes Cohen. "More varieties are going to become popular. The growth is so huge in mangos."

Heffernan of Agrexco reports imported dates are doing exceptionally well. "My sales are up 22 percent this year in dates," she happily declares. One wholesaler who formerly ordered dates from her once every



Paul Armata and his niece, Chelsea Armata, E. Armata Inc.

three weeks now orders them three times a week. In addition, she says, "My customer base has grown."

New Yorkers are beginning to discover new date varieties, as well. For example, Heffernan tells us that Deglet Noor dates, which Agrexco sells on the branch, are selling almost as well as Medjools. "I think dates have really grown into something. They're

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*"BECAUSE OF THE  
ECONOMY, THE MARKET IS  
DOING BUSINESS EARLIER IN  
THE MORNING NOW."*

NICK PACIA  
A.J. TRUCCO INC.

not just ethnic anymore."

Consumers love that dates have a long shelf-life, carrying less risk of waste. "They store well, whether it's on the countertop or in the freezer," reveals Heffernan.

Retailers are discovering the ease of dates, as well. "It's a low-maintenance item with a high profit margin," Heffernan relates. "My customers have worked really hard to sell this item because they realize it's such a high profit item."

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Elvin Rocha, Top-Katz Brokers LLC



Junior Augone, Juniors Produce Inc.

Heffernan has also seen success during the last year with a new product — pomegranate arils imported from India, Israel and Peru. “The response has been fabulous,” she reports. “More and more foodservice companies are using them. Some retailers are buying them at wholesale size and repacking them.” Agrexco is also experimenting with a new retail-size pack that includes a spoon for grab-and-go convenience.

The diversity of the New York area is what makes it a market for every kind of produce. “We’re good at moving all different varieties of produce,” says D’Arrigo. Upscale retailers may carry pricey heirloom tomatoes flown in from California by Eli & Ali’s Loves Tomatoes, a Brooklyn-based company that specializes in upscale and organic produce, while the little shop next door may have ready-to-eat bananas for pennies.

For some New Yorkers, the priority lies more in price than quality. “In our market, there’s a customer for everything,” notes Garcia of Krisp-Pak.

“Every store is different. They all have their own kind of clientele,” says Palumbo of Top Banana. “Go a block east or west and you have all different kinds of people. There are high-end stores in Manhattan, but there are also Mom and Pop stores.”

There are pushcarts, too. Louis Augone, Jr., president of Junior’s Produce Inc., wholesalers on the Hunts Point Market, estimates that 50 percent of his business is with street vendors. Some hope to install permanent stands soon, similar to those used for newspaper stands in Manhattan. These vendors often buy produce that is ready to eat that day — produce that many stores don’t want because it has little shelf-life left. Consumers in New York City love street vendors for their convenience as well as pricing. “You can’t beat the prices,” says Augone.

**QUALITY IN QUANTITY**

Quality is important to New Yorkers,

whether that means extra-large lemons or HACCP certification, as Coosemans and Baldor offer. Many buyers look to brands to deliver the quality they need.

A.J. Trucco’s KiwiStar and GrapeStar are in demand more now than ever, according to Pacia. “Because of the economy, the market is doing business earlier in the morning now,” he observes. “Quality and availability are important. Customers come early for the prime labels.”

Certain brands are especially important to customers, “but only if they offer value,” explains Andreani of S. Katzman Produce. “If a certain brand tastes better, has a bigger package and has a longer shelf-life, then it’s

**REPUTATIONS & RELATIONSHIPS**

**F**or some folks, it’s all about the bottom line. But produce people will tell you, in this business, it’s really all about the people. “Communication is the key to everything,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC, headquartered in River Edge, NJ. “From the grower all the way to the final consumer, it all has to have value. We all have to eat. If we work together, I think we’ll all do well.”

Reputation goes a long way in the produce business, Cohen notes. “Our industry is a big industry, but it’s very small,” he says.

Ciro Porricelli, co-owner and vice president of Jerry Porricelli Produce, located at the Hunts Point Market, does what he can to ensure that both his customers and his suppliers get a fair deal so everyone can keep doing business, even in tough times. “I try to work with them,” he states. For example, “My local farmers, they’re trying to get as much as they can to cover their expenses. I try to help them.”

A good relationship can benefit everyone. “My customers are amazing, both personally and professionally, because we listen to each other. We have a relationship,” explains Shaleen Heffernan, a sales associate at Jamaica, NY-based Agrexco (USA) LTD. “We have an open door of communication. If one of my customers gets stuck with a product — let’s say he buys too many dates — I call him and buy them back. I’m very aware of my customers’ needs and how they’re doing.”

At A.J. Trucco, Nick Pacia, vice president, has noticed more retailers are coming to him for advice. “They’re more open to discussion with us,” he says. As a result, he has been helping retailers find new ways to merchandise produce. For example, he details, “We try to push selling by weight rather than by count.” He has found some items, such as kiwifruit, seem more expensive to consumers when sold by the piece than when they are sold by the pound. As a result, when kiwis are sold by the pound, consumers tend to buy more. When he shares this advice with retailers, their sales often increase.

Some businesses benefit from decades-long relationships. Lori DeMarco, president of Hunts Point Market-based LBD Produce Inc., notes working with the same shippers for several years provides both her and her customers a sense of comfort. “We’re sure of what we’re buying and our customers are sure of what we’re selling,” she explains. She also knows she can continue to rely on her shippers to provide product when she needs it.

Because many buyers are starved for time, calling in orders instead of “walking the market” has become more popular over the years. This calls for a high level of trust between the buyer and the wholesaler. Vinny Bondi, president, of River Produce Corp., a spring mix distributor headquartered in the Bronx, NY, which owns the Uncle Vinny’s label, buys from merchants on the market and often sells to them as well as to retailers. “We work on a one-on-one basis. I speak to the buyers and the owners every day,” he tells us.

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holding its own."

For some companies, much depends on the name. "Brands mean everything to us," discloses Cohen of Vision Import Group, whose brands include Mango Maniac, Mr. Squeeze lemons and limes and Mojito limes. "Our vision is to take the commodities we're passionate about — limes and mangos — and brand them."

"Most important to us is quality and putting the right stuff in the box," Cohen explains. The company, which is just over a year old, believes, "building a brand and a

label for the future is important. I want people to ask for it by name."

"Customers have started to do just that," adds Raul Millan, executive vice president at Vision Import Group. The company does everything it can to make its brands stand out. For example, "The lime box has high graphics that call for attention. After that, the limes being packed are number one and exclusive," he says.

"Business is going well for us," reveals Cohen. "I think our branding is working out well. Our Mojito limes are really going."



Joe Palumbo and his daughter, Nicole Palumbo, Top Banana LLC

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MARIO ANDREANI  
S. KATZMAN PRODUCE INC.

Branding is also important to Eli & Ali's. "People buy our label because of brand-name recognition," relates Peter Kroner, director of corporate development.

Top-Katz Brokers LLC, representatives of growers at the Hunts Point Market, recently began having growers pack produce under its Bloom Fresh label. "We wanted to have something that we have a little control over and have a premium pack so our customers could have some exclusivity. We say 'This is our label. You can only get that from us,'" explains Paul Manfre, a sales associate.

To some people — especially some consumers — the brands on produce seem to make little difference. "Buying a brand is a matter of not wanting to waste," states Andreani. "But because consumers are much more price-driven now, they're also more likely to explore new brands."

"I think the consumer recognizes them, but for the small retailer it's even more important. It's like a security blanket. They get comfortable with it," notes Manfre.



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Tim Motley, The Food Barn

"We have some exclusive brands. A lot of customers like to have those," says Lori DeMarco, president of LBD Produce Inc., merchants on the Hunts Point Market specializing in cherries, grapes, oranges, apples, mushrooms and tomatoes. "There are some customers who will not buy from us unless we have a certain brand," she adds.

Although some retailers are certainly comparing prices, many put their trust in specific brands. "The retailer is requesting it. I don't know if consumers notice," says Ileana Duarte of Cuba Tropical. She believes the Hispanic consumers that shop with her customers "are looking for quality product, but not a specific brand. They know that particular item. They know quality." However, some labels stand out to these shoppers,

especially when it comes to bananas. She notices that some stores will only carry specific banana brands for this reason.

"It seems like people know Chiquita Bananas; people know Dole," says Manfre. "Driscoll's strawberries, too. If another strawberry was 99-cents and Driscoll's was a \$1.99, they'd still buy the Driscoll's."

"Driscoll's is still the one market leader," agrees Andreani. "They taste better and they have a longer shelf-life."

Cohen of Vision Import Group believes branding will become more and more important to consumers in the future. "Why would you buy a pair of Levi's jeans? It's supposed to signify quality, or what's 'in,'" he says. "The idea behind branding is to get something that catches your eye. People are

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creatures of habit. Once they buy the brand and discover its quality, they'll continue buying it every time. People associate the label with quality and we get repeat business."

Manfre agrees. "If you have a good brand, people stop looking and they assume it's always good. If it's good time and time again, people consistently want your product," he says.

**CHANGING BUSINESS**

While the recession forced businesses here to adjust quickly and decisively, some changes in the way New Yorkers do business have evolved more slowly. For example, many customers have given up "walking the market" at Hunts Point in favor of a quicker method. "The face-to-face nature of this busi-

ness with chain stores has disappeared. Business is now done on the phone," explains D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros.

Technology has taken its toll on the old ways, as well. "It's hard in these times to have a relationship like they used to have years ago. Everybody has a Blackberry," notes Top Banana's Palumbo.

"There are very, very few people who do the walking. They call everything in for convenience," agrees Venuti of Ven-Co. Some have turned to brokers to do the legwork for them. "Brokers help the retailer. They do the dirty work."

Small, independent Korean grocery stores that once shopped the market individually now often pool their funds to hire one buyer with one truck to procure for all



Sharon Nathel, Nathel & Nathel

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**NEW YORK REGIONAL MARKET PROFILE**

of them. As a result, "We used to have 20 or 30 different green grocers come in. Now you've got one guy," explains Joel Fierman, president of Joseph Fierman & Son Inc., merchants on the Hunts Point Market.

Additionally, the types of stores in the New York area have changed. "There are a lot of upscale stores in the city now," notes D'Arigo.

Many of these high-priced stores were inspired by traditional, independent green grocers, according to Garcia of Krisp-Pak. For example, "The Koreans didn't just stick with

produce. They added upscale juice, nuts and flowers. They evolved into specialty shops without anyone telling them or teaching them. Guys with the resources do it like them, and they do it better than them," he explains.

But these pricier stores have their roots at the little corner shops. "The Koreans made produce upscale in the 70s," says Garcia. "It wasn't upscale before they did it. Traditionally, the produce industry was the bottom end of food. There was no money spent on produce by consumers. Stores didn't care



Dana Taback, Joseph Fierman & Son Inc.



George Vegetatos, Nathel & Nathel

about it because they didn't make any money on it. The Koreans came to New York and bought the best fruits and vegetables from us, they'd wash it and display it and they put a lot of work and effort into it."

In fact, "In the 70s when the Koreans came in and made produce what it is in New York, they saved this market because supermarkets had started getting everything direct," adds Garcia.

The Hunts Point Market still relies on New York's many independent retailers. "That's what differentiates us in New York — we still have independents. When you lose the independents, you lose the market. These people have to come here every day to shop," explains Alphas of The Alphas Co.

Today, many of these small, ethnic stores are moving away from the city and into new territory. "First, there weren't enough of them," says Garcia. "Then there were too many and they started sprouting up on every corner and killing each other." Today, many are branching out to the suburbs. "I noticed now all these Koreans have gone into small towns in New York and New Jersey. They're not trying to be on every street corner. They've spread out where they'll be the only green grocer in town," he says.

Meanwhile, blossoming immigrant com-

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Eric Mitchnick and Felix Lemana, S. Katzman Produce Inc.

munities need their own stores to provide the specialties they rely on. "There's a big group of Indian store owners coming in. They're buying a lot of produce now. Their customers don't eat much meat or eggs — they're really into vegetables and we're doing a lot of business with them," says Comunale of E. Armata Inc.

Most of these Indian-owned stores are in Queens, Comunale notes. Their consumers

use a surprising number of American staples, especially cauliflower, broccoli rabe, citrus, mesclun, lettuce, apples and pears.

Retailers are not the only ones changing. Other businesses here are evolving, too, taking on new items, new customers and new leadership. A new generation of merchants is stepping up to the challenge.

Nicole Palumbo, a recent high school graduate, is currently working for her father,

*"THERE'S A BIG GROUP OF INDIAN STORE OWNERS COMING IN. THEY'RE BUYING A LOT OF PRODUCE NOW. THEIR CUSTOMERS DON'T EAT MUCH MEAT OR EGGS — THEY'RE REALLY INTO VEGETABLES, AND WE'RE DOING A LOT OF BUSINESS WITH THEM."*

RALPH COMUNALE  
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Joe Palumbo, at Top Banana. "I wanted to continue in the family name," she explains. "I obviously have a lot to learn, but I think I can do it."

Nicole Duarte is the third generation at Cuba Tropical, where she is in sales. At Krisp-Pak, John Garcia's second oldest son, John L.

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Joe, Peter and John Levantino, Guinta's Meat Farms



Garcia, has been learning the ropes for over a year. "Ninety percent of the businesses in here is family businesses," notes Garcia.

The next step in the evolution could be a new market at Hunts Point. Forty-two years ago, when the buildings were brand new, trailers were smaller. Cochran of Robt. T.

Cochran & Co., tells a story of how, years ago, the Hunts Point Market paid a professional traffic company to help deal with emerging gridlock caused by larger trailers. A man stood on the roof, observing trucks as they attempted to get in, unload and get out, and he suggested making the traffic one way.

That smart move solved a lot of traffic problems, but today larger trucks and a lack of storage space still have things tied up more than businesses here would like.

"Everybody's renting trailers for storage," notes Gosselin of Coosemans. "The frustrating part is just maneuvering in here. And the trucks are getting bigger."

Plans are underway to replace the existing, outdated market with a new and improved one. "We have a design for a new market that is 95 percent complete," D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. reveals. But first, merchants here and the city of New York have to come to an agreement about how that will be done, including how much money the city itself is willing to pitch in.

Hunts Point merchants would love to see stimulus money used to build the new market, but many don't believe this will happen. "A produce market is not going to be where they put it," says Joel Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son Inc. It needs to be where it makes the most sense geographically, where people, and most importantly, buyers have easy access to it.

Meanwhile, rail is making somewhat of a comeback here, despite some limitations. Fierman & Son has had its share of frustrations with unreliable trains. "Nine times out of ten I have a bunching issue, where I buy similar items three or four days apart that all come in at the same time," relates Billy Fierman, treasurer. Often, the FOBs change before the items arrive and the price may drop from what he paid.

Despite these troubles, "Right now, the economy dictates. The rail has dropped their prices substantially. It's more economically viable," says Fierman.

pb

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Louis Augone Sr.**  
1915 - 2009



Louis Augone Sr.

Louis "Junior" Augone

Louis Augone Sr. started his career in the produce business when he was a teenager at the Harlem Market as a peddler. Little did he know that this was the start of a multi generational full fledged business.

Louis Sr. joined forces with Jimmy Georgallas to start J&L Banana Distributors which turned into Banana Distributors of NY. The partners ripened bananas in the cellar of their facility. Years later, Junior opened up M&M Farms a Retail Store in Milford, CT. Louis Sr. loved to come to the store and set up the displays.

Louis Sr. loved every aspect of the business from repacking and making a box of anything look and sell better, to serving his customers by finding the best product on the market. Louis Sr. told his son, "If you want to do it I am there for you."

So Junior purchased units on the Hunts Point Market and with his son, Craig, built what is now Juniors Produce, a thriving business. Louis Sr. loved the passion that his Grandson Craig had, just like his own. Now joined by Louis III, Juniors will go on, but the man who started it all will ever be missed, yet never forgotten.

# THE FOOD EMPORIUM

*A veritable rainbow of produce and floral arrangements await customers at The Food Emporium.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN



**A**t The Food Emporium's Bridge Market store, one of 16 Food Emporium supermarkets in Manhattan, colorful displays of fresh seasonal produce and flowers greet customers as they walk through the doors.

It's a large shop for Manhattan, with wide aisles one would expect to see in suburbs, not the center of a crowded city. Enormous ceilings and plenty of natural light give the space the feel of a cathedral filled with upscale delights, from exotic orchids to organic apples to fresh-cut fruit salads for the taking. Past the produce department, displays of handmade chocolates, pastries, prepared foods, charcuterie, balsamic vinegars and jars of truffles tempt shoppers who hold presumably heavy wallets.

"We're in the heart of the city," explains Dominic Pelosi, senior merchant, who has worked in supermarkets since he was a teenager. "We have a range of educated customers — single people and families. We carry gourmet items. It's a different consumer than one would find in the suburbs. People look for organics; they look for new items. People here have small refrigerators and small apartments."

Although much of the produce sold at Food Emporium is bought directly from growers, fill-ins often come from the Hunts Point Market. Pelosi finds periodic, personal trips to the terminal market inspiring. "I walk the market to see new items and to see what's going on — to keep up with the industry," he says. "Last time, I found a new kind of tomato."

The economic downturn has had an effect on this supermarket, yet high-end items continue to sell. Pelosi has noticed, "Overall, people are more selective about what they buy. They all keep hearing the economy is bad, so everyone wants to find value in their products," he says. "Certain things slow down, like the prepared fruits. But that had a lot to do with the cold winter, too." Still, he tells us, "Fresh salads always sell. That's year-round."

When Pelosi creates displays, combining fresh fruits, vegetables and floral elements, "It's a lot of trying to create a fun shopping experience for customers, trying to create excitement," he says. "Flowers are very important. They bring smiles to faces. They brighten up homes."



Pelosi's vibrant displays are his way of encouraging shoppers to eat healthful foods that they enjoy. "My philosophy is that people should eat fruits and vegeta-

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DOMINIC PELOSI

bles each day," he says. "They used to say 'Eat 5-a-day.' I think you should eat more than that. Americans all eat more fatty foods. With the obesity we have as a country, more people should eat fruits and vegetables to keep their weight down, and it helps their health. It can lower health costs," he says. For example, "You can help fight colds by eating strawberries, which are high in vitamin C."

Food Emporium shoppers seem to appreciate the health benefits of produce, which may explain why about half of the produce here is organic. "We really emphasize organic," reports Pelosi. Other known healthful items, such as raw almonds, are also big sellers.

He believes produce can make his customers happier, too. "Whatever you eat, it changes your whole outlook, how you feel," he says. "I try to present — day in and day out — beautiful, fresh fruits and vegetables. In fliers, we tell people about the items — where they come from, how to use them. Education, that's the thing." That education extends to the staff, as well. "We educate our produce managers so when customers approach them they have the necessary knowledge to answer questions and be helpful," Pelosi explains. **pb**

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# WESTERN BEEF KNOWS PRODUCE

*While the name might be misleading, stepping into Western Beef is produce perfection.*

BY MIKE DUFF



Cooking a steak without preparing a salad is as preposterous as considering Western Beef without pondering its produce. The supermarket chain's 26 stores in metropolitan New York and, just this year, Boca Raton, FL, puts produce center stage, despite the store's meaty name.

Western Beef may have built its reputation on high quality, but reasonably priced perishables in the walk-in meat cases — a defining element of its operations. However, consumers must first traverse an elaborate produce display to reach the rest of the store, one featuring a cartoon-y vegetable mural and high-piled displays of stalks, stems and tubers.

Despite the recession, Western Beef has been adding stores at an astonishing pace and refurbishing older locations to bring them up to the merchandising standards of the newest stores,

such as a 40,000 square-foot location on Forest Avenue in New York City's borough of Staten Island, profiled here.

Western Beef's Forest Avenue store, one of two on Staten Island, opened two years ago with the latest produce-merchandising layout. The older location, on Bay Street, was recently refurbished with an enhanced décor package, including improved lighting and embellishments, and, of course, those high-stacked displays. "When you walk into our produce departments, we want you to say, 'Well, this is a produce department,'" explains Joe Battaglia, vice president of produce. "We want to impress you with quality, price and merchandising. That's always our goal."

Western Beef opened its first unit in College Point, Queens, 36 years ago. The company currently has 26 locations with three more planned over the next two years. The metropolitan New



York growth focus is at the extremes of its operating area: New Jersey and Long Island's Suffolk County. It has additional Florida location, in mind, as well.

Of the \$45 million in sales that Western Beef generates annually, about 11 percent comes from produce, although the contribution can be significantly different from store to store with the bottom end around eight percent and the high point, reached regularly in its Boca Raton store, approaching 20 percent. "We believe in produce," asserts Battaglia. "We have fresh, premium product that offers value for price merchandised the right way,"

Battaglia makes sure his produce sections are dressed for success. The assortment is deep in two ways: Displays are high and heavy with product, but they also are wide ranging. Western Beef has developed its produce departments to serve consumers representing a variety of ethnicities with plantains, jalapenos, kabocha and root vegetables, such as red yutia, part of the everyday product mix. "We're one of the best merchandisers of ethnic produce in the city of New York. Some ethnic shops do a very good job, but other chains..." says Battaglia. He stops short of pointing fingers, shaking his head. "We've been doing this for years. Some chains think coconuts are ethnic. Haitian mangos —

now that's ethnic."

Not every product that has a particular audience is from far afield, and Battaglia recently anticipated the opportunity Florida avocado season afforded Western Beef. The seasonal introduction provided him with the chance to expand the variety available at the store, but also to apply a buying and merchandise expertise that helps differentiate Western Beef's produce operation from its opposing numbers at other chain supermarkets. "We'll sell the hell out of that," Battaglia declares. "They'll be trying to sell it at \$1.99, and we'll be selling it for 99-cents."

Seasonality is a significant factor for Western Beef and while he has to have product year-round, Battaglia reveals he tries to shift out of some imports early to make room for seasonal products.

Given economic conditions, though, Battaglia is forced to make decisions he might not have three years ago — about what price points his customers might accept and what could strike them as over-the-top. At the right price, he said, Western Beef can put out any number of new items and get trial, but price has become a stricter arbiter in the recession. Battaglia said he's inclined to lay off early season products if their price is too steep, waiting for them to modify. He's more aware of

deals, too, when the quality is there. "You have to take your opportunities when you can get them," he says succinctly.

While fresh, bulk produce is the core of the chain's offerings, Western Beef offers an ice table with fresh-cut fruit and has shifted its operation toward convenience products with customer demand. "Over the last five years, bagged salads have grown and iceberg is off," Battaglia reports. "Also better are the grape tomatoes."

Competitive as the operation is, Battaglia notes company executives spent a year checking out the Florida market before determining to open a location as it became clear to them that there wasn't a Sunshine State retailer providing the whole package of quality, price and vast perishables assortment Western Beef could — and does. "So far, we've been very successful in Boca Raton," he discloses. "Sales have exceeded expectations."

Given the reaction, Battaglia relates Western Beef is considering an expansion that could give it an additional five to ten Florida stores within five years.

Western Beef supplies its New York area stores from a distribution center in Ridgewood, Queens. The bulk of produce is shipped to the distribution center direct, but the company still shops for fill in and specialty products at the Hunts Point Market, with 10 to 20 percent of its supply coming from wholesalers there, depending upon the season and circumstances.

While it might be reasonable to consider that the company's name might be a barrier to produce success, Battaglia admits he has changed his mind about that assumption over the years. Meat is about 30 percent of Western Beef's business, but it establishes a position for the company that is centered on perishable food. "It's something different," he notes. "It says we're specialized. I wouldn't say we're specialty gourmet, but we definitely have quality at the right price."

**pb**

**FACT FILE:**

**WESTERN BEEF**

2040 Forest Ave.  
Staten Island, NY 10303  
718-698-8092

**BUSINESS HOURS:**  
Daily 7am-10pm

[www.westernbeef.com](http://www.westernbeef.com)

# FAIRWAY MARKET

*The original Fairway, located in New York's Upper West Side, has grown by leaps and bounds, yet, with its latest store opening in Paramus, NJ, the store stays true to its roots with beautiful produce at unbeatable prices.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN



In 1974, Fairway opened on Manhattan's Upper West Side with 3,000 square feet and a whole lot of produce, plus some deli products and a few specialty groceries. As time passed and real estate next door became available, the store expanded into the destination it is today, with seafood, meat, groceries, an amazing array of cheeses, a cafe and — of course — lots and lots more produce.

"Produce is our biggest department, in terms of volume sales. It exceeds the national standards," notes Peter Romano, produce director, who has worked for the company for more than 30 years. "We forge sales in produce. We really want to achieve that. We pile them high and sell them low," he says. As a result, "A lot of customers come in for fresh produce and then buy everything else."

Quality is an important part of the equation. "We maintain

freshness. We don't keep anything old on the shelves. When in doubt, we throw it out," asserts Romano.

Not that the produce here has much time to stand around. The store is so busy that it remains open seven days a week, from 6 am until 1 am, giving workers just enough time to pile the fruits and veggies high on Fairway's signature pyramid-shaped displays before the doors reopen to waiting shoppers hours later. It's no wonder that Fairway has expanded to five stores — the newest one is in Paramus, NJ — with three more planned for the near future.

On a weekday afternoon, customers were seen reaching (and sometimes nearly running) over each other to pluck containers of fresh strawberries and other items from displays both inside the store and out on stands along the sidewalk. "Our philosophy is that we have everything from A to Z at the lowest price we can



get. We buy good and we pass it on to the customers. We deal in volume. And we strive for high quality," explains Romano. Much of the produce is bought direct and fill-ins often come from the Hunts Point Market.

In season, plenty of Fairway's produce comes from local farms. "We support our local produce quite nicely," says Romano. Tiny, sweet strawberries and fiddlehead ferns are some of the favorites here. "Anything that's local I like to support. You want to help the local economy," maintains Romano.

Organics are especially important to Fairway's customers. "We have a hardcore organic following who don't buy anything but organics," relates Romano. In fact, with the weak economy, he tells us, "Organics are the only department still growing at an accelerated speed — still going strong."

The economy has had some ill effect on the store. "Customers might trade down. We have 50 different types of olive oils. The item that gets hurt the most is the highest priced oil," says Romano. But, "In produce, I haven't seen much of a change with the economy. Not like the other departments," he notes. "People might not go out to eat. They stay home and cook, so our raw goods are doing well."

And while the prices of other items have increased over the years, the prices for produce remain remarkably similar to what they were a decade ago. "Produce hasn't gone up a lot. It still offers a great bargain," remarks Romano. When circumstances drive the price point on one item higher than customers are willing to pay, they simply opt for another. Yet some high-priced items, such as the season's first cherries, still fly off the shelves here. "This time of year, cherries are our best item," Romano reports. **pb**

**FACT FILE:**

**FAIRWAY**

17 N and Ridgewood Ave.  
Paramus, NJ 07652  
201-444-5455

BUSINESS HOURS:  
Daily 6am-1am  
Organics 2nd Floor  
Daily 8am-10pm

[www.fairwaymarket.com](http://www.fairwaymarket.com)

# THANK GOODNESS FOR GRACE'S

*A new store with a decades-old pedigree combines the best of old and new food retailing for its North Shore, Long Island customers.*

BY MIKE DUFF

**P**roduce is a showcase department for Grace's Market in Greenvale, NY, and the store is positioned to make the point that the operation stands for good and healthy eating. Rounding out produce is a range of departments, including bakery, deli, dairy and grocery all stocked with gourmet offerings. Yet, produce manager, Dominick Doria, maintains the produce department to standards that match or surpass the rest of the store.

Like Grace's, Doria's food heritage goes back to Balducci's, the legendary Greenwich Village gourmet market. There, his brother, Joseph Doria, met Grace Balducci when he came and worked for the store, and they were married in 1957. Grace's Marketplace, the store Joe and Grace Doria opened on the Upper East Side, is named for her and has become a fixture of the affluent Manhattan neighborhood. Its sister operation, the Long Island Grace's, opened in October 2008.

Dominick Doria worked at Balducci's, and later Grace's, before starting his own business, Dominick Doria and Son, on the Hunt's Point terminal market in the 1980s. The business is still operated by his son, but he came on to work as produce manager at the new Grace's.

The regard for quality and merchandising is evident right at the top of the produce department where a display of first season cherries and tree fruit greeted customer on a spring day. The cherries may have retailed for \$7.99 a pound, but they were each a third of the size of a plum — sweet and succulent.

Rusty Pacheco, a Doria in-law and part owner of the Long Island Grace's, reveals the affluent communities surrounding the store had never been served by a truly upscale grocery store. Thus, the high-end positioning of Grace's has been something of a challenge. "So far, the market is doing okay," Pacheco notes. "We've had to make certain adjustments to meet the demands



of the consumer who patronizes the store. The store also is going through changes because, even though we were successful in Manhattan, the needs of this community may be somewhat different. The suburbia mentality for shopping is more on the family package as opposed to the consumer who shops in Manhattan on a daily basis," he explains. "We're learning as we go along. We have very high expectations."

Additionally, customers on Long Island turned out to be more organic-oriented than anyone initially anticipated, although economics and geography may combine to explain the demand for natural food. The closest thing the neighborhood had to a full-line gourmet grocer before Grace's arrival was Whole Foods Market, two of which are within a 20-minute drive of the new store. "We started out with a very small section of organic," Pacheco details. "We didn't think it was going to be that critical of an issue. We've learned that folks around here demand the organic products. It's a staple — something we seek out now — pretty much an essential to have in fruits and vegetables."

The freshness of the produce offered, purchased daily on the Hunt's Point Market, and the variety Grace's can tap, represent significant points of differentiation for the store, maintains Doria. "It's not an ordinary supermarket. It's a family-owned business. We want to get the best quality of merchandise and handle it with care. With

the variety we have, a lot of our customers say, 'We go to the supermarket and they don't have Morel mushrooms.' A supermarket's not going to handle morel mushrooms at \$30-a-pound. Or the first cherries of the season. They go over \$100 a box or \$140. A regular supermarket isn't going to bother with them," he reasons.

Doria continues to try new and novel items to generate more interest in the store and establish Grace's as unique in the marketplace. "I'll be getting lychee nuts, which, over here, I hope people know what they are," he notes. "Another item that looks like a lychee nut, the Rambutans, I had to open up and show the people what they were and let them taste some, and they said, 'Oh my God, it's so delicious!'"

"It's a trial and error situation," Pacheco admits.

"Actually, we're on trial," Doria adds.

"We take a gamble," expresses Pacheco. "We bring in different provisions that we don't necessarily know how well they are going to be received by the consumer, but our goal is to introduce our regular customers to those products they never had access to before. We figure that once they know a shop like Grace's Marketplace is where they can come and look for those items they read about in the food magazines, whether it be star fruit or fiddleheads, they'll come and find them here." **pb**

## **FACT FILE:**

### **GRACE'S MARKET**

81 Glen Cove Rd.  
Greenvale, NY 11548  
516-621-5100

**Business Hours:**  
Monday-Saturday 7am-7:30pm  
Sunday 8am-10pm

[www.gracemarketplace.com](http://www.gracemarketplace.com)

# CRAFT-ED WITH CARE

*Tom Colicchio's Craft continues to inspire diners with its unique, family-style menu.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**Y**ou might think chef/owner Tom Colicchio would be tempted to let New York's Craft live off of its reputation. After all, the famed *Top Chef* judge owns a number of successful restaurants baring the Craft name around the country. But Colicchio has hired great people to watch over the day-to-day operations of the original Craft, and as such, the food continues to dazzle.

Craft's upscale, do-it-yourself, a la carte menu and family-style service took the world by storm in 2001. Simple preparations allow the top-quality ingredients to shine, according to James Tracey, chef de cuisine. "Craft started from the concept of using the best products on the plate," he explains. These include the best fruits and vegetables of the season, naturally. "In the summer, virtually all of our vegetables come from the green market," Tracey says, looking out the window and gesturing toward the Union Square farmers' market a few blocks away. "I know a lot of these guys out here and I've dealt with them for years." Other produce items may come from a purveyor who carries locally grown products or direct from the farm. In any case, "During the summer, spring and fall, virtually every vegetable is coming from a local farmer. We shoot for that."

In addition to local produce, local meats and cheeses are also featured promi-

nently on the menu. When items are not available locally, Tracey often uses products produced regionally, such as the eco-friendly, humanely raised pork he gets from a cooperative in Virginia. At Craft, how the food is grown is as important as where it's grown. "First of all, it's about quality," says Tracey. "The quality comes out in the way it's grown." Sometimes that means using organic food, but often he looks past that label. "The term 'organic' is not important. Organic has become a government word," he says. Instead, Tracey is very careful to let the quality of the ingredients dictate his purchases. "Local isn't always better, and organic doesn't necessarily mean it's good," he reminds us.

As a result of the shifting availability of many items, the menu changes daily. This is especially true during the summer months. "In the summer, there's more freedom. If you find something on the market that's really great that day, then you just put it on the menu." Tracey loves getting his hands on tiny zucchini and yellow squash. "Roasting those and finishing them with Parmesan and basil with a little bit of onion — the sweetness of that is amazing," he says, as he envisions it all coming together in his mouth.

"Peas — English peas, sugar snap peas — I love. Ramps are this romantic thing for me, because in the spring it's the first thing that pops. When I lived in Massachusetts I



used to pick them myself," Tracey says. The man knows his produce, and isn't shy about displaying his love for it.

Produce plays a huge role in the menu here, even in the meat and fish dishes. For example, a first course of foie gras is served with a Lady apple that has been cooked in duck fat, confit-style.

Because the menu is so large and varied, educating the wait staff takes up quite a bit of time each day. Waiters and waitresses usually sit down with Tracey before service and taste several of that day's dishes. They might learn what part of the pig the trotter comes from, or how to describe the taste of the burdock root with which the sweetbreads were cooked. "It almost tastes a little licoricy," describes Tracey. All this occurs while a small army of chefs prepares handmade pastas, family-sized hunks of prime beef, wild fish so fresh it might have been plucked from the river that morning and desserts that one waiter later promises patrons "will destroy you."

Diners never see any of this, but the efforts show in every bite of the carefully crafted banquet they'll consume with family, friends, dates or colleagues. And, certainly, the word is still out that this is the place to be. While other restaurants may be hurting for customers, even on a Wednesday it promises to be a busy night at Craft.

pb



## FACT FILE:

### CRAFT

43 East 19th St.  
New York, NY 10003  
212-780-0880

BUSINESS HOURS:  
Monday-Thursday  
5:30pm-10pm

Friday-Saturday 5:30pm-11pm  
Sunday 5pm-9pm

[www.craftrestaurant.com](http://www.craftrestaurant.com)

# FISHTAIL

*This new entry into David Burke's growing empire pleases with a mix of simple preparations and surprising combinations.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**R**estaurateur David Burke's latest endeavor, Fishtail — a luxurious, yet relatively affordable seafood restaurant in Manhattan — opened in December to rave reviews. The restaurant's concept is a new one for chef/owner Burke, who is known for his off-the-wall and often over-the-top creations. "It's our only seafood-focused restaurant," he notes. "We offer a full raw bar in the downstairs lounge area. It's more of a simpler approach to dining than some of my other restaurants."

Walk past the casual oyster bar and up the stairs into the main dining room and you'll enter a surreal sort of atmosphere that may seem familiar to anyone who has eaten at a David Burke establishment before. Much like the menu, it is whimsical, yet elegant; silly, yet serious, too. Take the Can o' Cake dessert, for example. It's a molten chocolate cake large enough to share, warm and made to order with an assortment of toppings, served with little beaters dipped in chocolate "batter."

Diners might start with Burke's not-so-standard Pretzel Crusted Crabcake with confit orange and poppyseed honey, Lobster Dumplings with XO sauce and sea-

weed vegetable salad or Dry-Roasted Angry Mussels with chili oil, basil and lemon. Groups of two or more might enjoy a simple, yet sublime shellfish tower with lobster, shrimp, oysters, clams, mussels and seafood salad ceviche.

Entrees are divided among Today's Whole Fish & Simple Fish, such as steamed or roasted Maine lobster with a selection of sauces, Fish Dishes, such as Roasted Maya Prawns on Fishtail Paella and Meat, either dry-aged sirloin or organic free-range chicken. Depending on the season, irresistible sides may include Cauliflower Brulée, Crispy Artichokes, Sautéed Mushrooms and Grilled Asparagus.

It's a large menu, offering many kinds of fish and utilizing almost every cooking method known to man, from steaming to poaching to dry roasting. The fish themselves are extremely fresh and most are environmentally friendly. "On average, over 85 percent of the fish on our menu is sustainable," says Burke. "Sustainability is important for many reasons: First, helping all of us conserve the ocean population for the future and second, offering diners the option to eat sustainably is important. We are one of the only restaurants offering



Photo courtesy of Fishtail

this many sustainable fish on our menu."

While some menu items sound complicated, it's the simplicity of some of these dishes that makes the seafood itself shine. Each dish is designed to let the flavor of the fish, which is often quite delicate, stand out.

The produce items used in each dish are carefully chosen to enhance the food. "In producing a seafood restaurant menu, produce plays a very important part," Burke tells us. "Produce has to be fresh so as to pair with the natural flavors of the fish. Local produce plays a big role here, as well as in our restaurant in New Jersey," he explains, referring to David Burke Fromagerie in Rumsen.

Here in Manhattan, fans of local food and Burke's sensational creations can look forward to a new menu at his flagship restaurant, which used to be called david-burke & donatella and is now named David Burke Townhouse. "When we re-launch David Burke Townhouse in August, we are planning a new menu that focuses on organic ingredients. We will be sourcing the freshest local produce we can find." **pb**



"Produce has to be fresh so as to pair with the natural flavors of the fish," says chef/owner, David Burke.

Photo courtesy of Fishtail

## FACT FILE:

### FISHTAIL

135 East 62nd St.  
New York, NY 10065  
212-754-1300

BUSINESS HOURS:  
Daily 5pm - 10:30pm

[www.fishtaildb.com](http://www.fishtaildb.com)

**House .....Unit(s) .....Phone**

A & J Produce Corp.....	126-133, 137-144, 450-463	718-589-7877
Albee Tomato Co., Inc.....	118-120	718-542-6054
Alphas Corp.....	223-225	718-893-0222
Armata, E.....	111-117, 338-341 369-370, 372-373	718-991-5600
B.T. Produce Co., Inc.....	163-166	718-893-7520
Best Tropical Produce.....	237	718-861-3131
Chain Produce.....	266-268, 400-402	718-893-1717
CM Produce LLC.....	123-125	
Cochran Robert. T. Co., Inc.....	408-412	718-991-2340
C and J Produce.....	238-241	718-991-5050
Coosemans New York, Inc.....	242-244, 249	718-328-3060
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.....	301-308, 310-320 323-330, 332-336	718-991-5900
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.....	247-248, 250-257, 271	718-893-1640
Food Barn.....	31B	718-617-3800
Fruitco Corp.....	200-204	718-893-4500
Georgallas Tomato & Produce.....	447-449	718-842-6317
Gold Medal Produce.....	167, 168	
Henry Haas, Inc.....	464	718-378-2550
Hothouse AFL.....	110	718-542-3777
Hunts Point Tropical.....	134-136	718-893-0895
Issam Kanawi.....	331	718-542-2217
Juniors Produce Inc.....	438-439	718-991-7300
Katzman Berry Corp.....	153, 260-263	718-589-1400
Katzman S. Produce, Inc.....	154-157, 423-428	718-991-4700
Korean Farm Corp.....	352-353	718-589-4440
Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.....	347-350	718-991-4800
LBD.....	226-233, 403-407	914-522-3049
Lee Loi Industries, Inc.....	234-236	718-542-4115
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Mabijo.....	271	718-893-1640
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Margiotta, J. Company, Inc.....	100-105	718-378-5800
Mendez Int'l. Tropical Fruit & Veg.....	152, 158-162	718-893-0100
Nathel & Nathel, Inc.....	354-364, 367-368, 464-468	718-991-6050
National Farm Wholesale Corp.....	434-437	718-617-6229
Okun, Morris, Inc.....	205-220	718-589-7700
Pan Hellenic Food Corp.....	440-444	718-328-8654
Porriceilli, Ciro.....	342	718-893-6000
Renella, J. Produce, Inc.....	351	718-991-4210
Robangela.....	374-376	718-893-3311
Rothman, D.M. Co., Inc.....	106-109	718-991-4920
Rubin Bros. Produce Corp.....	147-148, 269-270, 272-274	718-589-3200
Square.....	258-259	718-893-0200
Top Banana LLC.....	413-420	718-328-6700
Trucco, A. J.....	343-344, 337	718-893-3060
Ven-Co Produce, Inc.....	429-433	718-893-3311
Yola Produce.....	371	516-292-8821

# HUNTS POINT TERMINAL PRODUCE CO-OPERATIVE MARKET DIRECTORY

RUBIN BROS.	274	376	ROBANGELA
	273	374	
	272	373	E. ARMATA, INC.
FIERMAN PRODUCE	271	372	YOLA
RUBIN BROS.	270	370	E. ARMATA
	269	369	

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368	NATHEL & NATHEL
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353	KOREAN FARMS
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351	J. RENELLA
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ALPHAS CORP.	224
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342	JERRY PORRICEILLI PRODUCE
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340	E. ARMATA, INC.
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337	A.J. TRUCCO, INC.
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333	D'ARRIGO BROS.
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331	ISSAM KANAWI
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328	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC
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444	PAN HELLENIC
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439	JUNIORS PRODUCE INC.
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436	NATIONAL FARM WHOLESALE CORP
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433	VEN-CO PRODUCE INC.
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428	S. KATZMAN PRODUCE EAST, INC.
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114	E. ARMATA INC.	214
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110	AFL HOTHOUSE	210
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108	D.M. ROTHMAN CO. INC.	208
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103	J. MARGIOTTA	203
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MORRIS OKUN INC.	220	
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FRUITCO INC.	203	
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<b>ROW B</b>		

D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC.	320	
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PT. TERM FOOD	300	
<b>ROW C</b>		

420	TOP BANANA	
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411	COCHRAN ROBERT. T. CO., INC	
410		
409		
408		
407		
406	LBD	
405		
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402	CHAIN PRODUCE	
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400		
<b>ROW D</b>		

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# Corn Gets A Face Lift

*Innovative, value-added products are helping this staple summer veggie break out of its commodity mold.*

BY AMY SHANNON

**Sometimes considered the unsung hero among top-selling summer vegetables, corn is gaining prominence due to a growing number of value-added corn products on the market.**

Breeders are developing new corn varieties with higher yields, higher sugar content, longer shelf life and a greater resistance to drought and insects. Other trends in corn production include convenience-oriented packaging that allows consumers to microwave, steam and cook corn in the same container it's purchased and stored.

"Value-added corn packaging has become a new profit center for retailers, as opposed to the traditional view of corn as a loss-leader during summer holidays," explains Jason Stemm, associate vice president for Lewis & Neale Inc., the New York, NY-based communications agency for the Fresh Super-sweet Corn Council, based in Maitland, FL.

Abbott & Cobb Inc., (A&C), a Feasterville PA-based breeder, producer and marketer of corn seeds, developed Quick 'N Easy Summer Sweet Corn, a patent-pending product offering consumers the convenience of cooking its premium corn in 60 seconds or less.



Tray packs that allow consumers to microwave or cook the ears in the packaging are also gaining popularity at retail.

"The single ear microwaveable corn is cleaned of all husk and silk, and is wrapped with a food-safe film and sealed with its Easy-Open Strip," reports Vic Lomoriello, vice president of AAAbco, A&C's sister company that handles the retail marketing end of the company. "When pulled, the strip opens the packaging to dispense the corn right onto your dish ready for consumption."

Sales of value-added products, such as A&C's Summer Sweet Corn, are proven to be incremental as a premium product that helps build the category's sales and profits. "We don't look to replace existing corn products, but once consumers purchase Summer Sweet Corn, they come back for more," adds Lomoriello.

Much of A&C's marketing is done by word of mouth and through its sales and product-development teams, stresses Lomoriello. "Other avenues include media advertising, direct marketing and pull-through marketing."

Consumer demand for products with greater sophistication are on the rise, according to Fresh Facts on Retail, a 2008 study conducted by West Dundee, IL-based Perishables Group, reporting data from the fourth quarter of 2008. "Value-added vegetable share remained relatively consistent," notes the report. "Meal prep increased the most, up 1.4 share percentage points [from fourth quarter 2007] to 16.6 percent."

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and new business development for Rosemont Farms Corp.,



Photo courtesy of Rosemont Farms

**Rosemont Farms' Sweet 'N Ready 4-pack caddy carton includes cooking instructions, serving suggestions and nutritional information.**

based in Boca Raton, FL, agrees with the report, adding, “The consumers just want to have a satisfying experience they believe is a value.”

**“Many consumers who purchase tray-packed corn purchase it throughout the year, and will only purchase bulk corn with husk for large gatherings.”**

**— Vic Lomoriello  
AAAbco**

Stemm points to a growing interest in value-added tray packs, primarily 3-to-5 ears, “but some have done up to 12 ears for club stores.” They can be fully or partially husked.

According to Lomoriello, “Many consumers who purchase tray-packed corn purchase it throughout the year, and will only purchase bulk corn with husk for large gatherings or parties.”

## **MERCHANDISING READY-TO-COOK**

Tray packs that allow consumers to microwave or cook the ears in the packaging are also gaining popularity at retail. “These are mostly 2-to-4 ear packs, fully husked,” states Stemm.

Value-added products, including tray packs and microwavable single-ear corn, should be displayed with bulk corn under refrigeration, suggests Lomoriello. “This allows consumers to make the comparison of price, value and need of convenience.”

## **Sugar-Enhanced Varieties**

In Florida, the majority of corn producers grow sugar-enhanced varieties, such as supersweet and multi-sweet corn. Growers go to great lengths to cool the corn during harvest, which extends its shelf-life. Sweet corn is also shipped at ideal temperatures to ensure freshness once it arrives at supermarkets, notes Jason Stemm, associate vice president for Lewis & Neale Inc., the New York, NY-based communications agency for the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council, headquartered in Maitland, FL. “This has given retailers more time to move it through their systems and still deliver a fresh, sweet ear of corn to the consumer.”

Chris Roberts, product manager of sweet corn for Abbott & Cobb Inc., (A&C), a breeder, producer and marketer of corn seeds, headquartered in Feasterville, PA, says, “The multi-sweet varieties are designed to get a premium. We have focused our breeding efforts to be cost effective to the growers all the way to the consumers by breeding much-needed disease resistances with high-quality, better-tasting varieties. The general public has responded well to the high-quality multi-sweet varieties, especially the younger generations.”

Rosemont Farms Corp., headquartered in Boca Raton, FL, is in the process of introducing a groundbreaking new way to merchandise fresh, supersweet corn in the market-

place while taking convenience up a level, too. It’s all about “finding the right packaging formula that really highlights the delicious and fresh product. Sweet corn is a huge category that has seen fairly stagnant growth in the past 10 or more years,” explains Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and new business development. “Margins have gotten much thinner for the grower and the returns have had to improve on the farming side.”

A&C’s Sweet Tender kernels of Summer Sweet Corn are available year-round. Vic Lomoriello, vice president of AAAbco, A&C’s Tennessee-based sister company that handles the retail marketing end of the company, explains the kernels yield corn that tastes the same in January and February as it does in the middle of the summer. “Our Summer Sweet Brand multi-sweet products have excellent shipping ability, high-eating quality and holding ability to suit a variety of market preferences.”

While improved varieties with higher sugar levels have sparked interest from consumers, Whittles says it’s just as important to focus on the overall eating experience when developing value-added corn products. “Giving the consumer an improved presentation and flexibility of use and a superior eating experience will drive new interest and increased dollar sales.” **pb**

Rosemont Farms’ exclusive Sweet ‘N Ready 4-pack caddy carton features cooking instructions, serving suggestions and nutritional information. “Each ear of corn is individually wrapped and contains an easy-to-use pull strip for added convenience,” notes Whittles. “Sweet ‘N Ready only features the very freshest sweet corn from premium varieties to enhance consumers’ eating and

cooking experience.”

A&C’s new microwavable corn is packaged in a display-ready box of 24 single ears. “Just remove the high graphic box lid, and each ear is labeled with its own unique scan bar code and stamped with a ‘Use By’ date code for freshness and taste,” explains AAAbco’s Lomoriello.

For retailers, microwavable corn products offer an opportunity for premium pricing during times fresh corn is available. According to Lewis & Neale’s Stemm, “Retailers are going on ad with loose ears five-for-\$2 or eight-for-\$2 and also offering tray-packed corn at winter pricing.”

Rosemont’s new packaging innovation also allows for safe transport and vertical display, providing retailers with superior merchandising and exceptional value-added sales opportunity. “The smart packaging also extends shelf-life and fits right in at home or work with other grab-and-go products,” states Whittles. **pb**



Photo courtesy of Abbott & Cobb Inc.

**Abbott & Cobb has developed Quick ‘N Easy Summer Sweet Corn, which offers consumers the convenience of cooking its premium corn in 60 seconds or less.**

# Five Ways To Spice Up Garlic Sales

*Value-added, organics and creative displays play a significant role in successful garlic sales.*

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

**G**arlic has long been a popular spice for a number of cultures. Today, Americans also enjoy a love affair with garlic. It's no wonder. A wealth of health benefits, the flavor-without-fat trend, and the widespread popularity of side dishes, such as garlic mashed potatoes, are all driving sales of this robust flavored relative of the onion, leek, shallot and chive.

Marvin Lyons, produce director at Bigg's, an 11-store chain based in Milford, OH, says, "Garlic long ago moved from being an ethnic specialty to a mainstream item. It's a staple seller for us."

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), per capita consumption of garlic has increased from 1.1 pounds in 1985 to a forecasted 2.8 pounds in 2009, with approximately one third of this going to the fresh market, while the remainder is being used for processed products.

## 1. BUILD SALES AROUND BULB GARLIC

Fresh, whole heads of garlic "still dominate in terms of sales, even though we carry several value-added garlic products as well," reports Bigg's Lyons.

David Grimes, owner of David E. Grimes Co., a Hollister, CA-based marketing company that focuses heavily on fresh garlic, believes, "Most customers who know garlic go for the fresh, whole bulb." In addition to his own company, Grimes is also a sales associate for Vessey & Co. Inc., based in Holtville, CA.

Flavor is key, relates John Duffus, sales and marketing manager for The Garlic Company, in Bakersfield, CA. "There's nothing like fresh garlic. The taste differs from



Photo courtesy of Christopher Ranch LLC

**Garlic displayed next to tomatoes and avocados provides a color break and usage suggestions.**

processed types."

White bulbs of garlic are among the most desirable. However, Grimes explains, "Sometimes we get rain at harvest and the bulb color is affected, but there is nothing wrong with the garlic; it is just Mother Nature's way. White or purple, it's all about flavor."

Purple garlic imported from Mexico is something chefs love and consumers clamor for, reports Pam Mitchell, a sales associate at Empacadora GAB Inc., in McAllen, TX. "It's only available for a short season — mid-March to mid-September — but when retailers merchandize a display of white bulb garlic with purple in the center, the purple goes first. It's usually a premium ring because of the flavor; the cloves are huge."

As for the size of the head, "The bigger the better," asserts Anthony Sharrino, president of Eaton & Eustis Co, in Chelsea, MA.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's World Variety Produce, in Los Angeles, CA, adds, "Upscale foodie and gourmet customers look for jumbo- and colossal-sized heads of garlic because the cloves are larger and therefore, easier to chop. However, these large sizes represent only around 5 percent of the crop."

Some 90 percent of fresh, whole heads of garlic are sold in bulk, estimates Sharrino. "A small amount is packaged. We offer two heads in a cello wrap and also 1-pound mesh bag."

## 2. OFFER ORGANIC

Lyons notes, "At Bigg's, we carry both organic and conventional garlic. The organic is merchandized in the organic section."

Louis J. Hymel III, director of purchasing and marketing for Orlando, FL-based

Spice World Inc., reports, "Organic fresh and organic ready-to-use jar garlic are readily available and gaining ground."

Maurice A. Auerbach Inc. in South Hackensack, NY, offers whole heads of organic garlic in an 8-ounce, plastic clamshell. President and CEO Paul Auerbach remarks, "The pack brings attention to the category and allows retailers to sell it either in the organic or conventional section."

### 3. INCLUDE VALUE-ADDED OPTIONS

Most consumers have a need for differ-

ent types of garlic, says The Garlic Company's Duffus, "That translates to multiple sales. For example, people will comment to me that if they're making a special dish or dinner, they will buy fresh garlic. But, they'll also keep a jar of processed garlic on hand when they need a bit for a quick flavoring."

Even though value-added garlic doesn't have the same taste as fresh, its convenience ranks as the big selling point, says Grimes of David E. Grimes. "In this day and age, consumers are looking at ease-of-use and time savings and therefore, choosing the peeled and jarred garlic products."

Hymel concurs, adding, "Processed garlic has proven its value for all cooks — no waste, very convenient, time-saving and always available in the kitchen. Such value in cooking also has the tendency for consumers to use the product more often. This is proven through recorded sales volume over the years, making it a very profitable produce item."

One trend in product development on the value-added garlic front is a flavored product. For example, Frieda's, in Los Alamitos, CA, offers Frieda's Garlic Delights, a line of flavored, fresh, chopped garlic products that come in Original, Chipotle, Sun-Dried Tomato and Green Olive. The products are packaged in 7-ounce, re-sealable tubs. Karen Caplan, president, says, "These are great for in-store cross-promotions with fresh vegetables such as broccoli, carrots and potatoes, or to cross-merchandise near roasted pork."


Another product making stronger sales at retail is whole, peeled garlic cloves. Duffus calls it "the new mousetrap in the garlic business." This product has taken its cue from foodservice, where chefs over the last decade have found the pre-peeled cloves labor- and time-saving, yet close in flavor to fresh garlic.

Garlic suppliers, such as The Garlic Company, have gone a step further and now offer the ultra-convenience of a single, recipe-sized pouch containing three to four whole garlic cloves. Duffus offer details: "Each of our VakPaks comes with individual pouches that have easy-to-open pull tabs. The peeled garlic inside is 100 percent ready-to-use. This allows consumers to purchase the amount of fresh garlic they need without wasting or throwing away excess product or packaging. We suggest the VakPaks, which contain three portion packs of whole, peeled garlic cloves and weighs 1½ ounces, retail for under \$1.50."

### 4. SELL THE SOURCE STORY

Price, seasonality and food safety are among top decision points in produce buyer's minds when sourcing garlic. Price is important to consumers too, but flavor is also an important factor. Lyons discloses, "We've sourced from China due to the cheap price, but we're now moving back to California because of consumer concerns about food safety and requests for better flavor."

Similarly, Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral for Rice Epicurean Markets, an upscale market with five stores in the Houston, TX, area, says, "We try to source year-round from California, but product from China is attractive due to low pricing. That's definitely a concern for some customers in this economy."



**"The garlic produced and processed by and for I Love Produce in China can be assumed to be of highest quality of any available to the American consumer. It is organic produced. The production, handling and processing environments and methods are clean, sanitary, safe and well documented. The product traceability is, at least, equal to others in the market.**

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- **Dr. Ron Voss**  
Professor Emeritus & Extension Vegetable Specialist  
University of California at Davis, April 2009

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China is the largest producer of garlic, supplying over 75 percent of world tonnage, according to the University of California at Davis' Agricultural Marketing Resource Center's January 2006 published report, *Commodity Profile: Garlic*. The United States ranks fourth in global garlic production, behind India and the Republic of Korea. California accounts for 82 percent of domestically harvested acreage.

For the U.S. market, says Grimes of David E. Grimes, "Major garlic sourcing areas are California, Argentina and Mexico. China is a major factor, but the verdict is still out on sanitary issues and if the cheap prices should be considered dumping."

Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco Inc., located in the Bronx, NY, adds, "Another problem is flavor. Chinese garlic is mild. It doesn't have the distinctive quality and flavor that Americans prefer."

Chinese garlic is a different variety than that grown in California, adds Duffus of The Garlic Co. "It has a hot taste like an onion, but a mild garlic flavor. You need to use more of it to get the desired garlic taste."

The California garlic industry runs traditionally nine months. Yet it is growing close, if not already, to offering a year-round supply. Doug Stanley, general manager for Coalinga, CA-based Harris Fresh Inc.,

## What's New? Take A Look At Black Garlic

It looks like a regular head of garlic on the outside, but inside the cloves are jet black in color. Black Garlic is food enthusiasts' latest temptation and sensation, making its debut in February on television shows such as Bravo TV's *Top Chef* and the Food Network's *Iron Chef America*, as well as being dubbed by the *Washington Post* as the "next food trend."

Black garlic has a subtle, yet complex flavor, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's World Variety Produce, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. "It can be added to improve the flavor of almost any dish that would benefit from a mildly sweet, tangy garlic flavor. Due to its sweet and chewy texture, chefs describe it as a 'licorice wine gum' and reminiscent of 'roasted garlic with undertones of malt and molasses.'"

Black garlic is created when whole heads of Korean-grown garlic are aged for one month in a special, high-heat fermentation process.

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, based in Los Alamitos, CA, adds, "The aged garlic turns a rich black color. Peeled cloves can be added to salads or used to top a variety of dishes from pasta to steak to fish. Or chop finely and mix with diced tomatoes to serve with bruschetta."

As for merchandising, Caplan suggests, "Merchandize black garlic in a special basket near the common garlic and onions in the produce department. Be sure to include informational and description signage with usage ideas."

Both Melissa's/World Variety Produce and Frieda's offer Black Garlic two heads to a bag. **pb**

reveals, "We're working on extending the marketing season. The crop itself dictates a lot each year — its quality and its potential for storage. Typically, if California runs out, it will be sometime between February and June, when product from Mexico and Argentina is available."

As for food safety, Duffus declares, "A lot of buyers prefer California because of traceability. In China, there are thousands of garlic farmers and it's virtually impossible to trace the product."

What therefore plays out is a two-tier market, says Auerbach of The Maurice Auerbach Co. "High-end retailers will source garlic from California, Mexico and Argentina, while the rest will also buy from China."

### 5. CREATIVELY DISPLAY & CONSISTENTLY PROMOTE

Different stores. Different clientele. Different customer preferences. Spice World's Hymel notes, "Retailers that perform the best and generate the most sales within the garlic category are those offering the most garlic products. Usually the produce departments that lag behind in garlic sales are the ones lacking in garlic variety."

Auerbach concurs, adding, "Retailers can carry anywhere from two to three up to eight to 10 or more different types of garlic products and packs."

Another piece of advice? Think color, suggests Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing for Christopher Ranch LLC, base in Gilroy, CA. "Set garlic off in a display next to


bright colors and it will stand out. For example, merchandize whole heads of garlic next to red tomatoes and green avocados."

Spice World's Hymel agrees. "Garlic should be displayed and cross-merchandized with other items that it complements; this will drive sales and purchases of these other items. For example, display garlic next to tomatoes, corn and potatoes in the salad section. That said, garlic should always be merchandised in a permanent place in the department as well."

Additionally, make use of other departments when displaying garlic. Hymel adds, "Garlic shouldn't be limited to the produce department. It can be displayed in the bakery department next to fresh loaves of bread, suggesting garlic bread. It also can be displayed in the pasta an sauce section."


One of the biggest merchandising challenges is getting customers to look for peeled, fresh garlic cloves in the refrigerated case. Luchak of Rice Epicurean says, "We've displayed garlic cloves in our value-added section next to the fresh-cut vegetables and it has done well."

Hymel remarks there are several key opportunities throughout the year to promote garlic in any form. Promote during seasonal events, such as Cinco de Mayo, Thanksgiving, Italian festivals and summertime barbecues. Cross-promote during football season for guacamole. I once heard that 50 million avocados are eaten on Super Bowl Sunday. An extra tablespoon of garlic in the guacamole will liven up the dip." **pb**



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# Dates & Dried Figs: Not Just Holiday Items

*Dates and dried figs demand visibility in the produce aisle for sales success.*

BY KEN HODGE

In today's competitive marketplace, food retailers should ask themselves if they're realizing the full sales potential of every item they carry. In the produce department, for example, marketers of dates and dried figs are showing these often neglected items can generate higher sales if properly merchandised.

## DATES DO PRODUCE

Just as new apple varieties have built the category over the years when put in the limelight, so dates and dried figs can turn in a stellar performance when sold in a visible location. In fact, David Anderson, president of Anderson Food Sales and Marketing, based in New Braunfels, TX, reports astounding results when dates are merchandised side-by-side with bananas. "We're most successful when retailers treat dates as a fresh fruit, not a dried product," notes Anderson, who markets medjool dates for the Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association, headquartered in Bard, CA. "When they put them next to bananas or other tropicals, it's a 310 percent difference versus where they might normally be merchandised with dried fruits or nuts. Test stores outperformed control stores in our trials by 340 percent."

Anderson says both bulk and pre-packaged SKUs experienced sales increases, and banana movement wasn't adversely affected during the five-week test. Sales volume was not purely a holiday phenomenon, either. "Retailers who are doing well in this category are committed to merchandising dates 365 days a year," he asserts.

Dale New, president of Fallbrook, CA-based Cal-Tropic Producers Inc., concurs, "The first thing to do is put them in the produce department." Dates don't need to be



Photo courtesy of Anderson Food Sales and Marketing

**When dates are merchandised with bananas or other tropicals, sales skyrocket.**

front-and-center to maximize performance, admits New, who markets for Desert Valley Date Inc. of Coachella, CA. He notes Stater Bros. Markets, a Southern California grocery chain, based in Colton, CA, "does extremely well" offering dates in the produce department year-round.

## THE VISIBLE DIFFERENCE

Elaborating on the location of dates within the produce department, New advises, "They should be in a visible position. Many grocers put them on a hidden shelf after the holidays, but if they're visible, it really does not make any difference where they are."

Shaleen Heffernan, national account manager and date specialist for Agrexco (USA) Ltd., an importer of Israeli dates located in Jamaica, NY, believes dates are easier to merchandise than other fruits that bruise or spoil. "Dates are nature's perfect candy," she points out. "They're a travel-

friendly food and very nutritious."

When it comes to supporting sales, Heffernan offers plenty of options. "There are three things retailers can do to maximize date movement — three locations for them," she explains. "One is the fresh produce section. The second is the dried fruit and nuts area, and the third is the deli area. Retailers can offer dates in a glass jar in the deli with tongs for removing them, just like selling olives and pickles."

"Dates should be treated as a year-round item," agrees Andrew Stillman, president of Amport Foods/American Importing Company Inc. of Minneapolis, MN. "Imported dates are shelf stable. Why they aren't left in the produce department all year is the real question."

## PROMOTING YEAR-ROUND SALES

Linda Cain, vice president of marketing

## Consumer Interest And Misconception

**T**his year, more than any time in the last 10 years, people are sending us e-mails asking where they can buy dates and why they can't get them this time of year," reveals Andrew Stillman, president of Amport Foods/American Importing Co. Inc. of Minneapolis, MN. "In the old days, there were always places to find them. Now you can't purchase them. People want imported dates."

Whether it is lack of visibility or lack of consumer understanding, per-capita U.S. date consumption is at a low of just .15 pounds per year, according to Lorrie Cooper, manager of the California Date Administrative Committee, in Indio, CA, a group that's fighting to correct the drift. "It's perception," she reasons. "There is a big misconception among consumers. They think dates are high in calories. They're sweet and consumers think they're fattening. Dates and dried fruits in general get a bad rap, but dates are just as good as fresh fruits." **pb**

and retail sales at Valley Fig Growers, headquartered in Fresno, CA, suggests displaying dried figs in the cheese case. "Once people are reminded about figs, they tend to pick them up. People think about October, November, December and even January as traditional months for moving figs, but the Easter/Passover season is also good because of the traditional usage of figs for those observances," she explains. "We're finding if they have increased availability year-round, then people buy more."

Salvatore Vacca, president of A.J. Trucco Inc., a produce importer headquartered in the Bronx, NY, agrees dates and dried figs can be merchandised together year-round. He sees growing numbers of ethnic groups purchasing dates, and sales are on the upswing. "In the past few years we have been selling dates all year long," he reports. "We used to stop in the summertime, but now we keep going."

Vacca has also seen increasing sales of packaged figs and loose or bulk dates. "Leaving dates loose is a good merchandising technique," he relates.

## THE NUTRITION CONNECTION

Like high-octane fuel for the body, dates are nutritional powerhouses. According to Lorrie Cooper, manager of the California Date Administrative Committee, headquartered in Indio, CA, dates are high in antioxidants and contain fluorine that protects against tooth decay. They contain boron that can work to promote prostate health in men, as well as a variety of vitamins and minerals, such as potassium.

The date industry has hired Charlene Rainey, president of Food Research Inc. of Costa Mesa, CA, as a spokesperson for dates to tout their nutritional value. "Any way you test them, dates are among the highest in antioxidant capacity of any fruit," reports Rainey, who created the first date nutrition label in 1995, and has combed the scientific literature on dates. Rainey notes the antioxidant capacity of dates is especially significant in view of the fact that antioxidants have been shown to help prevent heart disease, cancer and even diabetes.

"Research is showing inflammation is a forerunner to cancer, heart disease, insulin resistance in diabetes and other conditions," Rainey says. "All these problems are initiated by years of chronic oxida-

tion and chronic inflammation. Antioxidants in dates and other fruits help prevent that inflammation, oxidation at the very start of these diseases."

In the fig industry, health and nutrition are also an important part of the merchandising strategy, according to Cain. "Figs are an excellent source of potassium, even better ounce for ounce than bananas," she relates. "We have the strongest story to talk about in the dried fruit world. The fiber content is excellent, about 20 percent of the RDA [recommended daily allowance] per serving. For people who are lactose intolerant, figs are a great way to include calcium in their diets. They are also a good source of iron, magnesium, manganese, copper and overall, a really good source for a number of trace minerals."

"But our biggest story is that they taste great," Cain continues. "They are such a wonderful item to cook with. Marketing figs is a three-legged stool: You have the health benefits, paired with the flavor, paired with their versatility."

Like dates, dried figs also work well in produce, with both dried and fresh fruits because shoppers often make them an impulse purchase when they're visible, according to Cain. **pb**



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Reader Service # 9

### DOS GRINGOS, A FLOWER COMPANY VISTA, CA

**Karen Waxman** joined the company as director of sales and marketing. With more than 10 years of floral industry experience, she is leading the sales team in expanding business for bouquets, fresh arrangements, cut greens, grower bunches, specialty-cut flowers and consumer bunches. Waxman previously was with The Sun Valley Group, Arcata, CA, and Sunburst Farms, Miami, FL.



### GALLUP & STRIBLING ORCHIDS INC. CARPINTERIA, CA

**Heather Bassett** is the grower's new sales manager and mass marketing director. She has more than five years of sales, marketing and communication experience. Her work background also includes package and graphic design, new media and public relations. Bassett was previously with the Santa Barbara Olive Company Inc.



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Reader Service No. 318

### GTIN WEB SITE LAUNCHED

The Floral GTIN Initiative, Alexandria, VA, has created [www.floralgtin.com](http://www.floralgtin.com) as an online resource for growers, importers, distributors and their trading partners. On it are step-by-step implementation instructions, the full GTIN Implementation Guide and a time line designed to have the system operating by the middle of 2010. The Floral GTIN Initiative is a coalition of six industry trade organizations that have been working for more than two years to define, test and refine the coding strategy.



Reader Service No. 319

## NEW PRODUCTS

### HALLOWEEN PLUSH MINIS

Micky's Minis Flora Express, Millstadt, IL, presents Plush Minis Halloween Gift-able miniature plants. Each gift set includes one 2-inch potted foliage or blooming plant in a clear acetate viewing tube with a holiday decorated lid and base. Color coordinated accessories enhance the package, which includes plant care instructions and a seasonal gift tag.



Reader Service No. 320

### SPIRIT LETTERS

Carolina Fraser Fir Company LLC, Mouth of Wilson, VA, adds patent pending Spirit Letters to its line of wreaths, greenery and Christmas trees. Customers can hang holiday Spirit Letters on front doors, mail boxes and fireplace mantles. The fresh-cut Fraser Fir greens can be embellished with ribbons, bows and holiday picks.



Reader Service No. 321

### HERB APPEAL

Northland Floral Inc., St. Catharines, ON, Canada, is promoting its moveable garden cart herb displayer featuring USDA-Certified Organic herbs in 4.5-inch biodegradable pots. With a 45-pot capacity, the cart's herb selection can be changed to suit the season, and recipe cards can be offered in a side cardholder. Signage can be customized as well.



Reader Service No. 322

### ENHANCING FLOWERS WITH LIGHTS

Floral Lites, Thornlands, Brisbane Queensland, Australia, introduces Party Dots and StickyLites to its innovative range of portable, fiber-optic and LED-lit ornamental products designed to enhance the natural beauty of floral arrangements and bouquets. The product line is available for use with both fresh and silk flowers. The company also is seeking North American distributors.



Reader Service No. 323

### FLORAL VENDING KIOSK

24 Hour Florist, Baton Rouge, LA, introduces a refrigerated floral vending kiosk for cash and carry sales and wire orders for delivery. Featuring a 17-inch touch screen with voice prompts for easy ordering, the patent-protected vending cooler offers 16 immediate floral items that are created locally. Software, training and full support are a part of the package.



Reader Service No. 324

### PINK RIBBON PRODUCTS

burton & Burton, Bogart, GA, has expanded its line of Pink Ribbon products in support of Breast Cancer Awareness. The resin Pink Ribbon Blinger with sheer ribbon tie is 2.25"H X 1.5"W. The Pink Ribbon Floral Pick with white stick is 9.25" tall and measures 2.25"H X 1.5"W. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of these products will be donated to help fight breast cancer.



Reader Service No. 325

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

# From Field To Vase

*Part II of II: How maintaining the floral cold chain influences profits*

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**E**ffective cold chain management is increasingly important as today's consumers look for greater value for their dollar. However, some industry members speculate there hasn't been enough focus on the benefits and value of having properly cooled flowers. "Few people in the floral industry are making decisions based on vase-life," explains Terry Johnson, president of Horticultural Marketing Resources, headquartered in Mission Viejo, CA. "Buying decisions are more based on price, reliability of the vendors and availability of the flowers. We have to shift some of our thinking to a more consumer-centric mindset."

Proven cold chain maintenance yields sales results. Jon Strom, vice president of floral and lifestyle merchandising for Price Chopper Supermarkets, in Schenectady, NY, explains, "Recently, we offered a special on roses, and they sold like crazy. It was the ultimate cold chain product where they were grown, cut and shipped just for us a truckload at a time. The product lasted forever and was a great experience for consumers. The quality was outstanding and the consumers reacted to it by buying flowers, even in the middle of a recession."

"Any consumer buying behavior survey shows quality trumps price," reports Elizabeth Darragh, director of food strategic marketing for Sensitech Inc., based in Beverly, MA. "Consumers want a fair price, but they're really looking for quality. In our economy, people have given up going out for dinner, given up going out for lunch. They've given up so many things. Wouldn't buying a nice, long-lasting bouquet of fresh flowers make them feel better? It's a small indulgence. This is a great marketing message retailers can use if they can provide the value behind it," explains Darragh.

On the flip side, improper cold chain maintenance will affect the bottom line. "The issue is that a breakdown in the cold chain doesn't manifest itself at the dock of



Photo courtesy of Continental Airlines Cargo

**Maintaining the cold chain during airplane-to-cargo truck transfer time is of the utmost importance, yet is most often the time when it is jeopardized.**

the retailer's DC [distribution center]," says Stephen Armellini, senior vice president with Armellini Express Lines, in Miami, FL. "Unfortunately, it happens in the homes of the consumer, and if the expenditure of their disposable income doesn't give them the value they're looking for, we know they are not coming back to buy flowers. If we are not protecting the cold-chain we are gambling away the future of the market."

Large and small retailers alike have effective tools in their hands to ensure cold chain maintenance and floral quality.

## MONITOR TEMPERATURE AND QUALITY

Tracking temperature and monitoring quality should be an inherent part of any floral buying program. "It is important to work with reputable suppliers who track the temperatures through the cold chain," expresses Joseph C. Farrell, president of World Flowers LLC, based in Englewood, NJ. "You can see trucks and coolers with the state of the art refrigeration units, but it costs money to operate them. You have to know the people you work with to ensure the temperatures are maintained properly."

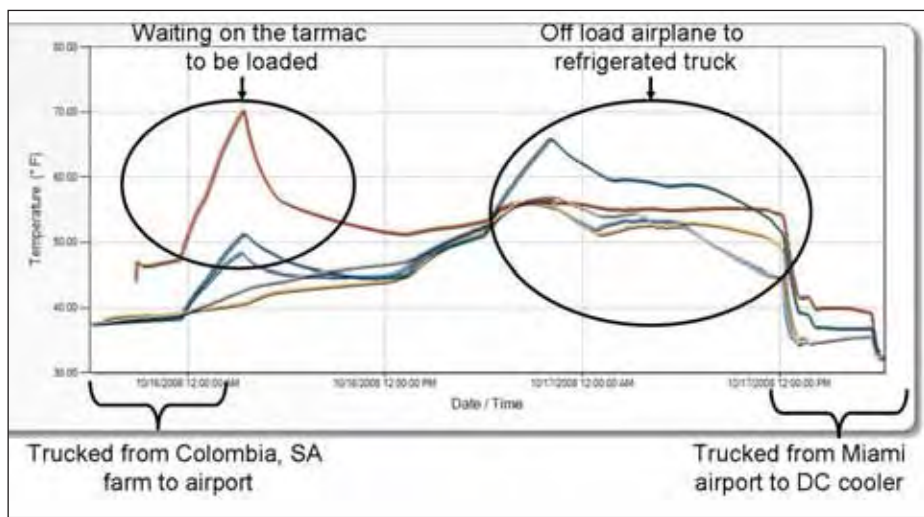
"Ask for temperature logs from the temperature sensors most quality-oriented shippers place in their cargo," states Mark Mohr,

product development and specialty sales manager for Houston, TX-based Continental Airlines Cargo. "If your supplier doesn't have an ongoing quality program, work with them to establish one. Implement an in-house Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program so you are constantly looking for ways to improve processes."

Many retailers already know the value of recording temperatures in produce and should require the same from floral suppliers. "Buyers should require their suppliers have a temperature recorder on every single load," says Darragh. "Many retailers require recorders on their produce and that should be extended into their floral products."

George Staby, Ph.D., president of the Perishables Research Organization, headquartered in Pioneer, CA, believes, "All shipments should include temperature monitoring devices. Retailers can and must require them, and be willing to pay for them."

Temperature recording will help buyers identify if and where improvement is necessary. "Improvements can never be accomplished until it is known specifically what improvements are needed," maintains Horticultural Marketing Resources' Johnson. "This means supermarkets must insist their vendors put temperature monitoring devices in flower boxes at farm level and



Graph courtesy of Sensitech Inc.

Each line represents time and temperature readings from one of five monitors randomly placed in a shipment of cut flowers sent from Colombia to Miami, FL.

then monitor those temperatures. Also, vase-life comparative testing should be done to demonstrate how much more vase-life consumers would receive through proper cool chain management.”

“Ask for specifics from suppliers like temperature settings and preventative cooler and cooling unit maintenance schedules,” adds Armellini of Armellini Express Lines. “Run tests on shelf-life and look at reporting results from temperature recorders.”

### COMMUNICATE AND TAKE ACTION

Many Web sites and sales presentations state something like, “We follow the cool chain,” but some question the accuracy of this statement. “It is true that ‘Every man is quick to proclaim his own goodness,’” states Bruce Brady, director of marketing and business development for Farmers’ West Flowers & Bouquets Inc., headquartered in Carpinteria, CA. “Initially, only careful inquiry and reputation will give insight into the level of cold chain adherence. Shipment monitoring through temperature recorders will tell the rest of the story.”

“Many importers argue the farms they buy from have proper refrigeration, which is probably true,” offers Johnson. “And they may have their own excellent cool chain facilities. But between farm departure and the arrival in a Miami cooler, there is risk for a huge break in the cool chain that may extract as much as 50 percent of the vase-life potential. The only way to know one way or the other is by monitoring temperatures at every point. Retailers have to ask to see the temperature data from the farm to the distributor’s door.”

Quality testing at store level will also help determine if the cold chain is properly managed. “You’ll know if your supplier is

being honest about its cold chain management by the length of time the product lasts in your stores,” says Price Chopper’s Strom. “If you have a lot of quality issues or if product is not lasting beyond the designated code date, then something’s not right. If a supplier is providing me with product not lasting the amount of time I need, for example 10 days or more in our case, then that’s not my supplier anymore.”

**“You’ll know if your supplier is being honest about its cold chain management by the length of time the product lasts in your stores.”**

**— Jon Strom  
Price Chopper  
Supermarkets**

“The beauty of flower distribution transparency is that there is no arguing,” points out Johnson. “Facts are facts. Temperatures are either properly maintained or they are not — period. It only remains to determine a solution acceptable to all concerned.”

After gathering the facts, it is up to the retailer to take action. “If retailers are not satisfied with the cold chain results, they can either work with the suppliers to correct the situation or change suppliers,” maintains Staby.

Retailers can help their suppliers by pro-

viding written specifications on their cold chain and quality expectations. “Developing written specs as the guidebook for what is expected and incorporating the incremental costs as necessary are key,” says Karen Leggett, director of sales and marketing services for Sunshine Bouquet Co., in Coral Gables, FL.

“Retailers should be very specific in writing down what their standard operating procedures (SOP) are,” suggests Sensitech’s Darragh. “Make sure the supplier understands what the retailer expects. They also must take responsibility to download, analyze and utilize the data. Share the information with the supplier and work with them to meet the expectations.”

### ANALYZE YOURSELF

A retailer’s own commitment to the cold chain is often the first step. “The most important element in maintaining the cool chain is top management’s commitment to doing whatever it takes to ensure it is done,” explains Johnson Horticultural Marketing Resources’ Johnson.

“Receivers are in the driver’s seat in terms of maintaining the cold chain,” says Perishables Research Organization’s Staby.

“We make sure we’re taking care of it first here at our company, before we go back to see if there was a breakdown in the chain,” explains Strom. “We talk about quality, service and innovation here at Price Chopper. It’s what we want our suppliers to do, but it’s because we do it first. If we demonstrate how we care about quality and the cold chain, then we can demand it from our suppliers.”

Proper handling during receiving and display is a crucial point in the cold chain. “Make sure your own distribution center or retail operation is in proper condition,” says Ed Corvelo, category manager of produce/floral with Save Mart Supermarkets, headquartered in Modesto, CA. “Teach proper handling practices at the retail level. Using code dates on fresh-cut flowers will also help maintain a positive purchasing experience for the consumer.”

Location of floral displays is another important factor to consider. “Stores need to be very careful of the floral layout because putting flowers right by the front door makes them more susceptible to the outdoor conditions,” adds Corvelo.

“It’s really on the shoulders of the retailer to demand accountability and ensure the cold chain is being maintained,” notes Strom. “We don’t talk a lot about the cold chain because it’s such a basic thing to us. It would be like talking about watering the flowers — it’s just built into our system.” **pb**



# Informing The Consumer

**A**sk adolescents where food comes from and with the exception of the two percent who live on a farm, the majority of them will answer the grocery store. Ask teenagers and twenty-somethings about fresh fruit and vegetable availability and value and a similar lack of knowledge will be revealed. For those involved with the produce industry, there are ample sources of information. The challenge is to make comparable information available to the end user.

Unquestionably, the Internet is completely changing the way we source information. Gone are the days when one walked into an automobile dealership, kicked the tires and departed with a glossy brochure containing most of the pertinent specifications and available option information.

Now, one can not only click on an automobile company Web site for product information, but sites that specialize in industry-wide product details provide the opportunity to compare among numerous choices. Want to know rebates, inventory supply or new model details? The information is but a click away. The popular Web site, Amazon.com, even offers details of many suppliers' products with the opportunity to compare numerous details as well as read consumer reviews.

As for consumers of fresh fruit and vegetables, there is limited product information available, apart from recipes and some basic nutritional information. When will the South American blueberry season be ending? When will Spanish Clementines be available? When will the spring season for Florida sweet corn begin? When will freestone peaches be in volume? The list goes on and on. Consumers continue to lack such important information, while producers miss out on a valuable tool for expanding consumer interest.

Although many items are available on a year-round basis, this lack of knowledge makes it impossible to plan the best times for additional purchasing of items that fluctuate seasonally with regard to availability, supply and price. Changing global availability brings multiple peaks and valleys of both supply and price with many consumers unaware of this dynamic, observing only unexplained and frequent retail fluctuations.

In today's world of dismal household economics, fresh fruit and vegetables are often losing out to processed alternatives. Consumers require additional information as they increase their use of shopping lists and reduce impulse buys.

Implementing such a program and making it available to consumers on the Internet is fraught with challenges. Perhaps the

biggest is being able to have a reasonable degree of accuracy of both current supply and projections of future trends. Developing a consumer-friendly format from information supplied by the Agricultural Marketing Service could be a good beginning. Certainly, the format could include information as well as promotional advertising by commodity groups.

Consumers dislike weekly fluctuating prices without sufficient information to adjust their shopping decisions to fit their budget requirements. Retail prices need not be projected, and each retailer certainly has its own pricing program. However, providing the consumer with an insight into changing availability would go a long way toward bringing demand into balance with supply and hopefully improving returns to growers.

Today's efficiencies brought about by information technology and the relative ease of software development does not require waiting for a national marketing plan in order for a consumer information plan to be developed and implemented. The national and international produce associations have consistently been improving services to their membership. However, the end customers whose decisions ultimately make or break these entities are the ones needing improved input. With the exception of nutritional information provided by Produce for Better Health, too often consumers enter the store with limited knowledge of the many opportunities available to expand their produce horizons.

Perhaps an initial step would be having consumer focus groups with diverse backgrounds scattered throughout the United States in order to find out what consumers do and do not know. Then determine what information would be helpful for them to receive and the best methods for them to acquire it.

Amazon recognized the change for delivering information, and with a revised business model, developed Kindle. Rapidly becoming an alternative — along with the Internet — to the distribution of information, now conventional books, newspaper and periodical companies must adapt revised models or find themselves the victims of creative destruction. Strategies devised by other businesses also need continual updating in today's rapidly changing world of technology to match consumers' desires and needs for information.

It is so easy to become wrapped up in the challenges of one's own business that the forest can't be seen for the trees. Will the produce industry revise business plans to recognize and implement new marketing strategies directed at consumers adapting to the changing information and technological age?

**pb**

**Too often consumers enter the store with limited knowledge of the many opportunities available to expand their produce horizons.**



# UK's Fresh Produce Concerns/Opportunities

**T**he Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's trade association for the fresh produce industry, with over 900 members, covering the whole spectrum of retailers, wholesalers, importers, distributors, packers, growers, foodservice, embassies and other organizations associated with fresh produce and cut flowers.

FPC is committed to the increased success of produce and floral industries in the UK. To achieve this, it informs members and gives advice on current issues affecting the industry, provides a forum for members to meet and discuss concerns that may impact the industry and takes action on its behalf.

The UK fresh produce industry incurs significant costs to meet existing legislative requirements. FPC has worked recently to put together a case for the UK government to review the cost of regulatory requirements on international trade. According to estimates, the industry could save around £175 million (\$288 million) through improved sharing of data, transfer of documentation and better integration of government departments and agencies.

Close liaison with government departments and agencies to influence legislators is critical, and with the majority of new regulations emanating from the European Union, increasingly FPC's focus is on the European Commission and Parliament, as well as the UK government. New European Union Marketing Regulations came into force on July 1 this year, leading to the introduction of around 400 new commodities under the General Marketing Standard. FPC lobbied hard on behalf of the industry to ensure consistent standards allow businesses to trade effectively in the UK and across Europe, and successfully avoided the imposition of additional costs and bureaucracy on the industry, with confirmation that produce imported into the UK under the General Marketing Standards will not have to be entered onto the PEACH system, an online system used by importers and inspectors for pre-notification and monitoring of fresh produce imports.

Food security is a key focus for the UK government, which, with over 60 percent of fresh produce imported into the UK, recognizes the importance of global markets to ensure UK supplies. Last year, FPC lobbied hard across Europe and worked with worldwide contacts to raise awareness of the potentially devastating impact on UK horticulture that would result from the European Union's proposals to introduce cut off criteria and substitution of crop protection products based on "hazard," rather than risk-based decision making. With the regulation coming into force from 2010, we continue to seek a thorough assessment to ensure the full impact on UK horti-

culture is taken into account by the UK government and others.

Another key area of activity for FPC the promotion of consumption of fresh produce across all sectors of the community. With rising obesity levels, particularly among young children, the fresh produce industry seeks to complement the work of the UK government's 5-a-day campaign by encouraging people of all ages to enjoy fresh produce. An average UK consumer eats just 2.5 servings of fresh produce a day, which is well below the recommended 5-a-day.

Over the past three years the industry sponsored Eat In Colour initiative — [www.eatincolour.com](http://www.eatincolour.com) — that has demonstrated achieving the recommended 5-a-day servings of fresh fruit and vegetables can be easy, affordable and fun, complementing the government's more prescriptive style of messaging. The campaign's high profile

was strengthened by support from Premiership footballers and 40,000 young Beaver Scouts who earned Eat In Colour healthy eating badges. Recently, Eat in Colour challenged five UK celebrity chefs to see if they could gain their own badges, which they did. Other recent successful campaigns include 'A Smoothie-a-day,' with downloadable recipes demonstrating quick and easy ways to get fruity goodness.

FPC works with many organizations, such as the British Retail Consortium — the lead trade association for the UK retail industry. Last year, FPC and the BRC, in association with NSF-Cmi Certification, the most widely known and respected food assurance brand, jointly published guidance on the interpretation of requirements to meet BRC Global Standard for Food Safety (guideline for category 5: fresh produce stored under chilled conditions).

Food poisoning outbreaks associated with the consumption of fresh produce are extremely rare in the UK. FPC has produced a Guide to Good Hygiene Practice, which explains the food hygiene legislation and provides advice on compliance and recommendations for good practice.

Recently FPC's Pesticides and Food Chemicals Working Group was hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the U.S. Embassy in London. Cathy Eiden of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, who recently completed a secondment at the UK's Chemicals Regulations Directorate, gave a presentation comparing U.S. and UK regulatory processes, which was warmly received.

As a founding member of the International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS), FPC has strong links with other associations across the world, including the Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh in the United States. IFPS seeks to improve the supply chain efficiency of the sector through developing, implementing and managing harmonized international standards.

**The UK's main produce association deals with many of the same concerns confronting the U.S. industry, but government regulations top the list.**



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Chilean Avocado Importers Association . . . . .	21	86	202-626-0560	
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Classic Salads, LLC . . . . .	24	4	831-763-4520	831-763-1542
Coastline Produce . . . . .	60	98	831-755-1430	831-755-1429
Robt. T. Cochran & Co., Incorporated . . . . .	74	83	718-991-2340	718-589-6704
Robt. T. Cochran & Co., Incorporated . . . . .	84		718-991-2340	718-589-6704
Coosemans New York, Inc. . . . .	75	72	718-328-3060	718-842-6545
Cuba Tropical, Inc. . . . .	90	84	800-545-2822	718-402-0209
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D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York . . . . .	88-89	28	800-223-8080	718-960-0544
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Juniors Produce, Inc. . . . .	94	89	718-991-7300	718-991-0989
Juniors Produce, Inc. . . . .	102		718-991-7300	718-991-0989
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc. . . . .	97	44	585-682-4435	585-682-4968
M&M Farm, Inc. . . . .	120	12	800-634-7898	305-233-0813
Mann Packing Company, Inc. . . . .	9	62	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Mann Packing Company, Inc. . . . .	45	63	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand . . . . .	60	35	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Miatech . . . . .	59	10	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
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New York Apple Association, Inc. . . . .	69	20	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co. . . . .	97	33	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
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U.S. Apple Association . . . . .	7	92	717-432-0090	717-432-9317
United Fresh Produce Association . . . . .	101	1	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Vision Import Group . . . . .	71	64	201-968-1190	201-968-1192
WaudWare, Inc. . . . .	54	37	905-846-9737	905-846-9738

# Blast from the Past

**J**ohn Pandol of Pandol Bros. Co., in Delano, CA, has a habit — an eBay habit. “For about a three-month period, I spent five or six hours a week on eBay and made 75-100 purchases,” he says. For John, working in the industry simply wasn’t enough. He wanted to be completely surrounded by it. “I’ve found everything from store pins, logos and uniform patches to an 1872 Grand Union cookbook and a 1951 elementary school reader on the benefits of produce. One of my best finds is a Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving ad for Acme Markets.”

One of the many purchases Pandol made was the A&P Super Markets ad seen here, originally printed in a 1943 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*. According to Craig Grybowski, president of the A&P Historical Society, in 1943, A&P operated a total of 5,919 stores, 1,667 of them Super Markets, while the remaining were small, storefront operations. Gross sales for that year were \$1.3 billion, no small feat during wartime.

Featuring Mrs. Robert Reichardt of Des Moines, IA, the ad focuses on the importance of maintaining an elastic budget and saving money when possible. Despite being more than 60 years old, the ad remains relevant today. While today’s consumers are affected by a faltering economy, as opposed to World War II, Mrs. Reichardt’s sentiments still ring true as consumers are once again cost-conscious, trying to purchase healthful and filling foods for their families on a tight budget.

Although A&P no longer operates in the Mid-West, there are still nearly 400 stores located within the Northeast, including Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Washington D.C. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the company, and its accomplishments continue to be recognized.

Pandol began collecting produce paraphernalia in the midst of redecorating his office. “I wanted to have items that reflected the market. When people come to our office, now they can get a really good idea of where we’ve come from and where we are going.”

Pandol is also struck by the similarities that remain in the grocery industry. “Looking at the image in the ad, the produce department of the 1940s appears much the same as it does today. The way you purchase an apple — the way you eat it — is not all that different. Sure, now they can be pre-sliced, but the majority of consumers bite into a whole apple the same way Eve did in the Garden of Eden,” he says. “You think about how different life was back then, but produce-wise, not much has changed.”



pb

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail [info@producebusiness.com](mailto:info@producebusiness.com)



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